

The Panopticon

See all. Hear all. Know all.

#3, April 2021



**A BRIEF LOOK AT
EASTERN EUROPE**

ON THE ISAD PANOPTICON

APRIL ISSUE

DISCOVERING

3 Asian Hate. Why,
How, When?

4 Orientalism in
Western Analysis of
Russia's
Interference in
Ukraine

9 Additional Material:
but what about Navalny?

10 Media Corner:
Roadside Picnic, Stalker,
S.T.A.L.K.E.R., or:
Exploring the concept of
Alien

12 Shadow
AND Bone:
a New Netflix Hit Yet
Another Reason
for Racism

14 Crossword
Puzzle – Once in a Year



Credits for this issue – [The ISAD Panopticon](#) Redactory Staff
 Managing Director, *Christopher Wijono* (International Security and Development, 2nd Year)
 Editor-in-Chief, *Khrystyna Hvozdovska* (Journalism, 3rd Year)
 Authors, *Jimmyn Lee* (International Security and Development, 1st Year)
 Cover image: *Lech Czech and Rus with the White Eagle* by Walery Eljasz-Radzikowski
[The ISAD Panopticon](#) Redactory Team welcomes submissions from individuals/groups looking to publish their
 work on the magazine. Send your content and manuscripts to isadpanopticon.redactory@gmail.com to get start-
 ed.
 Also follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/isadpanopticon> for more updates.

Asian Hate

Why, How, When?

Koi Fish, carp in other words, is a well-known symbol of Chinese and Japanese culture. Throughout the history koi appeared in legends or myths, symbolizing perseverance of character and courage. The legend of a Dragon's Gate, which was located on the top of a waterfall, opens up another distinctive feature of koi - strength of character. According to a legend, only the bravest carp would swim up the river to reach the gates and if succeeded it would be turned into a dragon. Koi fish is a great mean of symbolism used to portray the struggle Asians experience today and how they try to go against the flow.

The COVID-19 pandemic, though giving us some valuable lessons, sowed anger and fear in our hearts.

The background of the *Stop Asian Hate* movement takes us back to March 16, 2021 when the series of mass shootings happened in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Killing 8 people, including 6 Asian women, the shooter claimed his actions were the outcome of a *conflict between his sex addiction and religious beliefs*. The following cases are the death of an elderly Thai immigrant after being shoved to the ground. A Filipino-American slashed in the face with a box cutter or Chinese woman slapped and brutally set on fire and unfortunately the list goes on.

As reported by Russell Jeung, professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University there were several thousands cases of xenophobia and racism against Asian Americans between January, 28 and February, 24 of 2020. "Stop AAPI Hate" reporting forum recorded 2, 808 incidents for the period from March-December 2020. As stated 70.9% of cases described as verbal harassment with shunning or physical assault below. According to a WHYY-FM, a public radio station serving Philadelphia as of April, 21 2020 most cases of racism and discrimination remain unreported to the authorities, caused by both White and African Americans.

Activists say that the anti-Asians mindset might be the reason of the previous US president Donald Trump's sayings apropos COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. "Kung Flu" or "Chinese virus". Advocates say that this kind of hate crimes are linked to the rhetoric that blames Asians for COVID-19 spread.

"They have made us a scapegoat to enact their violence"

- Amanda Nguyen, an activist and the founder of the Rise civil rights not-for-profit organisation claims.

As BBC states President Joe Biden signed an executive action essentially banning the use of an inappropriate expressions related the origin of a virus within the federal government the activists still calling for more attention to the matter.

As protests are happening all around USA as well as actions are taken on social medias, people become more aware of what's going on and how pathological the some issues, which roots are ingrained so deep in peoples' minds.





Orientalism in Western Analysis of *Russia's* Interference in Ukraine

By Jimmyn Lee

In the years since Russia's seizure of Crimea and the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, NATO has taken several measures to deter further military aggression. Almost every member state has attached soldiers to the four Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Another

multinational brigade is active in Romania, completing the coverage of NATO's "eastern flank". The draw-down of US forces stationed in Europe that began early in the Obama administration was paused, and later, reversed with rotational forces maintaining a new continual presence in Eastern European countries. The role

of cyber/information warfare has also become of special concern as these capabilities saw use in eastern Ukraine. In response to an even earlier cyberattack by Russian-backed individuals on Estonian websites in 2007, NATO had already established the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn in 2008 in order

to “defy and successfully counter the threats in this area”. In all, a very substantial amount of manpower and resources have been devoted to countering and deterring the Russian threat.

These military actions and the discussions that preceded them are manifestations of the West’s political will and therefore, an extension of how their thinkers and leaders perceived the Ukraine conflicts. More specifically, they reveal how Western decisionmakers perceive Russia as an opposing force. There must, however, be special scrutiny of the assessments made by Western analysts. Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union and the Tsarist empire before it, has been the subject of Orientalist other-ing for over a century by the West. Kevin Blachford of the Baltic Defence College in Estonia describes how Russian actions are seen as “irrational, deceptive, and non-Western,” making Russian culture itself the primary cause of conflict and tension with the West. He notes that these Orientalist perspectives and their othering effect cause the conflict to be viewed as one of radically different and incompatible identities, limiting the possibilities of negotiation and leading to increased militarization.

According to Edward Said, the original coiner of the term, “Orientalism” has three core components. First, there is an exaggeration of differences, portraying the “other” as enigmatic and dangerous but undoubtedly inferior (whether in capability or in morality). Second, the “other” must have a “degenerate divergence from Western norms”. Common tropes of this theme portray Orientals as irrational, inefficient, incapable of self-governance, and only capable of appreciating power and force. Finally, Orientalist discourse is characterized by a lack of intellectual rigor where a “narrow set of convictions” about the observed subject, “now serve as the foundation of all subsequent thinking”.

There are critical areas where Western assessments of Russian activity are colored by these Orientalist tropes. These ahistorical and non-factual myths need to be identified and debunked in order for the West to develop suitable counterstrategies or feasible conflict resolution efforts. Chief among these mistaken narratives are the overvaluation of cultural or historical determinism as the source of Russian foreign policy, and the overestimation of supposed Russian military doctrines such as “hybrid warfare” or “A2/AD” due to their exotic novelty. Additionally, Russia encourages its own exoticization in these regards to further their own narratives. As Michael Kofman, Director of the Russia Studies Program at CNA observes, these assumptions cause

Western leaders to plan “for fights that don’t make much sense, or fights that do make sense, but where the adversary strategy and political rationale does not seem well understood”.

The Myth of “Greater Russia’s” Grand Strategy

In 2010, long before the Ukraine conflict, James DJ Brown wrote about the Orientalism present in the way Russian foreign policy is studied. It is all too common for Western scholars to present Russian foreign policy as puzzling, unpredictable, inscrutable to those following Western norms, and a wayward diversion that must be rectified by enlightened Western thought. To avoid the pitfalls of this bias, he recommends that one set aside any “rigid supposition of difference” between the decision-making logic of East and West, and instead “start with an assumption of rationality and only stray from this when there is a convincing reason for doing so”. Additionally, he cautions against dismissing Russian strategy as inferior or backwards just because it differs from Western standards. Objective review of the facts alone is enough to “construct a convincing narrative that places greater emphasis [...] on the logical coherence and accomplishments of the Kremlin’s recent diplomacy”. Brown’s lessons must also be applied to any study of Russia’s decisions to intervene in Ukraine in 2014.

The key to dispelling Orientalist myths lies in analyzing how Western observers depict Russian intent. Western efforts to explain why Russian president Vladimir Putin made the decision to use military force in Crimea and eastern Ukraine often cite historical determinist motives that suggest the existence of a Russian “grand strategy.” *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare*, a research publication produced by the National Security Analysis Department at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU APL) on behalf of United States Army Special Operations Command, grounds its analysis on such an assumption. As a military document, it focuses on describing observed aspects of Russian military activity in Ukraine, but also provides summarized research of the historical and political background to the conflict. It cites Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* to describe a cultural/civilizational conflict between Western and Slavic Orthodox civilizations, of

W Recommend

The Washington Post’s article where you can find answers to **9 questions about Ukraine you were too embarrassed to ask** by Max Fisher.

VICE’s coverage on Facebook. In a short video-material prepared by VICE producer Zeke Spector find out how the things have changed since 2016, what Russia has to do with it and how Mark Zuckerberg’s social network turned out to be a **toxic political wasteland?**

which Ukraine forms the border, and boldly declares that Vladimir Putin's interest and intervention in Ukraine "emanated from these deep roots and, more recently, from the dramatic experiences of the Soviet Union as it teetered toward its demise" (The portrayal of Putin as a former KGB officer, traumatized by the fall of the Soviet Union and seeking to restore it to greatness, also became a popular trope in the months after Crimea). These conclusions see conflict between East and West as inevitable and supposedly ingrained in history and culture.

The JHU APL primer goes on to attach Russian foreign policy to the geopolitical theories of Igor Panarin and Aleksandr Dugin. While these men are political scholars, they are also radical far right reactionaries who had been ostracized from the actual halls of power in Moscow since the early 2000s. George Barros of the Institute for the Study of War blames Western alt-right/reactionary journalists, fascinated with Dugin's anti-liberal, anti-globalist, Eurosceptic, and nationalist rhetoric, for giving him far more attention than Kremlin policymakers did, causing impressionable Western observers to falsely conclude that he was an ideological leader. For the JHU APL to feature these men in an official US military report highlights the extent to which this falsehood was propagated. From the frameworks of these two political scientists, Western researchers extrapolated the existence of a Russian grand strategy to establish a greater "Eurasian network" with Russia and its Orthodox culture at the core to provide a counterbalance to the US-led Western world. Dugin's work is particularly attractive in the aftermath of the "hybrid war" in Ukraine because he advocates "linking not just joint military forces in a theater of war but rather the entire information appa-

ratus of a state and culture in a contest for political and social domination". The use of manipulated public opinion, weaponization of national identity, and both conventional and unconventional forces make the Crimean operation seem like an application of the Dugin doctrine. However, Barros warns against conflating correlation with causation: "Just because Dugin prescribes certain strategies that are present in Russian policy does not mean that Dugin was the policy's inspiration or catalyst". Going one step further, attributing a nation-state's use of political/military power in its near abroad, however legal or illegal, to an ultranationalist conspiracy to establish a continental empire is a failure to heed Brown's advice to view Russian thinkers as equally logical.

