



## Escape

*Varian Krylov*

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## Escape Varian Krylov

Strange, quiet Luka doesn't live in this world; long ago he took refuge in his art, escaping into surreal mindscapes inspired by his favorite painters. In the beautifully monstrous realms of his imagination, he is safe from the pain of his losses: his family, his friends, his hope.

Until war breaks out, and he is forced to flee the only home he's known since he was thirteen.

Captured by an enemy soldier, young Luka is marched across brutal terrain, toward a fate known only by the bearded menace holding him prisoner. Quick with a knife, tireless and strong, Tarik guards the purpose of his mission as he takes Luka deeper and deeper into enemy territory.

When the soldier discovers the painful secret he has been hiding since childhood, Luka fears he is about to endure a new kind of cruelty, worse than being abandoned, ostracized or beaten. Or is it possible the soldier holding Luka prisoner is the one person who isn't afraid of the truth behind Luka's silence and lies?

## Escape Details

Date : Published August 6th 2015 by Smashwords Edition

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Author : Varian Krylov

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Genre : Romance, M M Romance, War, Military Fiction, Dark, Contemporary

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## From Reader Review Escape for online ebook

### Rachel says

Oh, this started off with so, so much potential, but in the end the romantic arc simply didn't reconcile with its gritty war torn back drop for me.

The book engaged me from the start. The writing is well done, but it won't be for everyone. The prose are highly descriptive – visually painting a scene to leave little to the reader's imagination. If this were ever made into a movie, every frame would be a work of art. Though I appreciate the spectacular visualization each word evoked, the style lent to some long winded run on sentences. Overall I personally, didn't mind the prose for the visuals they set, but I can't imagine many readers sticking with the elaborate scene setting. The setting is (in essence) the Balkan war disguised by Krylov in an imaginary country called Xukrasna. Why? I am not sure. Maybe so she didn't have to do the research to make it historically accurate? Maybe a statement about how the actual name of the country, war, details is irrelevant – war is war and genocide is genocide and across time and history it has all been the same with just different settings and time periods? I don't know, but at any rate for all intents and purposes this might as well have been the Balkan war and the story of a Bosnian civilian and Serbian soldier, isolated in their own rights, crossing paths. Despite this, the violence and gore is not graphic, but the suffering is palpable. The suffering of those displaced and those caught in the middle of the fighting. Those who end up suffering the most being those who have least to do with the war.

There is another key factor to this setting apart from the war: it is extremely homophobic. Set in a war where religion, culture and ethnicity are inherent to the workings of daily life – for gays in the country they will never be on the “right” side of the war, they are persecuted by all sides. For them, the war will never end, danger is always imminent. Krylov did an excellent job of setting the tone and the grittiness for the atmosphere.

*\* A little side note on the descriptiveness of this work: the lead character is an artist and much is told from his POV. There are a lot of references to art and imagery and one does not necessarily have to have a solid understanding of art history to pick up on everything, but there are many layered references to works that as an artist or painting is mentioned, if you are not familiar with it, you might want to look it up quick – Krylov plays with parallels and historical repetitiveness and references that take place in Luka's mind – as he is looking at the world, at everything through the eyes of an artist. If you don't have the knowledge that he has of art, I think some things can be missed. And of course on that note, you want to take a good look at Remedios Varo's Transmundo to see how all the pieces fit.*

So with this backdrop, starting off fleshed out nearly as well as S. & The Soul Shattering had conveyed the horrors and fear palpable in those books, I had expected something in the same vein, but with an M/M romance arc that suited the setting. And this is where the book began to lose stars ...

