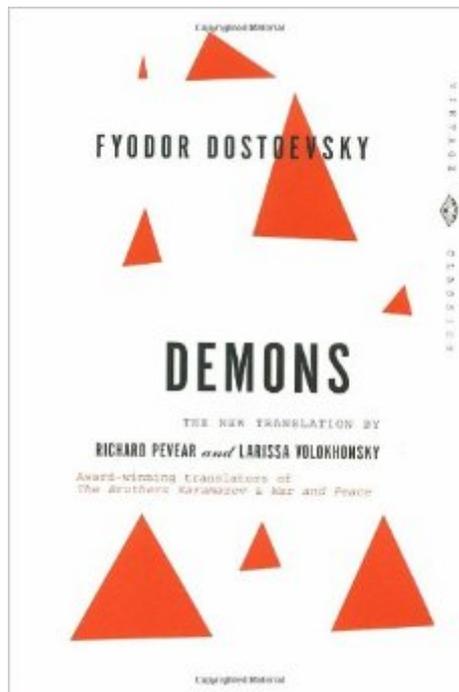


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# Demons: A Novel In Three Parts (Vintage Classics)



## Synopsis

Inspired by the true story of a political murder that horrified Russians in 1869, Fyodor Dostoevsky conceived of *Demons* as a "novel-pamphlet" in which he would say everything about the plague of materialist ideology that he saw infecting his native land. What emerged was a prophetic and ferociously funny masterpiece of ideology and murder in pre-revolutionary Russia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Most readers probably know that the character of the amoral nihilist Peter Verkhovensky is based--not too loosely, either--on the real-life figure of Sergei Nechayev (pronounced neech-aye-eff), who collaborated with the anarchist Bakunin while they were both hiding out in Western Europe. (Bakunin finally learned that Nechayev was a total fanatic who'd stop at nothing--even blackmail, betrayal, and murder--and disassociated himself with Nechayev, warning friends against him.) Nechayev murdered a member of his conspiratorial group, suspecting the victim of betrayal, a scene portrayed in the novel. What most readers may not know is that Lenin was fascinated with the career of Nechayev (who was eventually caught for the murder and extradited to Russia, where he died in prison), called him a "titanic revolutionary," and said that Bolsheviks should try to find everything Nechayev had ever written, and study it. If Peter Verkhovensky was a caricature, he turned out to be a caricature that came to life in Lenin and Hitler and Stalin. Yet it is important to remember that these men were not, and could not be, dangerous all by themselves. It is only the possession of an ideology that makes them dangerous, ESPECIALLY if

it is one that claims to be supremely moral and virtuous. Why is this so? Because self-righteous people who believe themselves to following a supremely moral path would almost certainly conclude that anyone who OPPOSES this supreme virtue must therefore be supremely IMMORAL--and what should be done with immoral people? Dostoevsky tells us something very important here: ideology kills, especially if it's the kind that exudes proclamations of goodness and virtue.

I don't know what it is, but I get the feeling that reading Dostoevsky is an addiction. Whether it's a longing for creepy reality-based stories set in the whirlwind of 1870's Russia or those moments where Dostoevsky's genius for emotional writing lets loose, I think I'm addicted. I say this because there are clearly a lot of moments in this 700 page book where I plod on, just wondering where the action is headed, could I recommend this book to someone else?, the answer is "No", but I still want to read on. The first couple hundred pages describe the various characters. The action takes place in the second part of the book. The writing is typical D, not some dry polemic I had feared, as I had read so much about Demons being D's most "political" book. Don't worry; it's a novel first, not a manifesto. I had a hard time following some of the characters, but maybe that was just me, maybe not. Figuring out the narrator is also problematic, though very interesting to think about (discussed in an essay in Leatherbarrow's book, see below). There's also humor, which many reviewers talk about, but this is mostly in the latter sections, where D satirizes the characters of the group that want to tear down society. Clearly, one of the main attractions of this book is that D seemingly and very accurately foreshadows what happens in Russia 45 years later during the 1917 Revolution and rise of Communism. He couldn't have been more on target. So, if you're reading this for enjoyment and haven't read several of Dostoevsky's other major books, read them first. This book, as well as many other of D's books, was printed and written as a serial and isn't as smooth and refined as *The Brother's Karamazov* or *Crime and Punishment*.

*Demons* (also known as *Possessed & The Devils*) is a 1878 novel by literary genius Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). The novel is long, difficult and rife with Russian names easy to confuse. The novel is also a work of art of peerless genius. The massive novel is set in the unimportant provincial Russian town of Skvorishniki. The major characters are: Vavara Stavrogin-She is the wealthy widow of a Russian general. Vavara is an aristocrat who is cultured and kind. Stavrogin-A nihilist who is involved in the budding communist movement to overturn the Russian government. He is cruel, self-centered and self-loathing. An intellectual bored with life and love. He marries a

crippled and ugly woman whom he later has murdered at his behest. He is Vavara's wastrel son. Stepan-The old liberal of the 1840s who is a failed professor. He is the tutor to the young Stavrogin and is supported by the kindness of Vavara. He will later flee the town to die on the road. I found him to be a pathetic foolish character. Lembke-The ridiculous head of the local town government. Dostoevsky did not like government officials and has fun with this pathetic creature. His wife seeks to climb society's slippery ladder by holding a literary fete in the town. Lisa-The love interest of the novel who has suitors but is drawn to Stavrogin in a hopeless and tragic love. The long novel is many books wrapped into one: a. A mystery and suspense story about the conspirators and the destruction they perpetuate in the town. The town is a microcosm of Russian Tsarist society. These are the "demons" of the title based on Christ's driving out the demons from the Gerasene demoniac in the gospel accounts. b.

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