Years later, it is now known that Dugin is not and has never been "Putin's Rasputin," itself a rather Orientalist assertion. His advocacy of reincorporating former Soviet satellite states into a "Greater Russia" never gained much traction in the government's foreign policy apparatus. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Western assumptions based on a cultural misunderstanding led to the wrong conclusions about a Russian "grand strategy."

The next step in applying Brown's recommendations concerns Western analysis of Putin and his officials. Blachford accuses Western observers of blaming the Ukraine crisis on Putin's "irrational leadership," and depicting his decisions as "not the rational choice of a leader responding to a realpolitik environment". To assess Putin's logic as a realpolitik actor in the Ukrainian environment, it is better to analyze events objectively from the ground up in Crimea and Donbass, rather than prematurely surmise top-down motives from Moscow.

Daniel Treisman, Director of

the Russia Political Insight project, observes that the annexation of Crimea bears the hallmarks of an improvised gambit rather than a systematic expansionist project, or a heavy-handed reaction to potential NATO expansion. Russian soldiers on the peninsula had been reinforced and placed on high alert since the start of the Euromaidan protests, a reasonable action for any state; however, the manner of their delayed deployment in confronting Ukrainian forces until after Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich fled to Russia suggests that their orders were tentative, and would not have been executed if Yanukovich had remained in office to play out the agreement he signed with opposition leaders and EU foreign ministers. Politically, Moscow displayed indecision on whether to offer residents a referendum on autonomy or annexation and went through several potential heads of regional government before settling on Sergey Aksyonov.

Similarly, Russian efforts to corral Ukrainian business elites, oligarchs, and agitators in eastern Ukraine who were hostile to the Maidan government were very rough in the early days of the revolution. Whether through incompetence, unsuitability, or arrest by local Ukrainian authorities, these figures were not very successful. In the words of Michael Kofman, "this was either the worst planned and executed subversion effort in recent history, or more likely, the best Russia could come up with in a hurry". Likewise, the subsequent escalation of force from supporting (relatively) lightly armed insurgents to overt military operations occurred after those insurgents were decimated by a successful Ukrainian counterterrorism offensive. Where Westerners who seek to formulate a grander narrative view this as a new Russian "way of war" or a complex



revanchist strategy, Kofman sees it as pure pragmatism: an “ad hoc approach to get Ukraine on the cheap, and Russia simply escalating in a quest for the lowest price”.

When Russian actions on the ground are viewed objectively, they figure more like a rational, albeit criminal, course of action for a political realist assessing geopolitical objectives. To extrapolate something greater than extemporaneous opportunism, such as a subversive plot to resurrect dead empires, is to reach beyond available evidence. However, it is entirely understandable for Western observers to buy into such narratives because Russians themselves are complicit in propagating their own myth. The “Little Green Men” primer even begins with a quote from Igor Panarin, boasting about “the nearly flawless Russian operation to seize and annex Crimea,” saying “Russia has found a recipe to counteract the color revolutions”. There is no logical reason for Russia to disabuse others of the notion that the Ukrainian intervention was a well-planned coup de main in a secret and complex grand strategy. The narrative keeps Western powers anxious, and for Putin, who has cultivated an identity as a strongman/defender, wins him high approval ratings from the Russian people.

Myths of “Hybrid” or “Non-linear” Warfare

Just as Westerners overestimated the value of grand narratives in explaining Russia’s foreign policy decisions, military thinkers have overemphasized the value of “hybrid” or “non-linear” warfare in explaining Russian military success in Ukraine. Definitions

of hybrid war are inconsistent but agree on some key features such as “a combination of regular and irregular war in a highly flexible and efficient way using modern information capabilities”. However, the novelty of this concept is questionable considering a wide variety of historical conflicts, from the Vietnam War to the American Revolutionary War could fit this description. Regarding Russia’s interpretation of hybrid warfare, it is crucial to determine what sort of narrative Western observers are applying. John Mearsheimer notes that the blending of soft and hard power tools to achieve one’s objectives has *always* been present in war, as suggested by the previous historical examples. Others, like Andrew Radin of the RAND corporation see Russian hybrid warfare as a carefully planned escalation from nonviolent subversion to covert violent actions, then to conventional warfare supported by subversion. A suitable starting point for examining the narrative-building that occurred in the military sphere is the popularization of the often-referenced “Gerasimov Doctrine.”

