

Wanted: Lift

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The square steel construction leers up out of the top of the underpass that leads to Kursky Station. It looks as if it were shipped in from a Soviet military factory whose move to consumer goods had not been as successful as hoped.

It is a steel lift for those for whom the continual descent and ascent of Moscow streets is impossible, with a design as clunky as the ticket machines in the metro, the size of computers circa 1955.

Luckily, the lifts are so ungainly and ugly that they blend into the background at Kursky, and I suspect they were there a few months before anyone noticed.

The lifts are not only supposed to be for the disabled but for the infirm and for parents pushing prams, all a good idea if it actually worked. Press the button on the lift, and you get an imitation of the city's unofficial attitude to the disabled: silence. Luckily there is another button to press to speak to the operator for such situations. Press that, nothing again.

It wasn't much of a surprise, as it doesn't look as if it has moved lately, much of the outside is

covered in fly-by posters advertising easy credit.

The only clue as to the last time a person used it was a solitary cigarette stub that lay on the floor inside.

One reason for its inactivity could be a desire to keep away the local down-and-outs, a sizable and influential community in that area, from taking over the prime real estate. A very sweet old lady has welcome ownership of a phone box near the metro from where she plays the violin.

The lifts are not that old, part of a feeble attempt by the city to provide disabled access. Even if they worked, you only have to go a few more meters to find more obstacles; there is no lift in the metro station nearby.

I suspect the only way to make the city easier to access would be to forcibly tie the mayor to a wheelchair for a month or six before taking up office. That is also a worthy sentence for the previous leader who might get convicted in the near future.

At Mayakovskaya, there is a lift of a similar design but in working order. When you press the button, the door swings open like a welcome to a haunted house. Inside, you have to keep the button continually pressed for the clunky journey down or up a few meters.

At the other end of the underpass, the second lift is located next to a low door built by someone who presumably envied how hobbits live.

A woman opens the door, unbends herself and explains how the lift works.

What about the one at Kursky?

“Oh, I don’t think that one ever worked,” she said and, bowing her head, went back into her burrow.

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