The line between sanity and insanity is blurred in this classic novella. The disillusioned idealist Dr. Rabin is in charge of a provincial lunatic asylum, overseeing with weary, dubious policies a motley group of patients, a group that mirrors in microcosm all of human and especially Russian society. Seeking answers to profound questions, Dr. Rabin enters into dialogues with both staff members and patients, trying to make sense out of what has become of his life, until it becomes less and less clear who is the doctor and who is the patient. Written with obvious reformist concerns about the dehumanization of "lunatics," the story is also a harrowing parable about the meaning of human existence.