The Gerasimov Doctrine is the name Dr. Mark Galeotti, a British writer on Russian security affairs, gave to a 2013 report published by Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov titled, “The Value of Science in Prediction”. This report attempted to provide an overview of how warfare had changed in the wake of the Arab Spring to focus more on social change and information. Gerasimov observes that the primary methods of conflict have shifted to the “broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures — applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population”. Of course, these instruments of national power are to be “supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including

carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special-operations forces”. The value that Gerasimov placed on information warfare was not lost on Galeotti, who noted how much of the General’s findings could apply to how Russia had conducted operations in Ukraine. However, Galeotti has since regretted overemphasizing Gerasimov’s report as well as the impact that it has had on Western analysts. While the West is indeed “facing a multivector, multi-agency campaign of subversion, division, and covert political ‘active measures’ by Russia,” the problem again lies in proving intentionality, and a common vision for desired objectives and end-states. He points out that the dangerousness of the Russian campaign lies in the fact that there is “no single organizing principle, let alone controlling agency.” The actors in Donbass are pursuing their objectives in a mostly uncoordinated manner. Their adversaries, whether Ukrainian or Western, are only putting themselves at risk by misunderstanding hastily organized and reactive battlefield decisions for a deliberate Russian strategy of controlled chaos. Westerners’ tendency to view the events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine as going exactly according to the Russian master plan is also a dangerous ahistorical fallacy, though perhaps an excusable one due to the fog of war and government confidentiality.

In *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, Porter states that “in order to understand the war/culture relationship, we need not only observe cultures at war, but observe the observers, and grasp the impulses that have driven their fascination”. Fascination is a most apt term, seeing how the US Army alone has published “The Russian Way of War,” “Russian New Generation Warfare Handbook,” the aforementioned “Little Green Men” primer, among



dozens of other War College papers all seeking to be the Rosetta Stone that unlocks the secret to understanding their Russian opponents. The narrative of the Russians pioneering a novel, exotic, dangerous, and most of all, effective form of war is a dangerous misconception because it causes observers to draw mistaken conclusions and prepare the wrong countermeasures.

"De-exoticizing" the portrayal of Russian hybrid warfare is a simple task that requires an observer to look no further back than the 2003 Iraq War. The exact same model provided by Andrew Radin (nonviolent subversion, to covert violent actions, to conventional warfare supported by subversion) can be applied to the success of the United States' own Operation Viking Hammer in Iraqi Kurdistan. CIA Special Activities Division officers arrived in Kurdistan eight months prior to the March 2003 invasion to prepare Kurdish paramilitary organizations for combat with the intent of supporting the main US attack. In this time, they executed subversive attacks against Iraqi infrastructure such as railroads. The Kurds were later supported by US Army Special Forces to conduct a joint attack on a local Islamist terrorist organization, Ansar al-Islam. Finally, conventional Army forces arrived in the area to seize the city of Kirkuk from the Iraqi Army. Other supposed hybrid warfare elements such as wielding political or economic influence to shape conditions before the start of the fighting appear in the lead-up to the Iraq War as well. Objectively, it is difficult to discern a significant difference between the US installation of the problematic Iraqi politician, Ahmed Chalabi, as the head of the Iraqi Governing Council, and the Russian installation of Sergey Aksyonov as Prime Minister of Crimea.

This is not an argument of "whataboutism," but an argument that this sort of warfare had already been proven effective globally and was not a product of special Russian innovation. Michael Kofman describes the fixation with hybrid warfare best, calling it "just an unintelligible Western reaction, after decades of wars of choice against paltry adversaries, to confrontation with another power that is [also] capable across the full spectrum of conflict".

Fighting a Steel Man

The challenge Western militaries face in responding to such a "full spec-

trum" threat is also prone to the sort of misconceptions that surround Russian foreign policy. Porter explains that when it comes to military Orientalism, Westerners may set up the foreign 'Other' as a steel man argument to be viewed as "a superior model to inform self-examination". For instance, the British observers of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 viewed Japan as the paragon of a martial culture and discipline that they felt was lacking in the waning British Empire. Japan's "determined fighting population" and "bushido culture" was considered as the product of deliberate social engineering processes, meaning that such desirable warrior values could be reproduced in Britain, whose population had become "effete", disloyal, and weak. Likewise, it is possible to discern how Western military observations on Russian "hybrid warfare" reveal more about what areas the West fears it is lacking in. Luckily, there is significant documentation on the "capabilities gaps" that Western military thinkers identified in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict. The West, which had been focused on the low intensity conflicts in the Middle East for over a decade, had good reason to feel insecurity over the "near-peer" threat posed by Russia, which had spent that same time modernizing its forces.

One of these gaps that cause Western military thinkers concern is A2/AD, or Anti-Access and Area Denial. A2/AD is described as a system that consolidates theater ballistic missiles, electronic warfare, cyber warfare, air defense, and field artillery to make virtual "steel domes" or "bubbles" over areas that make it impossible for adversaries to attack or send reinforcements to. The common fear is that in a future land-grab operation against a weak neighbor, such as the Baltics, Russia could set up an A2/AD cordon of long-range sensors and missiles to prevent help from reaching the victim in time. However, Westerners are committing a steel man fallacy by overemphasizing the threat of Russian A2/AD capability.