In the simplest of explanations: Luka wasn't angry enough, Tarik was literally perfect and the romance was so easy. For a war torn bigoted backdrop, this was one of the “nicest” romances I have ever read. The lead protagonist, Luka, has been bullied - physically, emotionally, mentally – to the point that he believes himself to be a sexual deviant and pervert who doesn't deserve love due to his sexual orientation. He has been ostracized for everything that he is – gay, Bokan, an artist – by a fear mongering, hateful society. But is he angry about any of it? Nope. Luka is one of the most naïve, innocent, loving, kind individuals in literature ... to me that just seems unlikely given all the abuse he has taken, rather passively I might add. I am not saying I would expect him to be a raging ass, lashing out at the world, but I felt there should have been some anger bubbling beneath his surface and not this calm acceptance of his circumstances. He was much too timid and sweet for me to believe he was a survivor. His whole existence was a daily fight, but there was no fight in

him. The secondary protagonist, Tarik, is perfect. Perfect. He had no problem playing the dashing hero to Luka's damsel in distress. He is dark and dangerous and deadly, but highly intelligent and very liberal and gentle with Luka. Seriously this guy is the incarnation of every dreamy romance hero archetype. He is even understanding and patient while maintaining elusiveness and he can even recognize Varo's Transmundo and the layered meanings in it. He is a flawless human being. So flawless that as the story goes on, I began to hate him. Part of me wanted him to betray Luka or at very least fart – something to just reassure us that he is human and not a fantasy come to the pages. At any rate, neither character made much sense to me, especially in the context of this setting. I found them both over written.

The other star losing aspect: the romance arc. Firstly, for those wanting to hop right into the M/M aspect, be warned this is a bit of a slow build in the start (though a whirlwind once it gets going). The beginning 10-12% simply sets the stage. Around 15% is where the story gains its momentum and the second protagonist isn't met until 17%. So about the first fifth of the book is ground work. It is well done, but heads up. Every obstacle imaginable to these two falling in love was primed and ready to go in the backdrop – yet not once did an obstacle make an appearance – or even threaten to. Tarik, was so mature and perfect, he decided to talk about everything – namely feelings, just to make sure there was no misunderstandings. \*applauds\* Good job Tarik, that makes total sense and I am glad you demonstrated an admirable level of maturity to navigate this relationship. Unfortunately it made for an anti-climatic story and at 75%, I was so bored and considering DNFing that I put the book down and read a Sterek, (Hale Sandwich - because let's be honest that is a guaranteed five star every time I read it), before picking Transmundo back up again so that it could deliver yet another easy sprint to the finish – despite the fact they are in a war torn country, despite the fact everyone is homophobic, despite the fact Luka should be emotionally unavailable after all that has happened to him, despite the fact angst should have been lingering in the air for 236 pages, despite the fact that Tarik and Luka are from two very separate worlds and experiences. Ugh, there are a ton of plot bunnies I could come up with to give this story some edge. And to top this easy romance off, the last third of the book is simply a complete sex-fest, that reads like a “Gentle Master / Docile Slave” book without high kink. I am actually kind of surprised Tarik didn't give Luka a safe word. It probably would have been easier than acting strangely tentative and asking him a million times (all of which Luka blushes to – seriously Luka might have a problem he wants a doctor to check, with how much he blushes in this book) if he wants to stop, and then acting crazy eager. Wait, why didn't I DNF this?

Is it bad to say that this story would have been much more successful if it had been written by Aleksandr Voinov? Overall this isn't a horrible story, it is a nice easy, somewhat formulaic, romance. And if you are in the mood for that, great. But what I find most disappointing about it, is the fact that the setting and the writing had so much potential to fuel the romance arc, but somehow their uniqueness got waylaid and really both became irrelevant as a dime a dozen romance story pushed them to the background to take center stage. I would encourage Ms. Krylov, to read *Special Forces: Soldiers Part I -Director's Cut*, *Unhinge the Universe*, *Shadow of Death*, *A Beautiful Cage* - to name a few of war torn set romances that kept the edge their setting denoted through the romance and the coming together of two enemies. I am a big fan of the enemies to lovers trope and am well read in the romances with war settings department, but one thing I think is key to all of them is keeping the angst high, the tension palpable and the chemistry of the romance up in spite of their circumstances, which should remain forefront – constantly reminding the protagonists why they shouldn't be together. The camaraderie was just a little too high and a lot too comfortable to sell any of it to me in this story.

