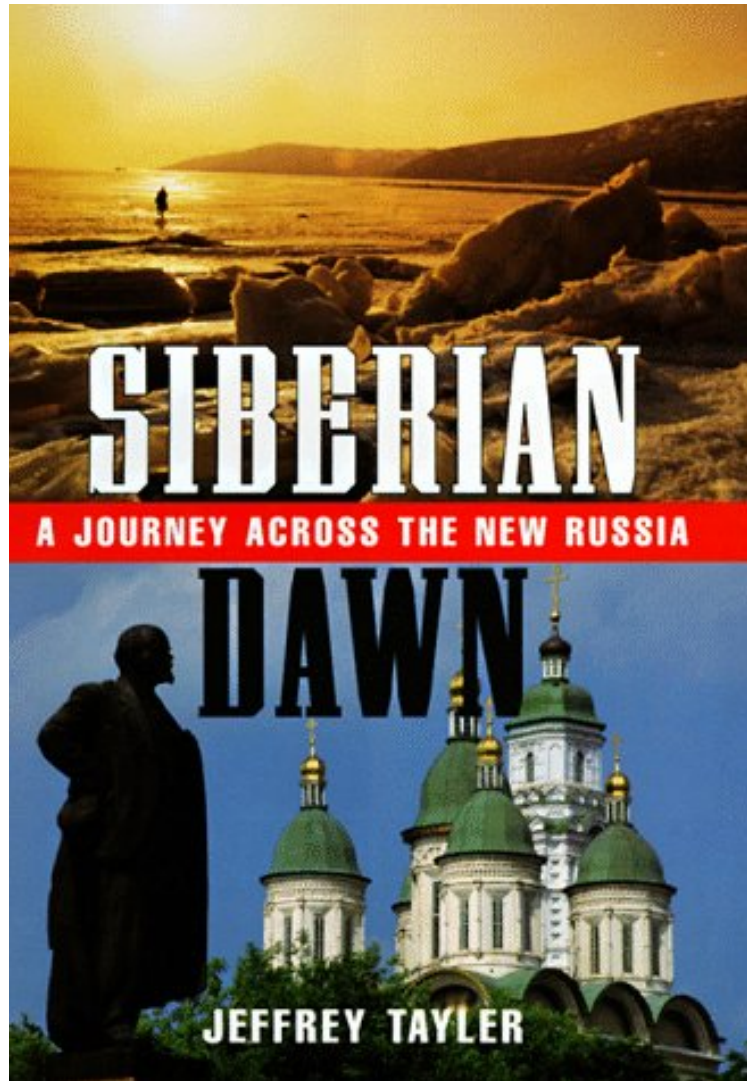


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Siberian Dawn: A Journey Across the New Russia

Jeffrey Tayler

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Jeffrey Tayler : Siberian Dawn: A Journey Across the New Russia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Siberian Dawn: A Journey Across the New Russia:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Cold, bleak land and people, will make you grateful for what you haveBy Alice FriedemannTo give you an idea of what Russia was like for Tayler, here are some quotes from his book:"The system Russians lived under hadn't worked, but they suffered it until it collapsed around them. Now they survived in the ruins. Only the dead, I thought, or those utterly without hope, could bear such squalid humiliation on a daily basis, from trivial insults like waiting for train tickets to larger torments. How could you start a business here? Develop the will to make something of yourself? Soviet rule had reduced many to the state of rats, at each other's

