



Cannibal Island: Death in a Siberian Gulag (Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity)

Nicolas Werth

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During the spring of 1933, Stalin's police rounded up nearly one hundred thousand people as part of the Soviet regime's "cleansing" of Moscow and Leningrad and deported them to Siberia. Many of the victims were sent to labor camps, but ten thousand of them were dumped in a remote wasteland and left to fend for themselves. *Cannibal Island* reveals the shocking, grisly truth about their fate.

These people were abandoned on the island of Nazino without food or shelter. Left there to starve and to die, they eventually began to eat each other. Nicolas Werth, a French historian of the Soviet era, reconstructs their gruesome final days using rare archival material from deep inside the Stalinist vaults. Werth skillfully weaves this episode into a broader story about the Soviet frenzy in the 1930s to purge society of all those deemed to be unfit. For Stalin, these undesirables included criminals, opponents of forced collectivization, vagabonds, gypsies, even entire groups in Soviet society such as the "kulaks" and their families. Werth sets his story within the broader social and political context of the period, giving us for the first time a full picture of how Stalin's system of "special villages" worked, how hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens were moved about the country in wholesale mass transportations, and how this savage bureaucratic machinery functioned on the local, regional, and state levels.

Cannibal Island challenges us to confront unpleasant facts not only about Stalin's punitive social controls and his failed Soviet utopia, but about every generation's capacity for brutality--including our own.

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