This is an easy, pretty romance ... but nothing more.

## YullSanna says

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## Baba says

**2 I-tried stars. DNF @73%. Review posted August 17, 2015**

How about a pitch-black no? You don't approve? How about a canary-yellow one?

*The Bokan was blushing. Again. Maybe it was some kind of glandular issue. A problem regulating his body temperature.*

He blushed one too many times. In fact, he never stopped blushing and on the rare occasions he did not blush, he shrugged.

The *kid*. I can't hear it anymore.

Bodily reactions to the nth degree:

*The sudden rush of warmth to Luka's chest made it feel like his heart was swelling, engorged almost to bursting with happiness.*

*Something in Luka's chest grabbed and strangled his heart.*

*The weight in Luka's chest got heavier, like it was going to sink through him, tearing him apart, and his face and throat burned.*

More style samples...

*The Bokan soldier. Wide eyes watchful. Focused and following. Faceted and changeable, nervous anticipation yielding now and then to doubt, or fear, sometimes even a shadowed hint of dread, of terror.*

*The eyes of a supplicant gazing on a capricious and dangerous god who might decide on a whim to test, to torment, to destroy. Those first hours, Tarik had left the Bokan bound to his fear, wondering now and then if he was savoring the flavor of his timid glances, his breathless, waiting suspension when Tarik suddenly mirrored his gaze, or moved in close, or caught his arm to startle him toward a brisker pace, or if, rather than pleasure, that pleasant state was just the absence of his own fear. Because the other's fear made him feel safe, made him feel strong, made him feel powerful and dangerous.*

I can't even.

*The weight of a million sharp-edged grains of cold sand leaked out of him. Tarik was getting lighter, lighter.*

*Tarik pulled the curtain open again, and that terrible moment of being seen, exposed and vulnerable, of the hideous sensation his guts were dissolving in acid, suddenly diluted and washed away as Tarik stripped off his own clothes. God, Tarik was so beautiful, the sight of him, naked and so close, unleashed a startling flutter in Luka's belly and an ache in the center of his chest. When Tarik stepped into the shower, when he slowly came close, the thrill of hope surging through Luka's body felt like it would shake him to pieces.*

*(view spoiler) halos in Byzantium bleeding into Prussian blue and golden green, didn't bother him.*

*Gentle alien, stranded on this mad planet. Stranger in a strange land.*

I get it, Luka wasn't "living" in *this* world but I'm not sure what I'm actually reading. It's m-m though. That should feel kind of reassuring, right?

*Between Tarik's legs, under the mercurial surface, a big fish, its silver body twisting under the light-bending curves of the rippling water. A quick-flashing, darting body. A furtive body, hunting and dodging. How do fish mate? Some, flopping, writhing in the wet sand, gasping, gills flaring. A mating between frontage and copulation, seed spraying onto seed.*

Tad writing.

What.The.Hell? These two guys are on the run, they fear for their lives and he must know how fish mate? I could not have cared less. \*facepalm\*

*Lashed by impulse, Luka plunked down on the rickety little wooden chair at the tiny desk in the corner, and in small, brisk, motions sketched the nautical nucleus of Remdios (that's a little bit embarrassing because it's spelled Remedios) Varo's mad world, a familiar, intrepid clockwork ship propelled by waterwheel and windmill in lieu of unfurled sails. The disembodied shadow emerging from the cabin had always struck him as sinister, but now he thought maybe that was him. Not the man out of sight, who's (whose) shape was cast onto the deck, but the shadow itself, cast in whatever direction larger forces dictated. Or was he the headless body seated aft of the windmill? Nameless, homeless, faceless. And all around him, the sun-yellowed, mist-kissed sea collapsing, falling away in a swirl of bottomless sinkholes.*

Baba's ship is sinking fast. Swallowed by the sun-yellowed, mist-kissed sea, eaten up by all those bottomless sinkholes on the floor of the ocean.

I'm still rubbing my eyes in amazement because I'm obviously the only one who didn't enjoy Trasmundo.

