



This memoir and literary travelogue from one of the UK's most esteemed novelists offers rare insight into Cold War-era Russia. In 1967, seeking an escape from his writing life, bestselling British novelist Alan Sillitoe embarks on a road trip from England to Russia via Harwich and Finland in his sturdy Peugeot. During his teens, the author had a cartographic fascination with the Battle of Stalingrad, and decades later he is still armed with intricate maps of the country based on British military intelligence, including one of the road from Leningrad to Moscow to Kiev, which he drew himself. Also in tow are a prismatic compass, binoculars, and a shortwave radio receiver. However, despite being so well prepared, Sillitoe embarks with naiveté about the political precariousness of an Englishman in the eyes of the Soviet regime. After passing through the endless days of a Scandinavian summer and a prolonged stop at a border control checkpoint—with his maps hidden in a secret compartment of the car—Sillitoe arrives in Leningrad. There, he meets George Andjaparidze, a worldly and candid English student who has been assigned by the Writers' Union to serve as the author's guide and keep him out of trouble. Though Sillitoe would rather continue his journey solo, Andjaparidze grows on him, and they begin what will become a lasting friendship. As soon as the duo leaves Leningrad, adventures and misadventures ensue. En route to Moscow, Sillitoe and Andjaparidze end up racing a pack of middle-age men in German sports cars partaking in a Berlin-to-Moscow rally. Sillitoe and Andjaparidze's time

in the capital is equally fast-paced, consisting of late nights fueled by vodka, impounded rubles, caviar breakfasts, erudite parties, and a pat on the back from a traffic cop for writing about the working class. A winding drive across western Russia and into Yugoslavia follows, replete with rebellious literature students, a speech on freedom, a visit to Tolstoy's estate, accusations of espionage, and a near-fatal run-in with a brigade of Red Army tanks. At last the writer and guide reach their destination: Kursk, that fateful place where a Soviet victory in 1943 turned back the Nazi tide. But the story continues long after the road trip ends. Back in England, Andjaparidze visits Sillitoe and the two are caught up in a controversy surrounding the defection of the Soviet writer Anatoly Kuznetsov. Written from the perspective of another trip to Russia forty years later (Sillitoe was invited in 2005 by the British Council to return to Moscow), this travelogue provides a rare and intimate look at the country's history, a compassionate understanding of its troubled ideology, and a frank portrayal of its undeniable lure.

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