Much like the Gerasimov Doctrine and hybrid warfare, there is no evidence to suggest that A2/AD actually exists in Russian strategy. The term was originally coined by American military observers to describe their assumptions about Chinese coastal defense capabilities, and Russian discussion of the topic is limited to references to Western uses of the term. Therefore, the significance of this concept lies in what it represents to Westerners.

The Russian A2/AD system is portrayed with a smattering of circles

on maps, each signifying the maximum range of a particular sensor or weapon system. This representation of Russian power projection intimidatingly walls off most of Eastern and Northern Europe with concentric circles representing anti-air missiles, anti-ship missiles, and anti-land ballistic missiles that threaten to strike any approaching enemy. An in-depth system-by-system examination of Russian A2/AD capabilities by the Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI) concludes that this "bubble" is "smaller than often thought, not impenetrable, and probably even burstable".

On the other hand, Western, especially American, militaries have operated for decades with air superiority taken for granted while the focus shifted to COIN wars. Similarly, funding and development have shifted away from these areas in that time. Much like the British officers who overemphasized Japanese morale and discipline as an expression of insecurity concerning their own forces, Western unease over being confronted with a type of warfighting they neglected for years can explain the overestimation of Russian capabilities. While it may seem that this does not pose much of a problem for the West, since this fear of being outmatched is driving new investments to even the capabilities gap, the FOI study identifies some political dilemmas that decisionmakers may fail to assess properly in the event of conflict. For example, overestimation of the A2/AD bubble may make it seem futile to defend, reinforce, or resupply an Eastern European NATO state under attack. Political leaders may hesitate to deploy soldiers or aircraft to an area that they interpret to be a gigantic kill-zone. To have Western leaders buy into narratives of Russian superiority is likely a victory on its own for Putin's image-building campaign.

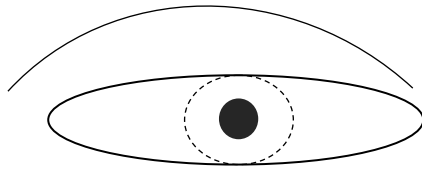
In Closing

Researchers at Helsinki University warned against overstating Russian strategic prowess and "hybrid warfare" capabilities, asserting that it may play directly into Putin's hands: "putting forward the notion of Western weakness in the face of Russia's superior 'hybrid warfare' capabilities implies respect and even fear of Russia as a powerful global actor that was not afforded to the country before". The West, in turn, has certainly put much effort into reasserting its strength. NATO's increased presence

on its eastern flank is growing with new headquarters being established to oversee the Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroups, and American strategic deployment exercises such as Defender 20 are the largest seen since the end of the Cold War. Regardless, fighting in Donbass is still ongoing, and Crimea remains the 84th federal subject of Russia.

Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and The Sword* was studied by the US government during World War 2 to gain insight into the Japanese "national character." However, it failed to portray the Japanese accurately due to Japanese domestic propaganda providing a skewed image of their culture. This central problem to cultural analysis, how to distinguish between how a culture portrays itself rhetorically on the surface and the undercurrents of conflict and contradiction beneath the facade, frustrated Western attempts to explain Russia's actions following the Ukraine crisis.

While the West's conventional wisdom concerning Russia has improved somewhat, especially regarding military capability, there is still a struggle to determine exactly what strategic foreign policy goals Vladimir Putin and his associates have. The narrative of establishing an independent authority separate from Europe intending to reclaim lost glory may be empty rhetoric meant for the masses, or it may reflect their true beliefs. Alternatively, they may simply be nihilistic realists who will take any action to preserve their power and that of their patrons. Without breaking through this cultural barrier to discern what is or is not negotiable, peaceful conflict resolution will remain elusive. As the obsolete narratives involving Dugin or a clash of civilizations have shown, producing a more accurate or insightful analysis will require reflection on the false assumptions that cause Western observers to fail to afford their Russian counterparts the same standards of reasoning and decision-making.



...But What About Navalny?

A Russian most prominent opposition activist Alexei Navalny is still fighting for his truth and liberty after being poisoned and then imprisoned by Russian authorities.

On August 20, 2020 he was hospitalized in the city of Omsk, Russia after losing consciousness on a flight. On September 2, 2020 German officials claimed Navalny was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent, the Soviet-era mean of dealing with *unwelcome* individuals. No wonder that Putin probably remembered some workshops from the times of his career in KGB.

Later in January Navalny flights back home to Russia, saying that it was never a question whether to return or not.

Either way he got arrested right in the airport, then given a 30 days pre-trial detention for violating the terms of his suspended jail sentence.

But Putin's methods are not the fair ones. Having the whole system working for him, it is not that easy for Navalny and his crew to reach the fair point - meaning free Navalny from the prison. What do I say.. the all-Russian protests couldn't help to reach the common sense nor the statements of European Countries. Probably that is the policy of a 21st century want-to-be-again-empire.

Anyway, speaking about Ukraine, in case of Navalny Ukrainians still can't be sure whether it will be possible to engage the dialogue with Russian oppositionist. Some of Ukraine analysts assert that it is not that easy with Navalny pointing on the fact that even though he is an outspoken opponent of Putin's regime, not always the enemy of our enemy can become our friend.