Maybe I'm lacking a special gene or something and need my head examined. Of course I'm just joking. The character of Luka was so molasse-y sweet, so sickeningly shy and OTT embarrassed, so overly tormented and so incredibly guilt-ridden, I kinda feel guilt-ridden for not really liking him. Sure, I felt very sorry for him but otherwise I did not really connect with that almost-boy. I guess this is one of those moments where you blame yourself, as a reader, for not bonding with a character who should have evoked a vast amount of emotions from you.

Luka must have been the shyest and most insecure and needy character I came across in *Romancelandia* in a long, long time. And, of course, the perfect remedy is brought to us by Tarik's magic assets. He has the right gender (male), is full of understanding, finds the right words with his soothing voice, the warmest and most luminous smile (or grin) and the most delicate touches and, of course, he does have a ripped body and a nice set of balls and a great (healing) cock. Never mind that Luka can't even pronounce penis, let alone dick or cock. Maybe he said it after I quit at 73%? Let's be realistic, Luka was totally messed up (and justifiably so) and needed professional help in the form of long-term therapy before he would have been ready to deal with cock in any way, shape or form (er...no pun intended).

The first 20% bored the living daylights out of me and I kept thinking about what my friend said: chapter eight. There lies the magic. Meanwhile, I was busy dealing with other issues. Do I want to go through so many chapters and grappling with a writing style that did not appeal to me, constantly rolling my eyes whenever Luka was blushing or, in case he didn't blush sweetly, I could be sure that his cheeks would heat up in embarrassment or burn like a furious fire, licking away at my patience? And let's not forget that he started to shrug all the time when he didn't happen to blush. Good grief. Again, I did love Hurt very much, the first book I read by Varian Krylov. It is unfortunate, however, that Trasmundo was the third book by Krylov that didn't work out for me.

Although there was something positive about this story. Tarik really grew on me after a few chapters. But as you know there were a few aspects that ruined everything for me. I just could not get past Luka's character. Banned from his parental home when he was thirteen-years-old, it's actually not a surprise that he was saddled with plenty of issues. He was always ready to hide, to disappear or run because he was scared or guilty. He did have issues with his body and his self-awareness. Also, he suffered from a total lack of self-confidence and a general inferiority complex. Add in physical abuse and you can be sure you'll have to deal with a messed up young man. His painful shyness (he couldn't even form any coherent sentences, he was trailing off all the time), his ever-present blushing and shrugging and the authors voice in general just did me in. Even though the writing sometimes felt kind of convoluted and wordy, some parts were beautifully written, I'll give her that. This being said, my budding approval of her writing was immediately crushed when Krylov's **melodramatic and sappy voice eroded all the beauty.** Others may call it poetic or lyrical, so I guess we will have to agree to disagree.

What I also found rather astounding was that Tarik never seemed to question his sexual identity; there was no confusion on his part. When he saw Luka for the first time he made his chest hurt. ~~Mind you, he only slept with women before, so I do wonder about his time-displaced epiphany that I was privy of at 72%.~~ Oh, scratch that. Tarik has been attracted to men before, he just didn't act on it and it happened before he met Tarik. Problem solved. I just thought that was a cheap solution.

*"I've been attracted to men before, I've just never had the chance to act on it."*

*Wild, desperate hope blossomed in Luka's chest. "And the women? You just did it, because it's what people expect?"*

*Tarik laughed again. "Fuck. No. I like women."*

*So much for thinking he'd found someone like him.*

(...)

*"If you like women, why are you..."*

*Tarik planted a row of tender kisses along Luka's brow. "I'm naked in this bed with you because the first day we knew each other, looking at you, your face, your eyes, made my chest hurt. Because something about the sound of your voice makes me happy, like listening to music. Because the smell of you makes me...I don't know...hungry." Tarik laughed. "Like I want to hunt you down and drag you off and breathe you in..." his focus sharpened and his right eyebrow arched, "and eat until I'm sated. And kissing you, touching you, feeling the way you move and breathe against my body is more arousing, more intense than actual sex with most lovers I've had."*

Anyway, after a thorough reflection, I decided to call it quits when I was reading chapter eight. I believe I gave this book a fair chance. Trasmundo is already a hit, so don't let my negative opinion deter you from reading it. It might work out just fine for you. It just wasn't for me.

