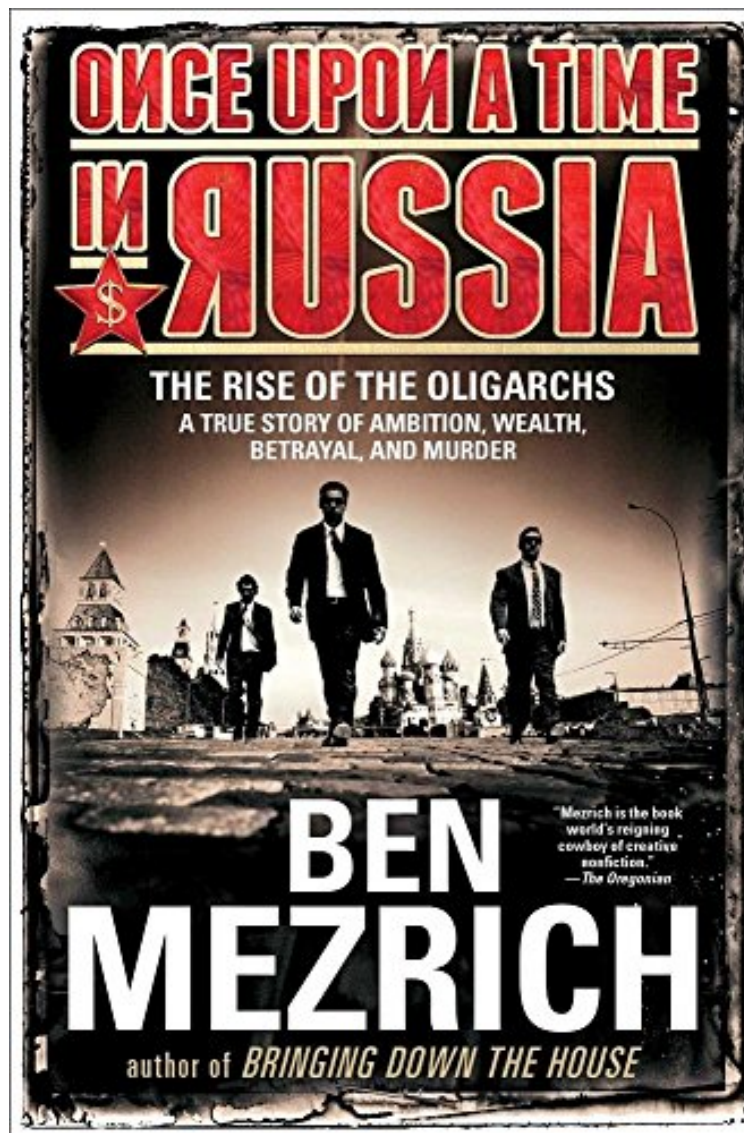


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## Once Upon a Time in Russia: The Rise of the Oligarchs?A True Story of Ambition, Wealth, Betrayal, and Murder

Ben Mezrich

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#200935 in Books Ben Mezrich 2016-06-14 2016-06-14 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.37 x .60 x 5.501, .0 #File Name: 1476771901288 pages Once Upon a Time in Russia The Rise of the Oligarchs A True Story of Ambition Wealth Betrayal and Murder | File size: 57.Mb

