



# Tatiana

*Martin Cruz Smith*

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## **Tatiana** Martin Cruz Smith

The fearless investigative reporter Tatiana Petrovna falls to her death from a sixth-floor window in Moscow the same week that a mob billionaire, Grisha Grigorenko, is shot and buried with the trappings due a lord. No one makes the connection, but Arkady is transfixed by the tapes he discovers of Tatiana's voice, even as she describes horrific crimes hidden by official versions.

The trail leads to Kaliningrad, a Cold War "secret city" and home of the Baltic Fleet, separated by hundreds of miles from the rest of Russia. Arkady delves into Tatiana's past and a surreal world of wandering dunes and amber mines. His only link is a notebook written in the personal code of a translator whose body is found in the dunes. Arkady's only hope of decoding the symbols lies in Zhenya, a teenage chess hustler.

## **Tatiana Details**

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## From Reader Review Tatiana for online ebook

### Mal Warwick says

Like so many mystery fans, I met Arkady Renko in 1981 when he first appeared in Martin Cruz Smith's brilliant, best-selling novel of suspense, *Gorky Park*. Seven more tales about the troubled Russian crime investigator have followed at intervals of three years or more. I've read nearly all of them; recently, I read and reviewed *Three Stations*. *Tatiana* is the latest.

Smith, a Bay Area resident (Marin County, I believe), has somehow managed to craft a series of compelling and all too credible stories that chronicle the descent of the Russian people from the tightly circumscribed lives they lived under Communism into the revived authoritarianism and kleptocracy of the Putin era.

Like so many fictional hero-detectives, Arkady Renko is an outlier, a brilliant performer among mediocrities and despised for his honesty on a police force that's corrupt to its core. However, Renko is uniquely Russian. He's melancholy to the edge of depression, fatalistic, cynical, and endlessly romantic. The son of a notoriously brutal general in the army, he seems to live for little more than to atone for his father's sins.

In *Tatiana*, Renko stumbles upon the mysterious death of Tatiana Petrovna, a crusading Russian investigative reporter who gives her name to the book. Clearly, she is modeled on the tragic figure of Anna Politkovskaya, a fearless journalist who was assassinated in Moscow in 2006.

Working in the shadows of the police bureaucracy, barely tolerated by his boss, Renko pursues the truth behind Tatiana's death with the help of his alcoholic sidekick, Victor Orlov; his adopted teenage son, Zhenya, a genius at chess who wants to run away to join the army; the famous old poet Maxim Dal; and his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Anya. As the plot unfolds, the leading figures of the Russian Mafia enter the scene. The story revolves around an interpreter's notebook, written in a personal language and supposedly untranslatable.

Smith has a great gift for character. Every one of the actors in this complex and satisfying tale is sculpted with care and lingers in memory. Much of the dialogue is priceless — lively and clever without appearing contrived. Martin Cruz Smith is one of the premier crime writers of our age.

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### Tony says

TATIANA. (2013). Martin Cruz Smith. \*\*\*.

I've been reading Smith's novels for years now, and particularly like his stories featuring Arkady Renko, his Russian detective. Renko has an approach to officialdom that manages to allow him to find out all the facts of a case through his quick read of "whose ox is being gored." In this novel, we are immediately faced with the death of Tatiana. She was either pushed, fell, or slipped from her sixth-floor balcony and ended up on the sidewalk below. Renko has his doubts, especially when he finds out that she had been working on a series of articles related to corruption on a grand scale in the Russian leadership that she planned to publish in the magazine she worked for. In his quest to find out what really happened, Renko runs smack into a grand conspiracy that involves the Russian Mafia, the Chinese government, and the high levels of the Russian leadership. It's all about money, and who ends up getting it. On the whole, the plot is pretty thin, but Renko and his idiosyncrasies manage to keep the reader interested. If you haven't read any of the Renko series, I'd

recommend that you start off with “Gorky Park.”

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## **Barbara says**

In this eighth book in the series, Russian detective Arkady Renko looks into the death of an investigative journalist. The book can be read as a standalone.