P.S. According to GR a two-star rating means it was an ok read. So I'd say nobody should get their panties in a twist over my rating. Thank you.

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## Tina says

4,5 stars

**"I hope you know, Luka, when people are cruel to you, it doesn't mean you're bad, or that there's anything wrong with you. It only means something's wrong with them."**

Wow! This novel and first part of a new series totally swept me off my feet... literally. I loved Varian's writing in *Dangerously Happy* but wasn't prepared for what was waiting for me when I started reading *Escape*.

*Escape* is dark, and emotional, and yet full of hope. Luka is such a sweet boy, living in an ethnic war zone takes its toll, his only way to escape his lonely and sad life is losing himself in the most beautiful thing: art.

I fell for him instantly. His story isn't always an easy read, especially at the beginning my heart was bleeding for poor Luka. What he has to endure because he is different... living in constant fear, being beaten up all the time, and getting cart off in a refugee camp.

Tarik, the soldier, is another lost soul in this senseless war... after reading a few chapters I was sure he isn't that different from Luka. Both of them are searching for exactly the same, a safe place to live and love without fear.

**With Tarik, he was so happy. Not just for the physical pleasure of the things they did together. Luka loved listening to him, loved how Tarik held him in his gaze when he listened to him. Loved how, more than just feeling safe for the first time since he was little, he felt whole and right, instead of broken and badly made, which is how he'd always**

**felt, on his own.**

Together they march through a country torn apart by war. Hell, what a rollercoaster ride it was! I was so relieved when the guys finally managed to escape and reached their destination in one piece.

On the one hand Escape was a gritty, edgy, melancholic story that kept me on the edge of my seat from the first to the last page, on the other it was full of beauty, love and poetry. Those contrasts made it to one of my most emotional reads this year. I'm still in awe.

**“It's okay. You're safe with me.”**

Escape is an absolutely fascinating story, wholly recommended and worth to read. Can't wait to read the 2nd book of the series!

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**Gitte TotallyBookedBlog says**

**4.5 emotional stars**

***“Every life is supposed to be a mix. Some suffering. Some goodness. And now I've had both.”***

Oh wow; such beauty, poetry, artistry and vivid images portrayed under such a grim, horrific and morose setting. Varian Krylov's writing is exquisite – we knew that already – it's almost as if we're reading a poetic account of life, the ugly and the beautiful – the frantic and the serene. The basic core of human elemental emotions and how intrinsically; all we want and need is to be loved and happy – without all the frills and materialistic possessions deemed necessary to survive and achieve satisfaction. To truly feel and value the good we need to experience the bad and feel pain. Only then can we truly understand and place value.

**‘Gentle alien, stranded on this mad planet. Stranger in a strange land.’**

Luka is almost ethereal in his beauty; a haunted young gentle man who's not only caught up in a war tearing up his country but battling daily abuse. Our hearts bled for Luka all the way through; it was akin to a defenceless animal being kicked, starved and abused by society yet keeps creeping back wanting a morsel of love, affection – wanting to be unseen yet be free to dream – to express his love of art and be part of ‘something’. It was distressing to say the least and that ache never ceased. Hatred destroys beauty; it nearly destroyed our Luka.

***“You're still burdened with the scars he gave you.”***

The light in the darkness comes, as a life altering path disguised in menace, when Luka encounters Tarik. Luka feels almost entranced or compelled by him no matter the frightening circumstances and the associated terrors. His life has almost been a living nightmare so better the devil you know for our poor Luka.

***“More than most people I've known, you deserve happiness. You deserve to be loved. If something happens to me, that's what you should remember.”***

However, not all is as it seems and the journey is a revelation for both him as well as his captor, Tarik who we absolutely took to heart as well. Luka's journey was incredibly raw and emotional, perhaps more so than Tarik as he under duress, captivity and inhumane treatment learns to live away from the observing shadows of the ugly side of humanity.

