



Gang of One: Memoirs of a Red Guard (American Lives)

Fan Shen

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In 1966 twelve-year-old Fan Shen, a newly minted Red Guard, plunged happily into China's Cultural Revolution. Disillusion soon followed, then turned to disgust and fear when Shen discovered that his compatriots had tortured and murdered a doctor whose house he'd helped raid and whose beautiful daughter he secretly adored. A story of coming of age in the midst of monumental historical upheaval, Shen's *Gang of One* is more than a memoir of one young man's harrowing experience during a time of terror. It is also, in spite of circumstances of remarkable grimness and injustice, an unlikely picaresque tale of adventure full of courage, cunning, wit, tenacity, resourcefulness, and sheer luck—the story of how Shen managed to scheme his way through a hugely oppressive system and emerge triumphant.

Gang of One recounts how Shen escaped, again and again, from his appointed fate, as when he somehow found himself a doctor at sixteen and even, miraculously, saved a few lives. In such volatile times, however, good luck could quickly turn to misfortune: a transfer to the East Wind Aircraft Factory got him out of the countryside and into another terrible trap, where many people were driven to suicide; his secret self-education took him from the factory to college, where friendship with an American teacher earned him the wrath of the secret police. Following a path strewn with perils and pitfalls, twists and surprises worthy of Dickens, Shen's story is ultimately an exuberant human comedy unlike any other.

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