**Ben Mezrich : Once Upon a Time in Russia: The Rise of the Oligarchs?A True Story of Ambition, Wealth, Betrayal, and Murder** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Once Upon a Time in Russia: The Rise of the Oligarchs?A True Story of Ambition, Wealth, Betrayal, and Murder:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Oligarchs and their problems  
By CR  
This book is about Boris Berezovsky and his spectacular rise and fall as a Russian kingmaker. The book is not about the Oligarchs in general although Roman Abramovich is mentioned in relation to his dealings with Berezovsky. I found the book choppy, it strings vignettes together that occurred over a number of years into a semi-cohesive tale. There is much liberty taken in the form of ascribing feelings, emotions, intent upon the actual activities that we know occurred. It's dramatic and interesting, reading like a fleshed out screen play. How factual it is, whether the people really are as the author describes them is a question that can't be answered due to the overwhelming assumptions put forth in the narrative. I may now need to read a less dramatically written book about this book's central players to see if their actions add up to the personality ascribed to them by the author of this book. If I could have given 3.5 stars I would have.  
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Insights into that period of Russian history  
By W. D. Barnum  
This book, although based in fact, reads more like a novel. The story of the Oligarch Boris Berezovsky starts with his already being a powerful businessman in Russia in 1994, through his rise to the stature of Oligarch and to his death, in the UK in 2013. A sub-plot centers on the life of KGB/FSB agent Alexander Litvinenko, his links to Berezovsky and to his ultimate death in the UK in 2006 of Polonium 210 poisoning. The basic facts of the lives of these two individuals is fairly well known – in fact, you can just check Wikipedia, if all you want are the bare facts. But, this book goes deeper and through the relating of various meetings and stories, it fleshes out the basic story and makes it come alive. I found one proofing error in the book – on page 190, the word “stagecraft” is printed when it should have been “tradecraft” as it was referring to Litvinenko’s following basic anti-surveillance techniques, normally referred to as “tradecraft” by those in the intelligence services. The joke told “that the Lubyanka building (former home of the KGB, and current home of the FSB) was the tallest building in Moscow, since you could see all the way to Siberia from the basement” – was in fact a joke being told in Moscow following the collapse of the Soviet Union – I personally heard it there in late 1991. I enjoyed this book – and had to keep reminding myself that this was true and not just another spy novel – the insights this book gives to that period of Russian history are worth the price of the book themselves.  
9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Exciting, Enjoyable, and Educational read.  
By Daniel Ben Mezrich  
His title is ironic in that this high speed adventure story takes place in the Europe of the past decade. There is no 'far away' or 'happily ever after' element to this story. Instead this thriller takes us on a roller coaster ride that hits you deep in the pit of your stomach. It's literally gut-wrenching. I held my breath as his title character, mathematician turned entrepreneur, Boris Abramovitz Berezovsky, navigated his way through the amoral corporate board rooms, government offices, billionaires' yachts, and the luxurious homes of the super rich, in an attempt to amass, not millions, but billions of dollars. His political and financial favors are not necessarily reciprocated when poisoners spike his best friend and business partner's drink with radioactive polonium. How fitting in this new world! We then watch Berezovsky's eventual downfall as his legal case for five billion dollars in damages against his former protege (the largest civil law suit in recorded history) doesn't go the way he had planned. By the end of the book, the reader is tacitly aware that the buck always stops at the seat of power. Putin's agenda does not include the new would-be titans of world industry. He has a totally different vision for the new Russia (although it bears a striking resemblance to the Russia prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall). I highly recommend this book.

The New York Times bestselling author of *Bringing Down the House* and *The Accidental Billionaires* tells his most incredible story yet: A true drama of obscene wealth, crime, rivalry, and betrayal from deep inside the world of billionaire Russian oligarchs that Booklist called “one more example of just how talented a storyteller [Mezrich] is.” Meet two larger-than-life Russians: former mathematician Boris Berezovsky, who moved into more lucrative ventures as well as politics, becoming known as the Godfather of the Kremlin; and Roman Abramovich, a dashing young entrepreneur who built one of Russia’s largest oil companies from the ground up. After a chance meeting on a yacht in the Caribbean, the men became locked in a complex partnership, surfing the waves of privatization after the fall of the Soviet regime and amassing mega fortunes while also taking the reins of power in Russia. With Berezovsky serving as the younger entrepreneur’s krysha—literally, his roof, his protector—they battled their way through the “Wild East” of Russia until their relationship soured when Berezovsky attacked President Vladimir Putin in the media. Dead bodies trailed Berezovsky as he escaped to London, where an associate died painfully of Polonium poisoning, creating an international furor. As Abramovich prospered, Berezovsky was found dead in a luxurious London town house, declared a suicide. With unprecedented, exclusive first-person sourcing, Mezrich takes us inside a world of unimaginable wealth, power, and corruption to uncover this exciting story, a true-life thriller epic for our time—“Wolf Hall on the Moskva” (Bookpage).