***“I hope you know, Luka, when people are cruel to you, it doesn't mean you're bad, or that there's anything wrong with you. It only means something's wrong with them.”***

Varian Krylov wrote an incredibly intense, emotionally honest, intricate and passionate story that grabbed our hearts and squeezed them continuously from page one till the last, never letting go. This has to be one of our favourite emotional m/m reads of the year!

***“You're safe. I promise.”***

***\*\*Reviewed from an ARC Copy provided by the author, with thanks\*\****

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## **Carly says**

Oh. My. God. This book is *amazing*! The character development blew me away. Luka is broken perfection. His past torments him, his present is a living nightmare, and yet he still hopes for a better future. I can't remember the last time I read a character that touched my heart as much as Luka did; I was amazed by his bravery and I cried over his pain. If I could I would wrap him up in my arms, shower him with love, and protect him from all the ugliness in the world.

Luka's first encounter with Tarik... what can I say? I wanted to string the man up by his ankles. How could he even contemplate hurting someone who is so obviously in need of protection? Tarik is complicated, a mixture desperation and strength. He holds himself accountable to a personal code of conduct that is unique and strangely honorable but make his motivations hard to interpret.

Set in a contemporary alternate reality, Escape is a raw and brutally honest portrayal of humanity at its best and worst. Action, drama, horror, hope, adventure, darkness and light are uniquely blended together to bring this story to life. As always, Varian Krylov's signature writing style is bold, placing her books in a class of their own. The subject matter is emotionally charged, the ending left me breathless and wanting more. Readers will either love it or hate it, there is no middle ground. Either way, I guarantee you won't ever forget it.

My OFFICIAL REVIEW written for Carly's Book Reviews.

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## Lala says

### 3.75 stars.

I'm rounding the rating up, I think? This was a good story, well-written..it sucked me in from the first pages and kept me interested till the end. Still, I'm not a fan of war and genocide stuff...the refugee camps, the running from home...with all the things going on in the world in real life, this story hit too close to reality for me.

Despite the bleak war atmosphere, the relationship the heroes shared was lovely. Maybe Luka was too skittish and Tarik too tender (reminded me of Dario, actually), but it all made for a nice contrast with the rest of the book.

Waiting for the sequel, now.

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## Bey Deckard says

I was so chuffed to collaborate with Varian and do the cover and other art for *Trasmundo: Escape* because this was such a great read for me. I haven't read many books where one of the central MCs is an artist—as an artist myself, that alone made the book a fascinating read. However there is so much more to it.

For one thing, the tension in this book was very thick at times, which I loved—the stress of waiting to see whether war's grasping claws would reach Luka, the worry over whether the risky escape would succeed... even the very precarious beginnings of the main relationship were all driving me forward, the words of the story compelling, and imagery vivid. However, the tension was tempered by Tarik's calm confidence and the wonderful way that the two MCs came to find solace in each other.

Yep. I liked it even though it was romantic. No... wait... maybe because it was romantic.

Don't get me wrong, the book is set against the dark, terrible backdrop of war and the ruthless, degenerates who are drawn to take part in it—but what Luka and Tarik have together spreads warmth and light across that sombre canvas, shaping a story that is both wonderfully sexy and beautifully touching.

I can't wait for the next one.

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## ♣? Lynda ♣? says

What a wonderful story!!

I must say I fell in love with Luka right off. His heartbreaking life until he met Tarik made me cry for him. Tarik was just what Luka needed. A savior of sorts. Their journey to escape a war, prejudice and to find family had me captivated. I didn't want to put the book down.

