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Marco Termes

Friends and Foes

Original title: *Vriend en vijand*

NOVEL

**Impressive Dutch novel in Russian
storytelling tradition.**

**Universal themes in an epic story: reason
versus feeling, good versus evil.**

About the author

Marco Termes (Zandvoort, 1957) is a writer, poet and an artist. After a turbulent existence, he chose to become a full-time writer. Earlier publications include the novels *T.R.* (*Tyrannosaurus Regina*) and *The 6th Republic*, and three collections of poems. *Friends and Foes* is his third novel, and the most ambitious so far.



About the book

The successful thriller writer, Joeri Kosar, has written an autobiographical book about his time in an internment camp in Moldavia. The book achieves international success. When attacks are carried out on people with names corresponding to the characters in the book, Kosar is put under pressure. In St Petersburg he comes into contact with Maxim, his publisher's right-hand man, who wants to talk to the author about the consequences of the book. Gradually it becomes clear that Maxim has yet another, even more significant reason for holding the meeting; a reason that goes back to a gruesome and common past in which Maxim's love for his own sister plays a crucial role.

Marco Termes, *Vriend en vijand*
ISBN 978 90 445 1838 2
Paperback, 384 pages
Publication October 2011

Excerpt from the book

During the hottest period of the afternoon, the birds were silent. Only an osprey, circling around on thermals, producing regular, shrill, broken screams, could be heard. His partner was probably sitting on the nest or waiting on a leafless branch. Mayflies raced low over the water only to come with unimaginable dexterity to a sudden halt, to remain at that spot for a couple of seconds, and then to accelerate as if they had been shot out of a gun. Butterflies landed on yellow flags flowering in the reed fringe.

Anna came out of the water, stepping carefully; a nymph who, out of curiosity and ignorance, had chosen to live on land for ever, and after her disappointing encounters with human beings would always be torn by a longing for her underwater paradise. I looked up from my book and watched her landing from under the wide brim of a straw hat that had once belonged to my father. The hat, with a grey band, had lain in the attic next to one of the cardboard boxes filled with notebooks, cash books, files of bank documents, letters stuffed into one large envelope, photo albums, his old Russian passport with a small black-and-white photo in which I hardly recognised him, a couple of medals and a dozen books. Of course the hat was too large and I had filled the inside with a folded up page from the *Kommersant*.

How lovely it is to see her coming out of the water, I thought, and saved the image so I could make a drawing of it later.

She came and stood in front of me, dripping. I pushed the hat to the back of my head so I could keep looking at her.

‘Why don’t you have a quick swim? The water’s cold, but it’s lovely once you’re in.’

Holding her head to one side, she bundled up her dark blonde hair and wrung it out with both hands. The wet cloth of her bikini betrayed her emerging womanhood and I felt a strange sensation. I concentrated on a mind game. Anna picked up her towel from the grass and dried herself off slowly. Much more slowly than when she came out of the shower at home. I heard the rubbing sound of cloth on skin. After a few minutes I was able to look at her calmly again.

‘I see you’re getting proper breasts.’

She smiled, suddenly a bit uncertain.

‘It would be even stranger if I wasn’t getting them, Little Brother. I’ll be fifteen in two months’ time, you know. Luckily I don’t have to study for this to happen.’

Despite my help, she had had to repeat a year of school.

‘Life is the very best school. Even if you have to re-do each school grade, you can still be totally successful’, I said, trying to make that sound hopeful.

She turned towards me and the towel fell over her stomach. She looked at me as if she was searching for something in my face, under the edge of my father’s hat.

‘Did you get that out of a book too?’

‘What?’

‘What you just said. About school and still succeeding in life and all that.’

‘No.’

I saw she was hesitating about a thought she had had, about really saying it.

‘You are so old. An old man imprisoned in the body of a boy.’