Roadside Picnic, Stalker,
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.,
or:
Exploring the concept of Alien

by Christopher Wijono



Cult classics in their own right, regardless of format, they are otherwise rather obscure pieces of media in the rest of the world.

Roadside Picnic is a novel written by Russian brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky in 1971, published one year later. The novel tells of an earth altered in six zones, allegedly due to the visits of extraterrestrials. Contained within these zones are strange phenomena and paranormal artifacts, some innocuous and some deadly. Fearing unforeseen consequences, the United

Nations strictly control access to these zones. Challenging this control are the Stalkers, a subculture of prospectors and scavengers illegally venturing into the zones to procure artifacts for profit. The story revolves around Redrick Schuhart, a Stalker, his forays into the zones and their influence on his life beyond it.

Film aficionados would recognize the name Andrei Tarkovsky, one of, if not the greatest Russian filmmaker of all time. With screenplay written by the Strugatsky brothers, Tarkovsky's *Stalker* was released in 1979, a loose adaptation of *Roadside Picnic*. It maintains the strange phenomenon that is the Zone and its contents but follows the foray of the unnamed Stalker as he guides his clients into the Zone. It was Tarkovsky's final work within the Soviet Union, and emblematic of his signature themes and styles such as metaphysics and nature. Receiving lukewarm welcome on its release, the film would go on to become a cult classic inspiring numbers of other media.

One of them would be the Ukrainian video game developer GSC Game World's *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series, based loosely on both *Roadside Picnic* and *Stalker*. The series currently has seen 3 entries: *Shadow of Chernobyl* (2007), *Clear Sky* (2008), and *Call of Prip'yat* (2009). The overarching plot of the game takes place in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone within

Ukraine, where following the first disaster of the Nuclear Power Plant, a second disaster caused strange phenomena and mutations to proliferate within the Exclusion Zone; akin to the Zones seen in *Roadside Picnic* and *Stalker*. The story revolves around different individuals and factions and their efforts to overcome the threats of the Zone to reach its center, placing players in control of different characters as they attempt to traverse the Zone and overcome its horrors.

Spoilers ahead! The article will discuss plot points and important revelations contained in these media. I recommend that you view one or more of the above media before going further.

Alien is the world, the world is alien

I argue that the three works revolve around the same philosophical concept of the “alien”. *Picnic*’s proposition of alien would revolve closer around the layperson’s definition of extraterrestrial, but I propose that *Stalker* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* are equally alien in the sense of great unfamiliarity, utterly removed from common sense and understanding. *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* uses the word “anomaly” to explain the phenomena contained in the Zone; strange, unusual, out of the ordinary, deviations from what is normal.

Simultaneously reinforcing and paralleling this alienage to humans is *Picnic*’s proposal of extraterrestrials, when character Dr. Pilman proposes that their arrival on earth is akin to that of a roadside picnic, specifically the point of view of all the other insignificant creatures: to them, human presence and their “artifacts”, such as “Old spark plugs and old filters strewn around... Rags, burnt-out bulbs, and a monkey wrench left behind...” are all items alien to an organism’s ecosystem, the same way the (to borrow from *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*) “anomalies” are in the view of humans.

Clear Sky presented the theory that the humans are in fact the aliens to the Zone; the “anomalies”, many harmful and fatal to humans, are akin to an “immune response” trying to get rid of this intrusion. *Shadow of Chernobyl* would reveal that this is the case, with the anomalies coming about as a result of the activities of the C-Consciousness.

Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* would go so far as to propose that humans are aliens unto themselves, unable to fully comprehend who they are (i.e., the

self). This is illustrated at the climax of the film mirroring *Roadside Picnic*’s when the explorers, under guidance of the Stalker, discover The Room, located in the center of the Zone and supposedly having the ability to grant the wishes of those who enter it. The writer surmises from the tale of the stalker Porcupine that the Room fulfills man’s secret desires. Those secret desires may not correspond with one’s perception of the self, and one may not like what they see. Thus, it creates a contradiction that leads to alienation and dissociation of the self; in Porcupine’s case, ended fatally. The film ends with a shot of the Stalker’s mutated daughter moving glasses through psychokinesis, signifying both the alienness of humans and the depths of unknown potential we harbor

Regarding the alien

Equally important in the discussion of alien is the interplay of the alien and the watcher, for if something is to be alien, it needs to have a “normal” or “common” for it to contrast. To borrow from communications theory, the alien is a series of signs (again, most of them unknown, strange, incomprehensible) and the humans would regard it, and then react. This reaction is then realized in various ways, such as fear, apprehension, or even curiosity.

I argue that the mutations seen in *Roadside Picnic* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* is illustrative of the feedback loop occurring during the process of communication and interaction. When one regards the unknown and the alien, the human psyche, the person, become a little more so. *Roadside Picnic* approaches this through Redrick’s daughter, who was born mutated because of his forays into the Zone. She is lovingly called “Monkey”, with a physique like one: close to human, but not quite.

