

## About the author:

**LEONID BERSHIDSKY** was born in Moscow in 1971. A journalist since the age of 17, his first job was with the Moscow bureau of the Philadelphia Inquirer, where he helped cover the breakup of the Soviet Union. In 1999, Bershidsky, by then an experienced reporter and editor, became the founding editor-in-chief of the daily Vedomosti, an ambitious media start-up that brought together Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal.

Bershidsky, a graduate of the INSEAD business school in Fontainebleau, France, was the founding editor or publisher of a number of other publications including the Russian and Ukrainian editions of Forbes, as well as the opinion website Republic.ru, now designated by the Putin regime as a “foreign agent.”

In 2014, Bershidsky loudly protested the Russian annexation of Crimea. Soon, he and his family were forced to emigrate to Berlin, where Bershidsky went to work as a staff columnist for Bloomberg Opinion. As the organization's Europe Columnist, Bershidsky covered politics, policy and business in Russia, Ukraine and throughout Europe until the Covid pandemic broke out in 2020. He spent most of 2016 in the United States chronicling Donald Trump's path to the presidency.

Bershidsky continued writing columns through 2023, restating his strongly anti-Putin and pro-Ukrainian position as Russia re-invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Bershidsky is also an experienced literary translator, having translated notable works, including 1984 by George Orwell and The Trial by Franz Kafka into Russian. Additionally, he has translated a selection of poems by Alexander Pushkin into English, titled A Captive Finch, which will be published by Freedom Letters worldwide in 2024.

Now, as technical lead of Bloomberg's News Innovation Lab, Bershidsky, a proficient coder, experiments with artificial intelligence applications for the Bloomberg newsroom. A German citizen, he lives with his wife and two daughters in Berlin and in Saxony-Anhalt, part of former East Germany.

*Selected Bibliography*

- 2024 — **Animal Tested**, *novel*  
2013 — **The Craft**, *non-fiction*  
2012 — **Faberge's Eight**, *novel*  
2011 — **Devilish Trills**, *novel*  
2010 — **Rembrandt Must Die**, *novel*

*Awards*

- Shortlisted for **PolitProsvet Award** 2014



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## Animal Tested

In *Animal Tested*, animals – crows, lab rats and chihuahuas – dramatically disrupt the lives of the novel's human protagonists and, eventually, trigger an avalanche of drastic geopolitical changes. Leonid Bershidsky employs a peculiar lens to explore urgent contemporary dilemmas of power vs control, empathy vs tolerance, and the real cost of scientific progress.

In the novel's alternative near future three seemingly unrelated plotlines intertwine into a tight knot.

In Moscow, a strongman ruler – whom his intimates call Coach and others are instructed not to address directly – faces a growing problem with crows. The priests are the first to be attacked by the aggressive and unusually intelligent birds, but Coach himself appears to be their ultimate target. The ruler's entourage reads his erratic and violent response towards birds as a sign of declining mental health and, more importantly, of weakness. An attempted coup d'état finds Coach sequestered in his fortress residence with his disenchanting mistress and their child. They, too, have been forced to hide indoors from aggressive crows.

The Coach and his family are placed under home arrest, while the guards undermine his authority by continuously provoking both him and his family, trying to make him snap. But to Coach himself, the only way to escape the nightmare is to join and head up the mystical forces aligned against him, to fly with the crows – and to get a message to a loyal general. By the time the coup is defeated, Coach perceives himself simultaneously as man and crow, ready to wage his wars in ways no ordinary man could ever imagine.

In Atlanta, Lex, a young biochemist at a medium-sized pharma company, leads a small team conducting obesity pill research. Lex' unusual emotional intelligence and gentle hands make her the favorite of the lab rats used in the experiments. Eager to make contact with Lex – and no one else – the rats display various near-human behaviors. When the researcher shares her experience with colleagues and her superior, Cheol, she is immediately suspected of burnout and drug use. Not to be deterred by the institutional resistance and the unfamiliar scientific terrain, Lex smuggles in forbidden equipment and embarks on a series of experiments with a brain-computer interface to decipher the message the rats want to communicate. When she finally succeeds, the message is one of unspeakable

suffering. Fired from the firm when Cheol covets her findings, Lex takes her program to academia and her results to the public, finding herself at the head of a powerful movement driven by compassion not only for animals but for victims of all forms of oppression.

In Berlin, Rainer Radtke runs one of several happiness models for EGAL, a think-tank-like organization that has been running Germany since, in the middle of a pandemic, the political establishment peacefully handed over power to the experts. Rainer's job is to track hundreds of real-time data feeds and suggest policy measures to make sure the population's happiness level doesn't drop below 70%. Rainer himself, however, no longer believes in scientific governance since a city planning decision resulted in the demolition of his childhood home and the death of his father. He rebels by running an underground pub in a gloomy village an hour's drive from Berlin and by breeding chihuahuas in defiance of a nationwide dog ban. The chihuahua business unexpectedly brings him into contact with a loose grouping of anti-expert dissidents and retired politicians bent on returning to power – and badly in need of canine companionship. Rainer helps his new friends wreck the models to escalate public discontent.

When the three plotlines finally intersect during a series of surreal conference calls between government buildings in Moscow, D.C. and Berlin, it's clear that the state of the world is precarious as rarely before – and that the story doesn't end here.

At once a brisk social commentary and a thrilling roller-coaster dystopia, *Animal Tested* showcases a colorful array of vivid characters, surprising the readers at every page turn with smartly concocted plot twists as well as dramatic psychological transformations. Bershidsky elegantly leads the readers as we probe the notions of power, control, intelligence, empathy – and freedom.