

Stalin's Ghost by Martin Cruz Smith. Macmillan 2007

This is the first Arkady Renko story that I have read since the very first one, Gorky Park, published in 1981. Having just completed the latest, and realising how much has clearly happened to Renko since I first encountered him 26 years ago, I find myself at a loss to understand how I let the other Renko novels pass me by!

Martin Cruz Smith lives, and, I assume, also works in northern California; yet he writes as one born and bred in Russia, an astute observer of the mind of Russian men and women, the Russian weather and the Russian state, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. His writing is incredibly evocative and atmospheric, and this is why the reader is able to feel the emotional responses of Arkady Renko to the situations in which he finds himself.

In Stalin's Ghost, Renko is sent to investigate sightings of Stalin on the Moscow Metro, and this leads him into a fraught investigation of fellow law enforcement officers, with connections to political extremism, the war in Chechnya and corruption. Stalin's Ghost is a compelling tale which will be lapped up by Renko fans but which can also be enjoyed by those, like me, who have missed out on some of the intervening stories.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh