



Danzig Baldaev: Drawings from the Gulag

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Drawings from the Gulag consists of 130 drawings by Danzig Baldaev (author of the acclaimed *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia* series), describing the history, horror and peculiarities of the Gulag system from its inception in 1918. Baldaev's father, a respected ethnographer, taught him techniques to record the tattoos of criminals in St. Petersburg's notorious Kresty prison, where Danzig worked as a guard. He was reported to the K.G.B. who unexpectedly offered support for his work, allowing him the opportunity to travel across the former U.S.S.R. Witnessing scenes of everyday life in the Gulag, he chronicled this previously closed world from both sides of the wire. With every vignette, Baldaev brings the characters he depicts to vivid life: from the lowest "zek" (inmate) to the most violent tattooed "vor" (thief), all the practices and inhabitants of the Gulag system are depicted here in incredible and often shocking detail. In documenting the attitude of the authorities to those imprisoned, and the transformation of these citizens into survivors or victims of the Gulag system, this graphic novel vividly depicts methods of torture and mass murder undertaken by the administration, as well as the atrocities committed by criminals upon their fellow inmates.

Danzig Baldaev was born in 1925 in Ulan-Ude, Buryatiya, Russia. In 1948, after serving in the army in World War II, he was ordered by the N.K.V.D. to work as a warden in the infamous Leningrad prison, Kresty, where he started drawing the tattoos of criminals. His collection of drawings, which he made in different reformatory settlements for criminals all over the former U.S.S.R. over a period of more than 50 years, have been published by Fuel in three volumes, in the bestselling *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia* series.

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