"A harrowing and truly Russian tale about the river of greed and corruption that gushed out of post-Communist Russia, carried men to power and opulence, drowned them in murder and betrayal, and led to the rise of Vladimir Putin." (Lev Golinkin, author of *A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka*)  
Mezrich turns his keen journalistic eye to Russia...and...the oligarchs... Mezrich focuses on two such men, a mentor and his young protégé, who accumulated staggering wealth before personal differences tore apart their relationship... Mezrich's ability to tell a true

(and well-documented) story in a way that makes it look and feel like the most involving of narratives is nearly unparalleled. He is one of the few writers whose name on a piece of nonfiction guarantees not only quality but also interest, no matter the subject, and this fine book is one more example of just how talented a storyteller he is." (Booklist (Starred ))"Mezrich relates the story in the form of a true-life novel. The bestselling author has used the device before, including in *The Accidental Billionaires*, which provided the basis for *The Social Network*... Interviews, first-person sources, court documents, and newspaper accounts as the basis for his narrative... make the story more accessible." (Financial Times)"With his knack for turning narrative nonfiction into stories worthy of the best thriller fiction, Ben Mezrich is one of our favorite writers." (Omnivoracious)"Wolf Hall on the Moskva!" (Bookpage.com)"Assassination plots, intimidation tactics, political maneuvering and money in unfeasibly large quantities... Based on a year of interviews with high-profile sources, it fleshes out almost 20 years of history with journalistic color and anecdotes." (GQ)"[A] fascinating and often chilling read." (The Sport (UK))"Unputdownable." (Mail on Sunday)"Ben Mezrich knows how to find a good story. In his latest, the Boston-based writer has a corker." (Boston Globe)"The real-life tale of ... Putin's ascendancy to power. After the fall of communism in Russia, a small new class developed, that of the oligarchs... the ambitious and opportunistic businessmen who led the wild and lawless economic conversion from state-run industries to market capitalism.... Mezrich's well-written account of this era of Russian history illuminates the tumultuous conversion of communism to capitalism." (Jacksonville News)Mezrich's most incredible story yet. A true-life thriller... a fascinating read. (Palo Verde Valley Times)"Compelling..." (Maclean's)"Undeniably readable." (Wall Street Journal, Best Business Books from 2015)About the AuthorBen Mezrich graduated magna cum laude from Harvard. He has published seventeen books, including the New York Times bestsellers *The Accidental Billionaires*, which was adapted into the Academy Award-winning film *The Social Network*, and *Bringing Down the House*, which has sold more than 1.5 million copies in twelve languages and was the basis for the hit movie *21*. He lives in Boston.Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Once Upon a Time in Russia CHAPTER ONE July 2000, Kuntsevo Dacha, Fili District THE SILENCE WAS EXCRUCIATING, the minutes ticking by thick and heavy, time itself gorging on the tension in the humid air. Even though the shades had been drawn back from the trio of windows pocking the long plaster walls of the cavernous dining room, it was impossible to tell how deep into the afternoon the day had drifted; the dense forest that surrounded the isolated, two-story compound cast deep shadows across the reinforced glass panes, shifting whatever remained of the bright summer light toward an ominous, gunmetal gray. For the eighteen middle-aged men in dark suits shifting uncomfortably in their seats as they waited in that palpable silence around an oversize dining room table, it was hard to believe that they were still technically within Moscow's city limits. Though, to be fair, this aging, stone house tucked in the middle of the dark woods, surrounded by a pair of chain-link fences topped by barbed wire, was a symbol of a much different Moscow than the rapidly growing metropolis beyond the wire. The men in this room had traveled back in time more than fifty years the minute they had been ushered out of their chauffeured limousines—now parked in glistening rows behind the double fences—and led through the dacha's front door. The setting of the meeting was not lost on any of the men. The invitation that had been delivered by official courier to each of them in the preceding weeks had been met by everything from incredulous laughter to expressions of suspicion. Every soul knew what this place was: whose house this had once been, and what had supposedly taken place here. None of the men looked carefully into the shadows that played across the aging walls, darkening the corners of the vast, high-ceilinged room. Even though this house had fallen into disuse a generation ago—and was now more museum than functioning dacha—the meeting's address had meaning far beyond the invitation itself. And the longer the men were forced to wait for whatever was going to happen next, the more ominous the setting seemed. Under the best of circumstances, these men were not accustomed to waiting. To describe them as powerful businessmen—or even billionaires—would have been a laughable understatement. Among them, they represented the largest—and fastest—accumulation of wealth in modern history. Within the Russian media, they had garnered the label Oligarchs—a term that was usually derogatory, defining them as a class apart and above. According to the popular notion, over the course of the past decade, as the former Soviet nation had lurched into capitalism through a complex, often shadowy process of privatization, this class—the Oligarchs—had accumulated insane riches, and they had used this wealth to imbed and twist themselves, like strangling vines, into the ruling mechanisms of the nation's government, economy, and culture. Most of the men in this room would have bristled at the designation. If anything, they saw themselves as representatives of the new, free, and modern Russia. Almost all of them had come from poverty; many had clawed their way out of childhoods filled with deprivation and prejudice. Many at one point had been mathematicians, scientists, or academics before they had turned their ambitions to business. If they had succeeded—and yes, as a group they had succeeded to a degree perhaps unique in history—it was despite the chronic corruption and cronyism of the shifting Russian paradigm, not because of it. Oligarchs or not, men who earned billions were not known for their patience. Eventually, the silence got the better of the room, and one of the invitees, seated closest to the door that led back into the interior of the house, cleared his throat. "If some Chechen managed to get a bomb in here and blew us all to hell," he asked, "do you think anyone would mourn?" Awkward laughter riffed through the room, then trickled away into the shadows. The macabre joke may have hit too close to home. Whatever the men thought about themselves, it wasn't exactly the best time to be

