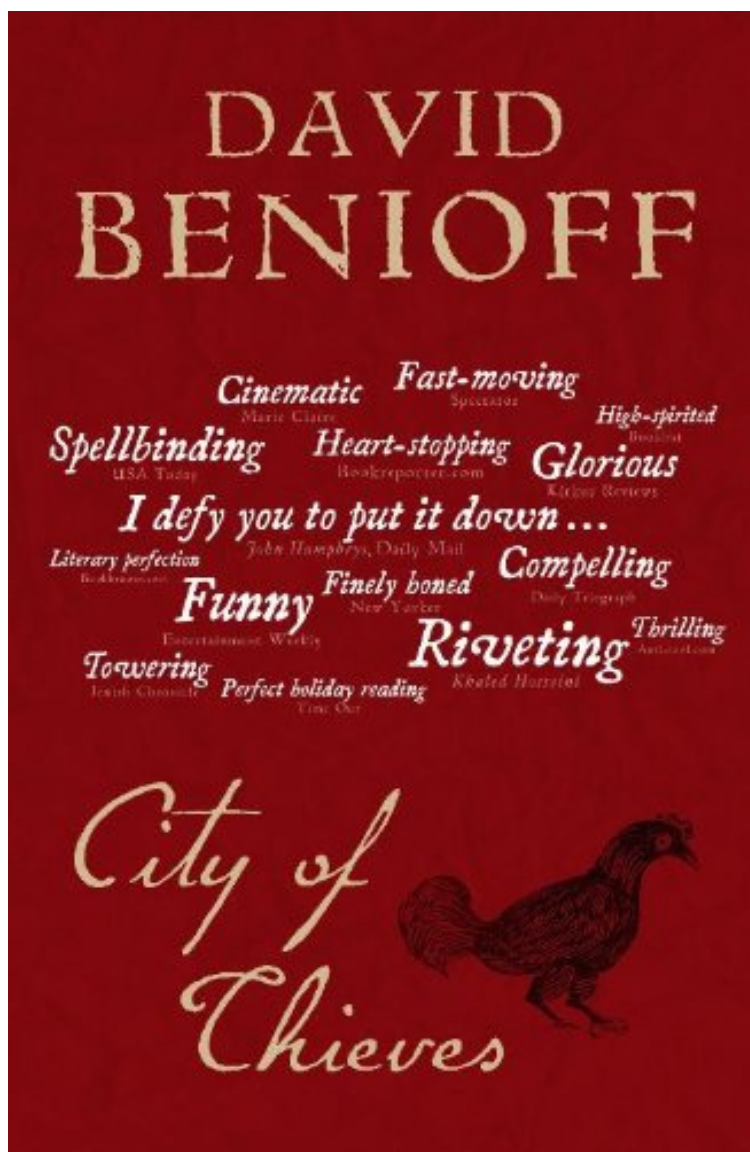


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City of Thieves (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the writer of the award-winning Game of Thrones series for HBO based on the books of George R. R. Martin.'David Benioff is an exceptional storyteller . . . CITY OF THIEVES is tender, illuminating, and, be warned, often shocking.' Khaled HosseiniFour months into the siege of Leningrad, the city is starving. Seventeen-year-old Lev fears for his life when he is arrested for looting the body of a dead German paratrooper, while his charismatic cellmate, Kolya, a handsome young soldier arrested for desertion, seems bizarrely unafraid.Dawn brings, instead of an execution squad, an impossible challenge. Lev and Kolya can find a dozen eggs for an NKVD colonel to use for his daughter's wedding cake, and live. Or fail, and die.In the depths of the coldest winter in history, through a city cut off from all supplies and suffering