throats over scraps. Suddenly I realized--I felt, rather--what this meant. Even a ticket line had provoked me to violence. Who was to say life in Chita wouldn't have extinguished my spirit, too, or turned me into a raging drunk? How could I not see my own reflection in their eyes? I couldn't resolve my feelings about all this, but it was clear I'd have to stay as neutral and tolerant as possible just to get through the trip alive." page 135"As usual, I was solitary in my window seat on this train to Irkutsk. Despite all the people I was meeting on my trip across Russia, the journey was a lonely one; I was certain to be leaving soon and certain never to return. The transient nature of these acquaintanceships intensified them. They magnified the uncertainties of life that hedge the borders of our consciousness even when we are stationary; we don't know when our last meeting with our friends or family will be any more than we are able to predict the moment of our death. We travel through time even when rooted to one spot. I already missed the people I had met and left behind thousands of miles of road back, from Alexander in Magadan to Sasha and Sergei on the Kolyma Route to Stal and Vika in Yakutsk; they had for a short time been vital to me. The warmth I felt toward them would dissolve into aching sadness after my departure". p 153-154"I ran a sovkhos (state farm), but I had to leave there. All the farm workers were stealing. They had to--their 70-ruble-a-month (7 cents) wasn't enough to live on. But it's impossible to bear if you're honest. I mean, 10% of the seed we were allotted actually got into the ground. It begins disappearing when it's shipped to us. Then more is stolen when it arrives, and even more when it is stored in our holds. Farmers just take it for their own use or sell it. Then, even after it's planted, they steal it out of the ground at night. As I said, we ended up farming ten percent of our allotment. /When I caught some farmers stealing, they tried to kill me. I said 'enough' and went over to the factory. Who needs it? The sovkhosniki would often vandalize the machinery. They'd leave tools on the ground so that harvesters would run over them. Or they'd steal parts. No one was being paid, harvests were lost...That's the way it is even today with our collectivized agriculture. We always are short of grain, but we could produce more grain than all of the countries of the world combined. "Tayler asks him "What about privatizing agriculture and letting people own their own land?" "Maybe that works in the West, but here? Who would end up with control over our lands? Not the people who worked them. Criminal elements bent on exploitation would buy it all up through connections." page 155-156My comment: The main reason the Soviet Union crashed was the cheap price of oil, and millions of Russians died, so part of what Tayler is seeing is the consequences of being over carrying capacity. The grumpiness reminds me of what the Greenlanders were like before they died off in Jared Diamond's "Collapse". Of course, the hunger and sabotage were exacerbated by the corruption and desperation that preceded the downturn, a lot more food could have been grown. Interestingly, this land is being bought up now by the Chinese and other nations to feed their people, which will mine the topsoil and degrade it for future generations of Russians. And of course, this makes me wonder how America will handle its own transition to declining oil. Will the last oil be used to fuel tractors traversing miles of monocrops like now, and then we go cold turkey, or will we be smart enough to change the tax incentives and subsidies to favor small, non-mechanized family farms growing many crops organically? And how will America go from 350 million to 100 million (the carrying capacity without fossil fuels)? One possibility is the Stalin method of the Great Purges of the 1930s "during which he exiled or executed his political opponents as well as millions of rank-and-file party members and workers and peasants...up to 22 million). The official justifications were stark and simple--massive plots of sabotage, economic "wrecking" or stabbing at the underbelly of the economy through poor production or unfulfilled quotas, espionage, "anti-soviet agitation," and so forth. In fact, almost all of these charges were simply concocted to destroy anyone who did not owe his or her position to Stalin--he would tolerate no one who might enjoy a popularity he had not sanctioned or created. Purges were Soviet power and began with Lenin's Terror; they reflected the destructive, crushing essence of Soviet power. Their result was a people that did what it was told and largely thought what it was instructed to think. The purges atomized Soviet society, driving people into the personal burrows of their family and closest friends, shattering all class cohesiveness that might have at some point or another coalesced into resistance, and turning apathy into a trait necessary for survival. Russians often told me that the purges destroyed their nation's gene pool by eliminating the cultured and skilled and brilliant. Whether or not this is so, they broke the back of Russian society. It has not recovered to this day" page 265My comment: I guess I should be glad that the USA went the Roman bread and circus route of entertaining the populace to distract them from seeing the looting of resources that ought to belong to everyone, or from caring that their land, air, and water were being poisoned, being brainwashed against birth control and abortion so that the rich could pay lower wages to the multitudes, and ultimately our extinction a possibility so a small percent of people could become immensely wealthy.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book!By Joshua VanwormerOne of the best books on Russia. Excellent author. Highly recommended!4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Too much imagery, too few facts.By A CustomerImagery has its uses, of course. But a few well selected photos could have substituted for at least a hundred pages of this work, leaving room for a lot more detail about actual conditions, attitudes, and future potential in the areas travelled by Mr. Tayler. And how did he manage to get across all that dangerous territory without ever being mugged? He only describes a couple of close calls. And why couldn't we know what happened with Lena and Natasha, the two medical students, that night in Chita?

