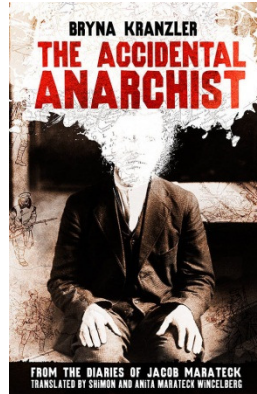


## Book Club Reader's Guide



<b>Title:</b>	<u>The Accidental Anarchist: From the Diaries of Jacob Marateck</u>
<b>Author:</b>	Bryna Kranzler (Translated by Shimon Wincelberg and Anita Marateck Wincelberg)
<b>Publisher:</b>	Crosswalk Press
<b>Number of Pgs:</b>	334
<b>ISBN-13:</b>	978-0-9845563-0-4
<b>Price:</b>	\$18.00

### **About the Book:**

The Accidental Anarchist is the true story of an Orthodox Jew who was sentenced to death three times in the early 1900s in Russia – and lived to tell about it.

### **Background:**

Jacob Marateck began keeping the diaries that were turned into *The Accidental Anarchist* in 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War. That was when he decided that he needed to overthrow the Czar. He filled about 282 pages with his impeccable Yiddish penmanship until he was distracted by the death sentences, sentence to and escape from Siberia, and the need to flee to the United States. Once he arrived in the Polish mining town of Shenandoah, PA, to which two of his brothers had already emigrated, he began telling stories of his experiences as a Jewish soldier, and later officer, in the Russian army, as well as what it was like to live as a Jew in the Russian-occupied territories at a time when anti-Semitism was the official government policy.

But what distinguished his stories was not merely his eyewitness account of a period of time that we, in the United States, know very little about (despite the fact that it changed the balance of powers in the world); it was his unique take on the situation that he described with a rare sense of humor that was not irreverent or self-deprecating so much as it was ironic. His storytelling style makes it easy to read about what were intolerable circumstances

### **Historical Context:**

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 was ostensibly fought over a warm-weather port in Manchuria, but in reality the reason for the war was quite different: Czar Nicholas II, the last of the Romanov Dynasty, had been hearing rumblings about revolution (not surprisingly because everyone in the Russian-occupied territories was starving).

Rather than addressing the problem directly, such as by giving some of the noblemen's land back to the peasants (which the nobility opposed, of course), the Czar decided that having a "quick and easy" war would be the best way to distract the population, raise their patriotism, and put to rest all that 'nonsense' about revolution. So the Czar violated terms of an earlier treaty with Japan, which provoked the Japanese to attack Port Arthur. Russia used this attack as an excuse to declare war.

Despite the fact that Russia declared what became known as the Russo-Japanese War (February 8, 1904-September 5, 1905) the Russian Army was completely unprepared to fight, going to war with technology and strategies that had last been employed thirty years earlier, during the Russo-Turkish War. The Russians completely underestimated the Japanese, and their defeats began almost immediately. But since the War was not being fought so much for a strategic as much as for a political purpose, the Czar would not allow the War to end and kept sending young men to their deaths. And in 1905, Jacob Marateck began documenting the many ways that the Czar had let down his own people.

The War changed the balance of power in the world as Russia fell off its perch as a superpower, while Japan emerged onto the world stage as the first Asian nation to defeat a European nation. It took the intervention of President Theodore Roosevelt to negotiate a truce between Russia and Japan to end the war, for which he won the very first Nobel Peace Prize.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why did Jacob Marateck begin keeping a diary?
2. What role did friendship play in the book?
3. What role did women play in Marateck's survival?
4. Would you have made the same moral choices that Marateck made (eg., helping his army friend get transferred to another regiment, rejecting Pyavka's suggestion for what they needed to do to get home)?
5. What were the most important survival skills that Jacob Marateck demonstrated?
6. Who was your favorite character, and why?
7. How do the political, social and economic circumstances that preceded the Russian Revolutions compare with those in recent history in other countries?
8. Does this book have the same relevance for non-Jews as well as Jews?
9. What messages did you take from this book, and are they still relevant today?