## Jenny - TotallybookedBlog says

### 4.5 emotional stars

*“Every life is supposed to be a mix. Some suffering. Some goodness. And now I’ve had both.”*

Oh wow; such beauty, poetry, artistry and vivid images portrayed under such a grim, horrific and morose setting. Varian Krylov’s writing is exquisite – we knew that already – it’s almost as if we’re reading a poetic account of life, the ugly and the beautiful – the frantic and the serene. The basic core of human elemental emotions and how intrinsically; all we want and need is to be loved and happy – without all the frills and materialistic possessions deemed necessary to survive and achieve satisfaction. To truly feel and value the good we need to experience the bad and feel pain. Only then can we truly understand and place value.

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## Lisa Arbitrary - AttentionIsArbitrary M/M Blog says

4.5 Stars

I have every intention of writing a poignant review, but in the meantime a thanks to Sheri for the recommendation. Her poignant review is here -  
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

And I heartily agree, though I think we found different points of interest and beauty.

:)

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## Kristie says

I've finished, and I'll review it... but I need time. Time because my heart has these feelings pouring out of it that I can't possibly put down right now. I might not ever, but I'll try... later. Then, I'll let you know.

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## Debra says

4.5 stars

### Review originally posted at *Sinfully...Addicted to All Male Romance*

Luka has not had a happy life. He carries a secret about why his family sent him away from his home in the southern region to work halfway across the country when he was thirteen. He feels overwhelming shame at his lack of education and his homosexuality. The one thing that brings him comfort is losing himself in his art. Now at nineteen he has been accepted into art school and is just beginning to find some joy when it all comes crashing down. The country has been descending towards an ethnic war between the northern and southern regions and Luka's Bokan ancestry suddenly marks him as different and a threat to the northern Ersbans. As the tensions and violence against Bokans escalate and people begin disappearing, Luka begins to plan his escape, but he is already too late. Forced from his home into a refugee camp, Luka's troubles only escalate and he finds himself bruised, battered and cast out on his own only to be captured by an Ersban soldier.

Tarik initially believes Luka to be a Bokan soldier he has captured, but soon realizes things aren't as they

seem. He immediately sees something in Luka and has an urge to protect him. He gives Luka food and water and then begins marching him further north for hours at a time. Tarik is on a mission, headed toward a safe house and then his final destination out of the country. Although Tarik says he won't hurt him, Luka is certain that if he stays Tarik's prisoner he will eventually end up dead once his secret is uncovered or Tarik no longer needs him, but he is just as certain that the outcome of any escape attempt will have the same result.

As much as the two come to know and rely on each other, Luka carries his shame and hopelessness so deeply, he can't let it go, fully expecting to be cast aside once they cross the border. Even as he falls in love, he doesn't fully trust any kindness Tarik shows, but Tarik is determined to convince Luka that he is a beautiful and strong person who is just as worthy of love and happiness as anyone else.

*"I feel like I found a treasure in that cave, a treasure that was out there in the light of day for nineteen years, and I don't know how it's possible no one before me realized its value."*

From the blurb, I wasn't sure what to expect from this book; whether it would be a war story, a POW story or something else altogether. The war is the backdrop and the catalyst for the story, and it is gritty and dark in places, but the focus is on Tarik getting to know Luka and finding a kindred spirit as Luka fights his fears and shame and just maybe opens himself enough to experience true happiness.

This was my first book by Varian Krylov and I was immediately drawn in. I liked Luka from the start. He is so broken and beat down, my heart broke every time more of his past was revealed. He has been abused, shamed and abandoned so many times that it is what he has come to expect. Even the joy and escape he finds in his art comes with painful memories. Despite all he's been through, Luka remains somewhat of an innocent and deep down still yearns for the love and affection he doesn't think he is worthy of.

The story is told in dual points of view so the reader quickly becomes aware that Tarik is not a monster, but a well-educated man who is just as much a victim of this war as Luka is. The characters have very distinct voices that serve to highlight the differences in their backgrounds. I found the quotes at the start of each chapter really set the tone for what was to come. Before starting this book I would suggest looking at the painting Trasmundo by Remedios Varo that lends the book its title and is a favorite of Luka's.

