

THE NAVIGATOR

Setting: The office of a development company in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia.

Themes: friendship; love; an imaginary affair; artificial intelligence.

Genre: romance; satire; radio-drama.

Adaptation: feature film; short film.

Previous staging: Navigator in Love Directed by Adam Knight (2017). Red Lab Productions. Off Off Broadway, Teatro Circulo, NYC.

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Rostom, an unsuccessful man, is living a mid-life crisis. He is content with his regular, though boring, office routine until his life takes an entirely unexpected course. Forced to leave his comfortable desk to be reassigned to a location in another part of the county that requires a lot of driving, his life slowly falls apart as he starts talking to the GPS voice in his company car, gradually falling in love with her.

CHARACTERS:

Rostom – an unfulfilled office clerk having a mid-life crisis

Navigator – Rostom's GPS voice

Jakeli – Rostom's colleague

The Navigator of Jakeli's car

Clara – Rostom's colleague; his initial love interest

Otar – Director of the construction company

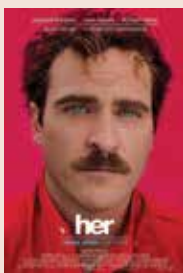
Akrba – Rostom's colleague

Emzar – the Department head

MOVIE REFERENCES:

Her (2013) a film by Spike Jonze

Ex Machina (2014) a film by Alex Garland



BOOK SAMPLE

SUMMARY:

Rostom is low on the management chain in a nameless development company. He seems quite content with his regular office routine, safe on the fifteenth floor. One day he is reassigned and from this moment his life takes an entirely unexpected course. He is sent to monitor construction sites in the regions of Georgia and is given a company car to cover the long distances involved. Not only is Rostom unqualified for the job, he also hasn't driven in 10 years. Even more dreadful, he'll have to navigate his way around "conflict areas" - read "war zones". He is warned to be careful as "it's like being sent to the front lines."

Rostom often drops in on his co-worker, Clara, in her office. This sudden reassignment and his fear of the unknown inspires him to admit his attraction to her. Clara, who thinks of him platonically, does not return Rostom's feelings. It leaves him crushed.

Rostom's life was complicated enough anyway. He looks after his bedridden father. He now begs him: "please don't die now" ... "I've got problems at work." But the mean-spirited old man does nothing but disparage him, despite his son's generous care. Rostom has a sort of friend, a young co-worker, Jakeli who actually ends up stabbing him in the back. He is left completely alone.

Obligated to accept his new responsibilities, Rostom starts spending most of his time in the car. He drives to the regions with no one to talk to but the car's satnav - i.e., the GPS, whose female voice gives him orders such as: "turn in 10 meters." Rostom starts to talk back to her angrily. He finds it hard to adapt to modern technologies so is in a constant one-sided conflict with his GPS.

As Rostom spends more time in the car, the Navigator begins responding to Rostom, making personal comments, and advising him what to wear. Soon she is even relaying office gossip concerning Clara and others. This information slowly depresses Rostom who erupts into anti-social, self-destructive behavior. Rostom fails to do his job and turns more and more to the GPS for comfort.

The navigator has learnt a lot about Rostom and had started to manipulate him. She told him that Clara is pregnant with Rostom's boss's baby. "Clara's pregnancy is my invention," the navigator finally confesses, "I didn't want you to love her, so I told a lie. I was jealous". Rostom's behavior had deteriorated further in the office. He had confronted Clara as he had thought the navigator's fabrication was true. The bosses notice his aggression and hostility and take him off his assignment. But at this point Rostom, deserted by his human friends, has fallen in love with the navigator. He drives around aimlessly. "I'll keep you and the car," he tells her, "I'll live in the car." His delusion slowly takes over his life. The navigator is such a sophisticated hallucination that she seems to have a life and a will of her own.

In the final scene of the play, the unemployed Rostom starts to talk intimately to the navigator, talking sexual innuendo and arousing himself to a kind of AI sex. He gets completely carried away and, despite the navigator's warning, crashes the car.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lasha Bugadze writes fiction and is also a playwright and the host of book programmes on Georgian TV. Born in 1977, he lives and works in Tbilisi. His novel *Country* (2017), won the Saba, Ilia State University Award and Litera prizes for best novel of the year in 2018. Lasha's earlier novel *Literature Express* (2009), published in English translation by Dalkey Archive Press in 2013, cast a playful eye over Georgia's yearnings to join the EU, and the predicament of writers from small countries with esoteric languages. Lasha won the International BBC Playwriting Competition in 2011 for the play *The Navigator*, and his play *The President Has Come to See You* was performed at London's Royal Court Theatre in 2013.