



Ground Up

Michael Idov

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Light streams through the windows as the espresso machine roars; a gorgeous, rich scent fills the air; and witty conversation unspools over the porcelain cups.

That's the caf? dream. Mark and Nina are about to experience the reality. Determined to re-create the perfect Viennese coffeehouse, they descend on New York's gritty but hip Lower East Side to educate the locals on authentic caf? culture. Soon Mark and Nina are in a downward spiral that will strip them of money, friends, sex life, status, shelter, and, finally, sanity--and offer salvation through something they have never experienced: disaster.

Inspired by the author's own coffeehouse hell, *Ground Up* is a sharp and funny portrait of a New York constantly reinventing itself, and a surprisingly tender story of falling out of love and back in it again.

Ground Up Details

Date : Published July 21st 2009 by Farrar, Strauss & Giroux-3pl

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Author : Michael Idov

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Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Russia, Literature, American, Humor, Funny, Food and Drink

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From Reader Review Ground Up for online ebook

Kostina says

I practically devoured the first third of the book. Then it stalled a little and I had to take a break. But once I crawled through the second third, it picked up the speed. (this is to say that the quality of the content, at least for me, was somewhat uneven). I did enjoy the language of the book immensely (although, I have to admit, I had to look words up in a dictionary more than I'd like:-)). The jokes are witty, and observations about American society are very sharp. The author is very intelligent and doesn't seem to patronize the reader, which I always appreciate.

What was also interesting for me is to look the author's own translation of it into Russian (Kofemolka) and compare the two versions. The one in English is more appealing, although the Russian one has its jewels too.

Sergey Tomson says

??? ??? ??????? — ? ??????? ???-?????. — ??????. ??????????? ?? ????, ?????..» ?? ??? ??? ??????? ???-???????, ??????? ????, ??????????? ??????? ?? ????, ???????, ??? ????? ????, ??????? ?? ????, ???????.

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P.S. ????? ?????? ??????? ????? ? ????? ???? ?????-?? ?????????????? ?????? ???????, ?????? ? ???????? ? ???????
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Anna Kravchuk says

From the very beginning, you know where the story is heading. The characters and their plans are doomed and the author doesn't try to present it as some kind of intrigue. Instead, he is relishing every step, every thought on this road to failure. It's all about the process and details. What comes as a pleasant surprise is a certain degree of hope and even tenderness from the author towards his characters. Yes, their decisions are wrong, their view of the outside world is naive, their logic is twisted, their disregard of their privilege is absurd. But it doesn't mean that they're bad people. And their failure doesn't mean their lives are forever in ruins. And while we laugh at their misfortunes we understand that there are hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands people who share the main characters illusions. And it's quite likely that somewhere deep inside we're quite similar.

Vlad Nedogibchenko says

It's great cosmopolitan literature, where the idea and story component are not secondary... Very New-York-style and ironic.

Jessica Draper says

An inconsequential tale engagingly told. Michael Idov's protagonist, Mike Scharf, is a neo-yuppie who has a charming way with words as he narrates the inevitable failure of an idealistic coffee-shop venture--the cooking area is so tiny that he dubs it a "kitchennyet." His voice kept me reading despite two grievous mismatches between my tastes and the novel: 1) I do not drink coffee, so most of the bean-centered delirium went right by me. 2) I was not particularly interested in the business or marital troubles of a semi-detached, self-absorbed couple of leisure-class quasi-intellectuals. But hey, with a tale like this, it's the telling, not the plot, that counts, right? I'll happily read Idov's essays, but this novel isn't staying on my tablet.

Sergey Tomson says

«?????????» ??????? ????? ?? ?????, ??????????? ??????? (???? ??????? ? ???... ?? ????? ??????) ??????? ?? ??????? ??????, ? ????? ??????? ?? ?? ?????? ?? ??????. ?? ????? ????????. ?????? ? ?????? ?????? ??????, ??????, ???????, ????????, ????????, ????? ??????? ?? ?????? ???, ??? ?????? ??????? ?? ?????? ??? ?????? ??? ????????: «????? ??????? — ?????????? ????. ? ?????? ?????? ??????? ?????? ???, ???, ??? ? ?. ?. ?????? ?????? ?????????? ? ??????????? ?????????? (????? ???? ???????!) ?????????? ?????? ???????; ? ?????? ?????? ??????? ??????????. ??????? ?? ?????? ??????? ?? ?????? ???????, ?????? ?? ?????, ? ????? — ???????, ?????? ?? ?????? ????. ????. «?????????» — ????? ??????????, ? ?????? ?????? ?? ??????. ?? ?????? ?? ??????? ?? ?????????? ????. ??????, ??? ?? ??? ????? ??????? ?? ?? ?????? ??????. ??????? ?? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ??????? ?????? ????. ????. ??? ?? ??? ?????? ???????, ?? ??? ?? ?????? ?? ?????????? ?????? ?????????? ????. ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? «????? ?????» ?? ?????? ????. ?????? ?????? ?????? ?? ??????, ? ?????? ?????? ?????????? ?????????? ?????? «?????????», ??? ??????».