The book had a good amount of suspense and drama, but it's the love story that really shines. Alternating between treks through the country's dangerous terrain and holing up in safe houses, both while avoiding the Ersban troops and the dangers of the war around them, the two men have plenty of time to learn about each other and explore feelings that are new to both of them. Convinced that what he feels is dirty and wrong, I loved seeing Luka slowly open himself to the possibility that he can be accepted and loved for who he is, and maybe he can accept himself that way as well.

There are many layers to each of the characters and as much as we learn about them and as close as the two men get, Luka is still a work-in-progress, loving Tarik but not trusting that what they have can last. Escaping the country is just the first part of their story, and with a planned continuation in Trasmundo Book Two: Exile, I would say the ending is HFN. While it's not a cliffhanger there are some parts of the storyline that remain unfinished. I'm definitely looking forward to the next installment.

## Trisie says

I'm giving this book 5 stars especially because of its first part. The writing style was just exquisite. I loved the composition and the way the art was intertwined with the story. I also enjoyed quotes in every chapter (J.-P. Sartre and F. Nietzsche - what more could a MM and philosophy lover want:D)

Even though it was revolving around a war situation, I didn't find it too deeply focused on it. In the second half of the book you could easily forget about what was happening around them. It went from an action to sweet romance and I really really loved it (their first time together was hot as hell and they didn't even have to go all the way) but I still couldn't keep myself from wishing it was a little bit darker.

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## Sheri says

My chest aches.

My mouth is dry.

My knuckles are still white. Frankly, I'm a mess.

I don't know about you, but I love it when a book has such a profound effect on me.

I needed back-up, so I called in reinforcements to join me on this epic journey.

I'm sure we'll have plenty to say after we compare notes.....

I'm baccckkkkkkk! And riding the wave from my book high *still*.

It's been awhile since I crushed....and this time, I crushed hard. Apologizes ahead of time~ you are about to enter a Luka&Tarik mania zone, enter at your own risk.

This book...this book was an emotional tsunami. And I was swept away. Before the first tidal wave hit, I frantically sent emails, texts and messages to my friends and family. I was struck with an urgent need to...well, take them with me. Ha! I'm not sure if I was afraid of being alone or not wanting them to miss out...most likely it was a bit of both. But I was compelled to share the power of this painstaking beautiful tale.

Now, since you are not my family, I am *not* going to tell you to read this book. I think it's a personal decision and I can't make that choice for you. However, I CAN tell you why this book meant so much to me.

First and foremost it was Luka. From the very beginning I was enthralled with him. This shy, quiet man quickly grabbed my heart with a vice-like-grip and never let go. I was anxious throughout the entire book. I loved Luka, wanted others to love him, and was deeply vested in his future. I believe this is crucial. If you fail to connect with Luka, this story will not have the same impact.

Second and equally as powerful is Tarik. Tarik is the reason that this story soars. He brings light to the shadows. He caresses the wounds and kisses the scars that are inflicted before his presence. He soothes the sharp edges of pain, both Luka's and mine.

Together? I was awestruck.

**Their transcendent love story is one of the most powerful and intense stories I've read this year.**

Even if you embrace Luka and Tarik as I did, another pivotal component that comes into play is the writing. It's extravagant. It's artsy. It's not always consistent. At times it was tremendously evocative. However, I had no qualms with it. The violent setting, the cruel and brutal scenes, and their horrific struggles required balance. I needed the vivid, flowery prose. It kept me from losing my hold as I traveled their path of despair. It worked....for me.

I could babble and gush and go on and on....to keep myself in check, I'm going to let my friends share a few things about Luka, Tarik and their escape in a wave of thoughts....

I believe the future holds many great things for Luka. I think his long overdue happiness will stir deeply buried feelings and unleash a new Luka, one we have not yet seen. Love holds immense power. And though many might perceive Luka as weak and pitiful, I think his hidden strength and tenacious drive has always been there, and *finally* being loved will set him free. Tarik has done his best to help Luka, show him his beauty shining from inside as well as out, but it's up to Luka now. His personal journey is just beginning. Confidence will be a great look on him. And I for one, can hardly stand the wait.

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