No guidebook existed for my route; no one had ever done it before", writes Tayler. As the first American to visit many

of the places he goes, his reports on a country in transition are timely and unforgettable. It is also the account of one man's love for a fragile, desperately troubled country.

From Publishers Weekly The ideal readers for this book would be World Bank advisers drawing up credit agreements in their five-star Moscow hotel rooms as they dine on German beef. Yet anyone seeking an understanding of post-Soviet Russia that goes beyond the dull CNN cliché of a Lenin monument standing before a McDonald's will be mesmerized by this account of an American's overland journey from Magadan to Warsaw. Completing a trip that even few Russians would be willing to attempt, Tayler portrays a Russia to which foreigners have long been denied access, both geographically and spiritually. Tayler (a contributor to *Atlantic Monthly* and commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered*) begins his 8325-mile trip by hitching a ride out of deepest, darkest Siberia, above the Arctic Circle, where the remnants of the Gulag system lie strewn about the frozen steppe. His willingness to press onward and calmly accept local conditions distinguishes this experience from most Westerners' travels in Russia. The Kalmyk, Burati and other Siberian peoples, including the Russians, are a reminder that this is a country straddling Europe and Asia. The reader is confronted with a bleak landscape blighted by ecological disaster, alcoholism, poverty, bad roads (where roads exist at all) and a systemic breakdown so severe that many pine for a return to authoritarianism. Yet, through the entire book, Tayler's fascination with and love for the birch forest, the steppe and the enduring Russian spirit remain at the fore. Refreshingly, cracker-barrel discussion of who "won the cold war" and suggestions for reform are left out. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* In 1993, Tayler, an American journalist who lives in Moscow, decided to brave a trek across the vast expanse of the former Soviet Union, from the gulag city of Magadan in the far east to the border of Poland. The over 8000-mile route—almost never undertaken over land—took him through some of the most difficult terrain on the planet as he stopped in small, bereft towns and witnessed the shattered remnants of communism and the false starts of capitalism. Alternately hitching with truckers and taking trains, Tayler reveals the profound poverty, environmental degradation, and hopelessness faced by people in the midst of economic collapse. In spite of Tayler's often choppy prose and somewhat abrupt judgments (especially about the many victims of alcoholism he encounters), this book provides a rare view into the very real human crisis that continues to play out in Russia. Recommended for all public libraries. —Rebecca Miller, "*Library Journal*" Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Kirkus* sA young American's encounters with arctic cold, violent vodka-induced drunkenness, unknown levels of radiation, and mafia-ruled hinterland cities reveal the bleak and desperate side of life in the post-Communist Soviet states. Inspired by his love of Russian culture and finding himself at loose ends in Moscow, Tayler decided in 1993 to cross the entire landmass of Russia. Naively enthusiastic, yet ill-equipped and underprepared, the young American started out on a perilous journey from the desolate byways of the Russian Far East, across Siberia and the Urals, to the Polish-Ukrainian border. The journey embodies both a personal quest and a search for the heart of Russia. Tayler explains, "I wanted to fuse my fate with the country's in a crucible of my own making." And a crucible it was. Against the odds of inadequate equipment, incredible coldness, unwise decisions, and the constant threat of violence in Russia's depressed provinces, Tayler survived the solo journey. He describes his travels by bus, train, truck, and car, his fleeting friendships and sometimes violent encounters with almost uniformly desperate men and women, the astonishing changes in weather and landscape in this vast region, and the physical state of Russia's hinterlands, including its environmental devastation—none of which is uplifting. The harrowing stories he shares about life in Russia's desolate hinterland sharpen our understanding of Russia's past and present with their unforgettable details: cockroaches emerging from hosts' wallpaper and ceilings during a meal, scary confrontations with several of Russia's drunks that lead to exchanges of words and blows, and the filth and dangers of life in polluted Chelyabinsk, the once-thriving center of the Soviet nuclear and defense industries. By the trip's end, it's a toss-up who is more relieved to cross the Polish border, Tayler or his reader. Graphically describes the deeply disturbing state of the "new" Russia and its demoralized citizens. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.