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P.S. ????? ?????? ??????? ????? ? ????? ??? ?????-?? ?????????????? ?????? ???????, ?????? ? ???????? ? ????????

Kathy says

Based on the author's own short-lived experience opening -- then closing -- New York coffee house.

Mark Scharf, the novel's narrator, is the slacker son of Russian-Jewish emigres. He fancies himself a writer, and pens snarky reviews of first-novels for Kirkus Reviews. His wife, Nina Liau, is a trust-fund baby and disaffected lawyer who fancies herself a fine-arts photographer. She's also a good cook. At one of their dinner parties, guest who turned out to be a Michelin reviewer compliments Nina's cooking and plants the seed of an idea in Mark's and Nina's heads. They come up with a scheme to use the equity from their Upper East Side apartment to start a Viennese-style coffee house on the Lower East Side to "educate" latte-swilling New York hipsters on the "true coffee culture" of Central Europe. Mark and Nina don't let their complete lack of business experience slow them down, and soon they've opened "Kolschitzky," a coffee house so precious even their friends won't patronize it.

Idov has filled the book with pun-tastic business and rock band names.

Funny and sad.

Tonya says

4-4.5

I've been wanting to read this book for years and certainly enjoyed it.

Serge says

I really want to award this book 5 stars based on the sheer enjoyment I got out of reading it, but alas, despite being a stellar first novel, it's not a 5 star book. It kept me laughing through both the good and bad times of the semi-fictional characters and their enterprise. Despite the author's attempts to lampoon snobs of various varieties in the novel, he did end up trying too hard at times to flex his own erudition. Finally, it kept me engaged throughout because it details the practicalities and real world hassles of opening and operating a cafe.

Olga Lempert says

Reading this in the Russian translation was a serious mistake. In addition to the NYC-specific allusions which would have gone over my head anyway, I lost much of the elegant and complex wordplay in favor of contrived and strained efforts of preserving at least the seventy percent advertized by the author in the preface. Russian is obviously not the stronger out of Idov's written languages, which turned out to be a benefit of sorts when the English intent was clearly visible through the non-Russian Russian, enabling a kind of a vicarious enjoyment of the original. Apart from the language, however, I did like the book. Idov's prose is very good to my taste, and the Kaffeehaustraum narrative speaks to me, even if the trust-baby background doesn't. I just wish I had a better knowledge of New York's history and geography, so my understanding of the book could be less cerebral and more intuitive.

Offbalance says

It's amazing when you can see the end coming from the first page.

Here's the scenario - two upper-middle class, overeducated brats with nothing to do and too much money to burn decide to find their purpose. But, like Preston in Avenue Q, they fall short by the end. In the middle, they have a disastrous time opening and running a "Viennese-Style" coffee shop in the East Village. They want to form a new cafe society. And, like the screeching breaks of the car wreck to come, you can tell from the first chapter exactly when the crash of metal and breaking glass will come.

I'd hoped from the first chapter that Idov would keep up the snarky, self-effacing tone, but after a few chapters he became whiny and on the verge of a tantrum; how DARE these people not UNDERSTAND the brilliance of this undertaking? Ground up did provide a few chuckles, and watching the two puffed-up protagonists fail miserably was just the foam on the latte.

Anne says

This is the story of an aimless intellectual couple and their quest to run a hip coffee shop in Manhattan. The book is based on the author's real-life foray into cafe ownership. As someone who has always romanticized the notion of owning a cafe (I mean, who hasn't), preferably with a small bookstore attached, I was curious to see how this one would play out. From choosing the name of the shop (nothing with a pun) to hiring "coffee artists" to figuring out which pastries to sell and what kind of vibe to put forth, I found Idov's dialogue and story telling style for the most part witty (in a Juno, if not realistic, way). But, the characters themselves were simply not likeable. The couple doesn't act like much of a team, and they take themselves way too seriously for the reader to ever truly root for their success. Of course, that might be part of the point. The main characters cannot be bothered to find money important, so the mere fact that they've set off to achieve a capitalist's dream (complete with competing Cup a Joe across the street) solidifies the satire and ensures their ultimate demise. This story is the classic picture of urban malaise. And while it is not as annoying to me as suburban malaise, I found it mostly tedious and uninspiring.

Stop says

[image error]

Julia Smolyanskiy says

I had low expectations but ended up really enjoying this book. If you know New York City and have Russian background you are sure to like it. Smart writing, lively characters who end up on an amusing journey with a predictable ending but it is still a fun ride to undertake with them.

Paul Thomas says

This was a pretty good book about an interesting couple in Manhattan who decide to drop their legal and "writing" careers and do something different, like start a coffee shop. The writing is deceptively good, quick, witty, slightly more complex than the novel itself. It helps that I live in NYC, and invested/worked in a restaurant once upon a time, but not necessary to enjoying the story. Nor is being Russian. There could have been more of a plot. The story line got a little tired, but the characters were colorful, and the prose was engaging and quick to read. A good light to medium read.