#### **Critical Praise:**

*"The Accidental Anarchist is a profound testament to the power of faith, and to the continued survival of the Jewish people."*

• Elie Wiesel

*"Readers interested in European or Jewish history, war stories, and just plain action adventure will enjoy this book. Kranzler's editing creates a smooth style with a quick pace while retaining her grandfather's unique voice and perspective. The Accidental Anarchist is the true story of a likable hero on an epic journey."*

• ForeWord Reviews

*“Indeed, the adventures in this novel are many, and unforeseen. Variety-spiced life mixed with historical events of the 1900s in Russia and Poland sees Marateck moving on from student to baker’s assistant, labor organizer to an officer in the Russian army during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 against the Japanese in China. Marateck has his own struggles close at hand, too, in situations “in which the men under my command wanted to kill me, simply for being a Jew, as much as the enemy did, simply for being in the way.”*

• **Seattle Post-Intelligencer**

*“Marateck is an extraordinary character facing certain death many times with consistent humor and steadfast faith in God. The reader certainly does not need to be an Orthodox Jew to appreciate the intense commitment Marateck has to his faith and his religious duty. His notes reveal a breathtaking ability to absorb the absurd that life dishes out to a lowly Jew in the Czar’s anti-Semitic army with aplomb and grace.”*

• **New York Journal of Books**

*“I found myself so fascinated by The Accidental Anarchist that I thought about it at work, wondered what would happen during dinner, and picked it up each night before bed. Several nights I went to sleep much later than I had intended because I was simply unaware how much time was passing. One reason for this is that Kranzler does a remarkable job of turning a life into a narrative. The reader knows what drives Marateck and wants to know whether or not he achieves his goal.”*

• **The Bookshelf**

#### **Awards:**

WINNER, 2012 Readers' Favorite, Non-Fiction: Historical/Cultural  
WINNER, 2012 National Indie Excellence Award  
WINNER 2012 International Book Awards, Biography: Historical  
WINNER, USA "Best Books of 2011" Award, Biography: Historical

#### **Excerpt:**

##### **Chapter 1: In the Beginning**

I have no excuse, save for the ignorance of youth and a desire for grand adventure, which may have been one and the same thing. Consequently, the seemingly minor decision I made to end my education before the age of thirteen led me down a path from which each future choice was misdirected by the previous foolish one.

Not that I didn’t have a loving family to guide me, particularly my older brother, Mordechai, who had seen me risk my life repeatedly but was unable to convince me to make at least one sensible decision. There was simply too much fun to be had.

The result was that, in a little over ten years, I went from being a *yeshiva* student, a baker’s assistant, and labor organizer, to a corporal in the Russian army during the war in Manchuria (in which the men under my command wanted to kill me, simply for being a Jew, as much as the enemy did, simply for being in the way), to a revolutionary. For my efforts, I earned my first two death sentences, which was a little more excitement than I needed.

This limited my curiosity as to whether my end would come from freezing or starvation, from Japanese artillery or Chinese bandits, and whether it would be today or tomorrow. From my experiences with the comically inept Russian army (at least, it would have been comical had our lives not been at stake), I learned that, no matter how terrible it was for anyone to be in the midst of a war, it was a hundred times worse being on the losing side.

Still, I was slow to put into practice the lessons from my youth and, following the war, became a revolutionary who wanted to overthrow the Czar. This got me involved in amateur spy missions that would have gotten a Hollywood screenwriter fired, but got me sentenced to death for the third time.

As a result, I travelled the width of Russia, from Petersburg to Siberia, where my adventures were to have come to an end. But even if my record wasn't clean, my conscience was; everything I did was done with the most honorable intentions.

And ultimately provided enough excitement to last a lifetime.  
(©Bryna Kranzler 2010)



**Author Bio:**

Bryna Kranzler is a graduate of Barnard College where she studied playwriting, and received the Helen Price Memorial Prize for Dramatic Composition. Her first play was a finalist for the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Competition, and was scheduled for production twice: The first time, the theater owner died, and the season was shut down; the second time, the director committed suicide. For the benefit of the arts community, she out of playwriting and pursued an MBA at Yale University. She spent 15 years in marketing for health-care, high tech and consumer products companies before returning to writing.

**Website:**

[www.TheAccidentalAnarchist.com](http://www.TheAccidentalAnarchist.com)

[www.facebook.com/AccidentalAnarchist?v=wall](https://www.facebook.com/AccidentalAnarchist?v=wall)

See photos from the Russo-Japanese War, with references to which page of the book they illustrate, at:  
<http://pinterest.com/brynakranzler/the-russo-japanese-war-in-the-accidental-anarchist/>

**Other Recommended Reading:**

Rasputin and the Jews: A Reversal of History by Delin Colon

**Contact the Author:**

info@CrosswalkPress.com