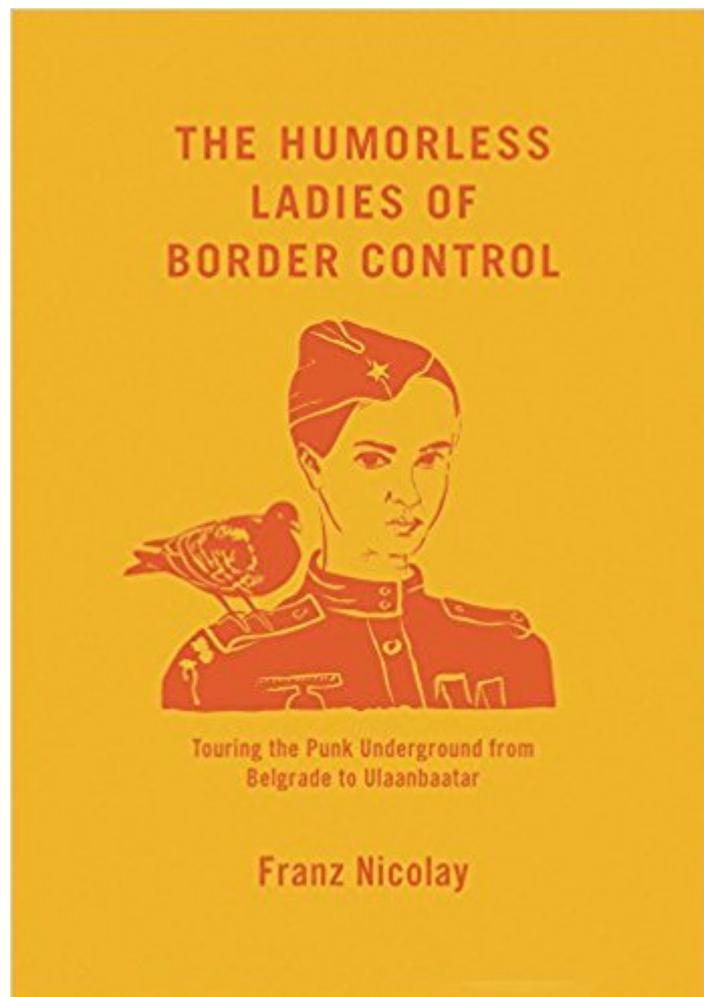


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The Humorless Ladies Of Border Control: Touring The Punk Underground From Belgrade To Ulaanbaatar



Synopsis

In 2009, musician Franz Nicolay left his job in the Hold Steady, aka "the world's greatest bar band." Over the next five years, he crossed the world with a guitar in one hand, a banjo in the other, and an accordion on his back, playing the anarcho-leftist squats and DIY spaces of the punk rock diaspora. He meets Polish artists nostalgic for their revolutionary days, Mongolian neo-Nazis in full SS regalia, and a gay expat in Ulaanbataar who needs an armed escort between his home and his job. The Russian punk scene is thrust onto the international stage with the furor surrounding the arrest of the group Pussy Riot, and Ukrainians find themselves in the midst of a revolution and then a full-blown war. While engaging with the works of literary predecessors from Rebecca West to Chekhov and the nineteenth-century French aristocrat the Marquis de Custine, Nicolay explores the past and future of punk rock culture in the post-Communist world in the kind of book a punk rock Paul Theroux might have written, with a humor reminiscent of Gary Shteyngart. An audacious debut from a vivid new voice, *The Humorless Ladies of Border Control* is an unforgettable, funny, and sharply drawn depiction of surprisingly robust hidden spaces tucked within faraway lands.

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Customer Reviews

Full Disclosure: This book combines my two loves, indie/DIY/punk music and indie/DIY/Raw Travel. I've read a plethora of books and viewed documentaries about punk music and touring (Henry Rollins - "Get in the Van", "Another State of Mind") and I've read many, many travel books in my time, including the classics when travelogues were more in vogue (before EVERYONE who has ever jumped on a plane had a blog, Twitter or Instagram trying to replace the sacred experience of

authentic travel with "bucket lists" of vapid destinations in an attempt to show their cool factor). This book ranks as one of the most entertaining I've had the pleasure of reading in a long time and I'm a voracious and very picky reader. Life is too short to read a bad book and this book has me wishing for two lifetimes. This aptly titled book has me flipping "just one more page" deep into the night and my only complaint is that it's severely killing my sleep patterns. No exaggeration, for me at least, it's that entertaining and it rings true (I've been to some of the same destinations as the author. Indeed, we missed crossing paths by a matter of months in some cases). The other places I've yet to visit are brought alive with a unique and well researched historical and everyday anthropological context missing in news reports and media today. The author is funny, depreciating, humble and in short, a great character to root for. His descriptions of life on the road for an indie musician, the colorful cast of characters and off the grid "destinations" are authentic, empathetic and thought provoking, not malicious or overly opinionated. This is seriously one of the top 10 or maybe top 5 best books I've EVER read and I've read hundreds by now. Get it, read it and be enthralled.. I may even read it again.. something I've done only a handful of times in my life.

Over the course of many albums, tours, zines, and essays, Franz Nicolay has built a body of work any writer would be lucky to claim. His writing in whatever genre is always vigorously alive, sparked by surprising diction, sharp humor, and an unfailing awareness. It's wonderful to have a full book in which all of those talents have room to bloom. The book excels in all its terms-- as a document of a musician at a crossroads of his career, as a book about punk in general, eastern European punk specifically, as a snapshot of the area's recent political and social tumult with insight from several generations of people effected, as a meditation on travel itself, and as an updating of previous academic travel literature about the former eastern bloc. Nicolay balances the historical context, contemporary action, and personal narrative perfectly. Recommended for any fan of travel literature, European/Asian history, punk history, and music writing in general.

This book is an excellent view into a world many people in the DIY/Punk scene never get to experience. Franz Nicolay's writing is entertaining, thought provoking, and highly intellectual and well researched. It is an incredible first hand account of the struggles and rewards of being a touring solo artist in countries where people barely know who you are. This book has been the favorite part to my day and has opened a whole new world of learning for me. Nicolay's personality truly comes through in his detailed story telling, and has been a pleasure to get a glimpse into a part of the punk scene that is often overlooked.

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