

Night Train to Odesa: Covering the Human Cost of Russia's War

Jen Stout

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Reporter Jen Stout's *Night Train to Odesa* is a heartbreaking memoir about the Ukrainian people's fight to survive a relentless war.

Offered a journalism scholarship in Moscow, Stout arrived in Russia during Putin's regime. When Russia invaded Ukraine and war broke out, she experienced first-hand how state propaganda turned her Russian friends into hostile strangers with upside-down worldviews. With no connections, no money, and no news outlets to publish her reporting, she headed to the border between Romania and Ukraine. Once there, she pitched a story to BBC Radio and began to give voice to the exodus of refugees arriving across the Danube River. Soon after, she crossed the border into Ukraine to report from the front.

Night Train to Odesa chronicles the early stages of Russia's war against Ukraine through easy-flowing, immersive prose that's filled with evocative images. Each on-site encounter is rendered in sharp detail, presented in the format of written pantomime. There is a fixer who can get hold of the most rare objects at a moment's notice; a death-defying daredevil poet who shuttles journalists across army front lines; an anxious hostess who preaches both-siderism while pleading with her guests not to talk about the war; and people picnicking in a city park while ignoring the air raid sirens with sardonic defeatism.

The narrative is as relentless as the war: new people are introduced, familiar individuals are killed, crises and emergencies appear without warning. The ending is open-ended. The war continued while Stout left for the safety of home, recognizing that this was a privilege that Ukrainians did not have. Left on the page is a vague promise to return and never forget.

Relentless in its narrative fortitude, the memoir *Night Train to Odesa* is filled with detailed reportage from the front lines of Russia's war against Ukraine.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (November / December 2024)

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