a billionaire in Russia. Worse yet, the idea of a bomb going off in the dining room of such an ominous address wasn't as far-fetched as they would have liked to believe. Before anyone could break the silence again, there was a rush of motion—a door opening on the far side of the dining room. The air seemed to tighten still further, like a leather strap suddenly pulled taut. After a brief pause, a lone man entered through the doorway. Head down, every step and movement controlled and determined, from his forceful, athletic gait to the way his lean, muscled arms shifted stiffly at his sides. Short of stature—five foot seven at the most—with thinning hair, pinpoint eyes, a narrow, almost daggered jaw—his presence was somehow well beyond the amalgamation of his parts. As he strolled in, warmly shaking each man's hand in turn, none of the billionaires at the table could have turned away even if they had dared. He didn't just project an imposing aura: he was a mystery, an unknown, and these gathered businessmen had built their lives—and fortunes—on their abilities to procure and use knowledge. Even though some of them had been responsible for their host's ascension to power—had in fact hand-picked him for the role he now played—they had done so without knowing much about him. In truth, that had been one of his main selling points. He was purposefully obscure, a supposed nobody—a loyal cog. They had thought that a man like that would be easy to control. There was nothing easy about him as he took position at the front of the room, facing the table. And then he smiled. “????? ??????????” A warm welcome, my colleagues. He looked around the room, matching each of the gathered billionaire's eyes. “Some of you supported me,” he continued, his voice low and steady, as he paused on a few of the staring faces. “Some of you did not.” Again, he lingered on a handful more. “But none of that matters now. You have done very well for yourselves. You have built vast fortunes.” He waited, the room as silent and still as a pane of glass. “You can keep what you have. Business is important. Industry is important. But from here on out, you are simply businessmen—and only businessmen.” Before any of the men could react, there was another flash of motion—and then a group of lower-ranking officials took over, ushering a team of butlers into the room, each carrying a tray laden with porcelain and gold tea settings. Collective relief moved around the table; at the same time, it dawned on most of the men in the room that they had made an immense miscalculation. This loyal nobody, this obscure cog had become something else. Every moment of the meeting had been choreographed, from the very moment he had invited them here, to this place, imbued with so much brutal meaning. Just a few yards down, off the hall now bustling with servers carrying tea into the dining room, were the study and living quarters where Joseph Stalin had spent his final two decades. This house—Stalin's Moscow home—had been the symbolic headquarters of the most infamous, powerful, and brutal regime in their nation's history. And Vladimir Putin—the man at the front of the room now trading niceties with the nearest of his guests, while butlers served tea up and down the dining room table—had just sent them a clear, explicit message. Putin was not a simple cog they could twist and turn as they wanted. The Oligarchs had been warned: You can keep your billions. But stay out of my way . . .