



The Four Books: A Novel

Yan Lianke

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From master storyteller Yan Lianke, winner of the prestigious Franz Kafka Prize and a finalist for the Man Booker International Prize, *The Four Books* is a powerful, daring novel of the dog-eat-dog psychology inside a labor camp for intellectuals during Mao's Great Leap Forward. A renowned author in China, and among its most censored, Yan's mythical, sometimes surreal tale cuts to the bone in its portrayal of the struggle between authoritarian power and man's will to prevail against the darkest odds through camaraderie, love, and faith.

In the ninety-ninth district of a sprawling reeducation compound, freethinking artists and academics are detained to strengthen their loyalty to Communist ideologies. Here, the Musician and her lover, the Scholar—along with the Author and the Theologian—are forced to carry out grueling physical work and are encouraged to inform on each other for dissident behavior. The prize: winning the chance at freedom. They're overseen by preadolescent supervisor, the Child, who delights in reward systems and excessive punishments. When agricultural and industrial production quotas are raised to an unattainable level, the ninety-ninth district dissolves into lawlessness. And then, as inclement weather and famine set in, they are abandoned by the regime and left alone to survive.

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