Clear Sky demonstrates this through its introduction and fleshing out of various factions, whose reactions and perceptions of the Zone would drive them to it and wage war against others to see their wills realized. Stalkers and Bandits see the Zone as something to profit from, Duty regards the alien nature of the Zone as a danger to humanity and seeks its destruction, Freedom looks on the Zone as a font of possibilities and seek to realize unchecked access to its wonderful phenomena, while the Ukrainian Military would have none,

but the authorities regard this alien in the first place, seeking to make the zone wholly off-limits. The recurring enemy faction from the games, Monolith, also demonstrate that this ability to regard can be impaired or altered; it was revealed that members of Monolith were individuals who reached the center of the Zone, only to be brainwashed into protecting it.

The “other” as an alien

The “alien” covered in these stories would mirror extraterrestrial aliens or supernatural phenomenon more, but I argue that the concept of alien applies as much to human-to-human relations as it is with these examples. The concept of the “other” is deeply ingrained in human interaction, especially those between different groups. This ranges from the concept of the “barbarian” (a common thread throughout history: Greeks and non-Greeks, Romans – non-Romans, Christians – Muslims, Chinese – non-Chinese) to the literary trope of the “noble savage”. Even today, we see this with groups of people one is not wholly accustomed to. Phenomena like stereotypes or prejudice exist and influence our interaction with people. In *Stalker*, for example, the Professor is worried that given the opportunity, man would use the Room for evil purposes due to their weakness of character. Thus, he seeks to destroy it.

But as explored above, what if we shift the human model of interaction with something truly unknown? I argue that regarding the truly “alien” therefore, allows us to evaluate our thinking processes in these feedback-producing interactions, free from preconceptions and prejudices that may arise from those that may be familiar to us. Following *Picnic* and *Stalker*’s exploration would include the *Fallout* (Interplay/Bethesda Softworks, 1997-) videogame series, which evaluates ideas and character in a post-apocalyptic nuclear wasteland (i.e., a clean slate), or *Warhammer 40,000* (Games Workshop, 1987-), which allows the evaluation of common good and humanity in a brutally unforgiving universe.

Picnic, *Stalker*, and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* remain masterpieces not just because of their masterful presentation, but also how close it hits home for people. While we regard the alien, more than anything, we learn something new about humans and what we see in ourselves.

Shadow AND Bone

A New Netflix Hit, Yet Another Reason for Racism

by Khrystyna Hvozdojska

The lately released Netflix's *Shadow and Bone* series fairly can be called a *hit* when it is spoken about fantasy adaptation. The previous one, *The Witcher*, set a high scale for the production team in both - technical and acting matters, pleasing fans with a worthy picture. One way or the other both adaptations got criticised.

Shadow and Bone is based on Leigh Bardugo's series of Grishaverse books. For an East-European reader, not acquainted with the story, the atmosphere in the show is quite familiar to Russia. Though the country, which inspired Leigh Bardugo is quite conservative nowadays, in the show we can see diversity, praised by Eric Heisserer, the show's developer.

One of the things *Shadow and Bone* succeeded in is bringing out the problems of Asians and their representation in a movie making industry. The main part in the show is played by Jessie Mei Li {Alina Starkov}, a Chinese-English origin actress. The issues her character goes through in a show are also the difficulties might be experienced in real life. In the first episodes of *Shadow and Bone* the beholder meets with the frequent question of *What is she*. It clearly describes the society back in the days, not used and afraid of something or someone different. As it turns out we still have to deal with same old fears, like fear of being excluded, afraid of, not comprehended. But with Jessie Mei Li playing the leading part the industry slowly makes important steps on the way to diversity as its wanted.

The other important issue, touched in the show is people trafficking. Amita Suman, who plays Inej, in all ways shows the huge trauma, which was caused by and the difficulty of dealing with it. There are the matters we speak about and something we are terrified of so much that we choose to avoid it. The deep inside worries of Inej show the viewers how deeply hurt the person can be inside, what efforts it takes to open up to new and how painfully is going back to memories, especially of loved and lost ones.

But the deep concerns of Amita's character is not the only thing we should lay our eye on. Being a Nepal-born British actress she, as well as Jessie and other actors, is a part of a multicultural society of the imaginary world of Grishas'. Though at first the show seems to be perfect, there is always a cloud on the horizon.

Before moving forward fairly would be mentioning the huge impact of social medias on our lives. *REFINERY29* writes: *the internet has recently uncovered a surprising and offensive casting choice*.

The Twitter user pointed out that Amita's character Inej stunt double is white. During the process of being conformed to Amita her Hungarian stunt double, Vellai Krisztina, was put in brownface. Moreover she had to wear a brown body suit during her performances. And though Amita recalls a positive memories from working together, internet users got much more offended. For some time there was no comments from the production teams on the issue, until Jessie Mei Li decided to break the silence and speak of an accident.