appalling deprivation, man and boy embark on an absurd hunt. Their search will take them through desolate, lawless Leningrad and the devastated countryside surrounding it, in the captivating journey of two men trying to survive against desperate odds. You have never been so hungry; you have never been so cold. When we slept, if we slept, we dreamed of the feasts we had carelessly eaten seven months earlier: all that buttered bread, the potato dumplings, the sausages eaten with disregard, swallowing without tasting, leaving great crumbs on our plates, scraps of fat. In June of 1941, before the Germans came, we thought we were poor. But June seemed like paradise by winter. At night the wind blew so loud and long it startled you when it stopped; the shutter hinges of the burnt-out café on the corner would quit creaking for a few ominous seconds, as if a predator neared and the smaller animals hushed in terror. The shutters themselves had been torn down for firewood in November. There was no more scrap wood in Leningrad. Every wood sign, the slats of the park benches, the floorboards of shattered buildings all gone and burning in someone's stove. The pigeons were missing, too, caught and stewed in melted ice from the Neva. No one minded slaughtering pigeons. It was the dogs and cats that caused trouble. You would hear a rumor in October that someone had roasted the family mutt and split it four ways for supper; we'd laugh and shake our heads, not believing it, and also wondering if dog tasted good with enough salt there was still plenty of salt, even when everything else ran out we had salt. By January the rumors had become plain fact. No one but the best connected could still feed a pet, so the pets fed us. There were two theories on the fat versus the thin. Some said those who were fat before the war stood a better chance of survival: a week without food would not transform a plump man into a skeleton. Others said skinny people were more accustomed to eating little and could better handle the shock of starvation. I stood in the latter camp, purely out of self-interest. I was a runt from birth. Big-nosed, black-haired, skin scribbled with acne: let's admit I was no girl's idea of a catch. But war made me more attractive. Others dwindled as the ration cards were cut and cut again, halving those who looked like circus strongmen before the invasion. I had no muscle to lose. Like the shrews that kept scavenging while the dinosaurs toppled around them, I was built for deprivation. So I was too young for the army but old enough to dig anti-tank ditches by day and guard the roofs by night. Manning my crew were my friends from the 5th floor, Vera Osipovna, a talented cellist, and the redheaded Antokolsky twins, whose only known talent was an ability to fart in harmony. In the early days of the war we had smoked cigarettes on the roof, posing as soldiers, brave and strong and square-chinned, scanning the skies for the enemy. By the end of December there were no cigarettes in Leningrad, at least none made with tobacco. A few desperate souls crushed fallen leaves, rolled them in paper and called them Autumn Lights, claiming the right leaves provided a decent smoke, but in the Kirov, far from the nearest standing tree, this was never an option. We spent our spare minutes hunting rats, who must have thought the disappearance of the city's cats was the answer to all their ancient prayers, until they realized there was nothing left to eat in the garbage. We had a little radio on the roof with us. On New Year's Eve we listened to the Spassky chimes in Moscow playing the Internationale. Vera had found half an onion somewhere; she cut it into four pieces on a plate smeared with sunflower oil. When the onion was gone we mopped up the remaining oil with our ration bread. Ration bread did not taste like bread. It did not taste like food. After the Germans bombed the Badayev grain warehouses, the city bakeries got creative. Everything that could be added to the recipe without poisoning people was added to the recipe. The entire city was starving, no one had enough to eat, and still, everyone cursed the bread, the sawdust flavor, how hard it got in the cold. People broke their teeth trying to chew it. Even today, even when I've forgotten the faces of people I loved, I can still remember the taste of that bread. Half an onion and a 125-gram loaf of bread split four ways: this was a decent meal. We lay on our backs, wrapped in blankets, watching the air raid blimps on their long tethers drifting in the wind, listening to the radio's metronome. When there was no music to play or news to report, the radio station transmitted the sound of a metronome, that endless tick-tick-tick letting us know the city was still unconquered, the Fascists still outside the gate. The broadcast metronome was Piter's beating heart, and the Germans never stilled it. It was Vera who spotted the man falling from the sky. She shouted and pointed and we all stood to get a better look. One of the searchlights shone on a parachutist descending towards the city, his silk canopy a white tulip bulb above him. A Fritz, said Oleg Antokolsky, and he was right, we could see the grey Luftwaffe uniform. Where had he come from? None of us had heard the sounds of aerial combat or the report of an AA gun. We hadn't heard a bomber passing overhead for close to an hour. Maybe it's started, said Vera. For weeks we'd been hearing rumors that the Germans were preparing a massive paratrooper drop, a final raid to pluck the miserable thorn of Leningrad from their advancing army's backside. At any minute we expected to look up and see thousands of Nazis drifting toward the city, a snowstorm of white parachutes blotting out the

sky, but dozens of searchlights slashed through the darkness and found no more enemies. There was only this one, and judging from the limpness of the body suspended from the parachute harness, he was already dead. From Publishers Weekly Starred . Author and screenwriter Benioff follows up *The 25th Hour* with this hard-to-put-down novel based on his grandfather's stories about surviving WWII in Russia. Having elected to stay in Leningrad during the siege, 17-year-old Lev Beniov is caught looting a German paratrooper's corpse. The penalty for this infraction (and many others) is execution. But when Colonel Grechko confronts Lev and Kolya, a Russian army deserter also facing execution, he spares them on the condition that they acquire a dozen eggs for the colonel's daughter's wedding cake. Their mission exposes them to the most ghoulish acts of the starved populace and takes them behind enemy lines to the Russian countryside. There, Lev and Kolya take on an even more daring objective: to kill the commander of the local occupying German forces. A wry and sympathetic observer of the devastation around him, Lev is an engaging and self-deprecating narrator who finds unexpected reserves of courage at the crucial moment and forms an unlikely friendship with Kolya, a flamboyant ladies' man who is coolly reckless in the face of danger. Benioff blends tense adventure, a bittersweet coming-of-age and an oddly touching buddy narrative to craft a smart crowd-pleaser. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.