

The Snail on the Slope

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Boris Strugatsky

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Arkady and Boris Strugatsky grapple with identity, fear, self-discovery, and progress against the surreal backdrop of their novel, *The Snail on the Slope*.

This is a novel of opposite perspectives. The first is that of Peretz, a philologist pressed into the service of the Administration; he can't seem to figure out his place in the strange bureaucracy. The Administration's primary goal is to tame the mysterious Forest that surrounds its compound. Peretz is drawn to the Forest—not because of any directive from his superiors, but because of a longing for escape and freedom.

Meanwhile, Candide, an employee of the Administration who crashed a helicopter in the Forest some time ago, seeks a way out of the wilderness and back to the Administration. Both men are discontent with their current situations and romanticize their perceived means of salvation.

The prose is often wonderfully disorienting. Everyone except Peretz seems to understand the bizarre inner workings of the Administration. One minute, he is thrown out of his room by a paranoid hotel manager, and the next, he is listening through a colleague's phone to incomprehensible instructions from the Director until he's told that his phone is elsewhere. Order is constantly in flux.

Similarly, the Forest offers a wealth of dreamlike imagery. Candide must navigate a path filled with otherworldly creatures, thieves, and a group of women who are able to conceive children without men, all while the people he meets try, with slippery language, to dissuade him from going to the City. In both men's cases, there are no neat resolutions to be found, though an afterword by Boris Strugatsky sheds some light on the genesis and thematic concerns of this fascinating novel.

The Snail on the Slope provokes questions about humanity's trajectory in light of scientific and social progress.

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