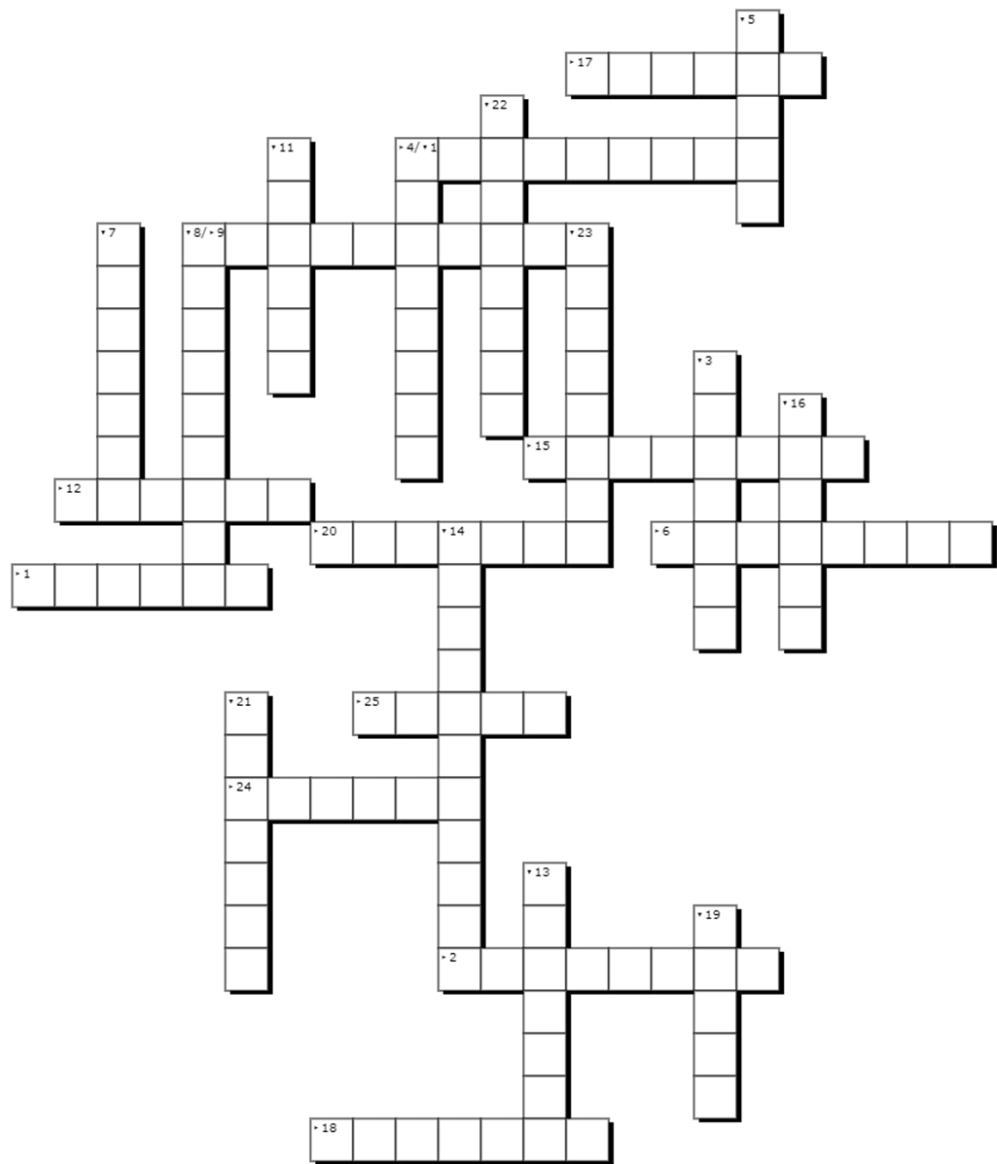
Among the few things she pointed out was the cost of finding the same body type stunt double for Amita in Hungary, reminding that time is money. And at this point everyone decides for himself whom to blame. The only thing clear is that there will always be offended and offender.





Crossword

Eastern European Military History



Down

1. Famous Russian Prince; Fought in the Battle of Lake Peipus
3. Famous Polish winged cavalry
5. Nobility Rank in Slavic and Eastern Europe
7. Mongol general; crushed a grand Rus' army in the Battle of Kalka River
8. Marxist faction founded by Vladimir Lenin
10. Location of the only major battle in France's 1812 invasion of Russia
11. Historical region of Georgia; Royal capital Tbilisi is located here
13. Historical name/region of present-day Latvia
14. Contested region of the Great Game between Russia and the United Kingdom
16. Russian paramilitary organization; reportedly involved in Syrian conflict
19. Polish title of Henryk Sienkiewicz's Deluge
21. Eastern European ethnic group; found primarily in Ukraine and Russia
22. Gorbachev-era slogan for openness and transparency
23. Russian Vice Admiral; Famous for averting global thermonuclear war

Across

2. Slavic Republic; Led by (1)
4. Battle in the Crimean War; Subject of poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade"
6. Location of the First Battle of Tannenberg
9. Nazi German military operation; Invasion of the Soviet Union
12. Supreme deity in Lithuanian paganism
15. Russian term for special forces units
17. Soviet marshal; four-time recipient of Hero of the Soviet Union
18. Ghost town following Chernobyl power plant incident
20. The last royal house to rule Imperial Russia
24. Russian aircraft manufacturer
25. First ruling dynasty of Poland