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Investigator Arkady Renko is attending the funeral of businessman/mafia leader Grisha Grigorenko in Moscow when he encounters a group of demonstrators protesting the death of Tatiana Petrovna, a journalist who uncovers government corruption and exposes government officials who collude with criminals. Tatiana's death was ruled a suicide but Renko doesn't believe it and - against department regulations - starts an investigation.

Tatiana's death seems to be linked to the recovered notebook of a murdered international translator, a book filled with indecipherable pictures and symbols. Renko gets the notebook but can't figure it out.

Renko's investigation soon takes him to Kaliningrad, a port city run by gangster Grigorenko and his cohorts, considered one of the most corrupt cities in Russia. Everyone - the mob, cops, government officials, and Tatiana's editor - wants Renko to quit investigating Tatiana's death. In addition, many people want to get their hands on the mysterious notebook. All this leads to intimidation, violence, and betrayal but Renko carries on.

There are various interesting characters in the story including Renko's gruff but likable partner Victor; a broke, middle-aged, dissolute poet who was Tatiana's former lover; Renko's chess-hustler ward Zhenya who's a whiz with puzzles; an intrepid journalist who hopes to take over Tatiana's beat; criminals on the make; and more. In time, the notebook is translated and Tatiana's death is resolved.

To me Renko's investigation seemed more plodding and less compelling than in previous books but the Russian ambiance of the story is fascinating and memorable. All in all a pretty good mystery/thriller.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot...>

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## **Kemper says**

Among the many jobs I'd never want is working as a journalist in Russia, and probably right behind that one on the list is being a detective in Russia.

Moscow police investigator Arkday Renko is back in his eighth book that finds him getting mixed up with the events surrounding the death of famous investigative reporter Tatiana Petrovna. The official verdict is that Tatiana killed herself, but official stories aren't worth anything in a Russia where the police and government are available to the highest bidder. Renko begins to connect her death to the murder of a wealthy

mob boss and also to a translator who was part of a mysterious business deal.

As usual Renko finds roadblocks everywhere from apathetic and corrupt fellow cops to his own boss who'd rather work on his golf game than see a police detective actually investigate anything. Renko's also got problems on the personal front in his role as legal guardian of the brilliant but strange teenager Zhenya who is pressuring Arkday to let him join the army. Worst of all is that his doctor pops in with the news that the bullet he carries in his brain from a previous misadventure has started to shift and strenuous activity could cause a sudden case of death.

Re-reading Renko's introduction during the Cold War in Gorky Park and then this one immediately after that was a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same. Back then Arkday had to play a dangerous game of trying to do real police work in a communist society that never wanted to admit any flaws. Now he plays a dangerous game of trying to do real police work in a society so consumed by capitalism that the government has become a relentless stealing machine that ruthlessly cracks down on anyone would dare expose the corruption.

It's a quality mystery in which Martin Cruz Smith does his usual thing of using his much abused but still stubborn detective to tell us what it's like living in the Russia of the moment. Renko remains one of the more interesting fictional detectives with a pragmatic nature that doesn't try to change the world but still insists on driving himself to find answers even when it puts him in extreme danger. One of the more interesting new elements in this one is that Renko starts listening to audio tapes Tatiana recorded as her notes, and he starts getting more and more intrigued by the dead woman.

My only complaint is just that of familiarity. Smith has been writing Renko for over 30 years now, and the rhythms are pretty much the same since about the fifth book. I guessed a major twist in this book not because of anything in the plot, but just because I thought it seemed like the kind of thing that would happen in a Renko book. That's not to say that it's completely predictable or that I didn't enjoy it, but I did have a pretty good idea of where it would end up.

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## **Dorothy says**

Within a few days, the fearless reporter Tatiana Petrovna falls to her death from her sixth-floor apartment in Moscow and a mob billionaire name Grisha Grigorenko receives a bullet to the head and is buried with all the trappings of a lord.

Meanwhile, Tatiana's body is "lost" by the morgue, then found and secretly cremated. Investigator Arkady Renko is suspicious of connections between the two deaths. No one else cares to see any connections.

As usual, the cynical and analytical Renko is on his own as he pursues his investigation of Tatiana's death, even though the prosecutor's office has decided that there is no case. Tatiana supposedly committed suicide. But there is a witness who heard her screaming as she fell. Does a woman who commits suicide by jumping from a great height scream on the way down?

Renko goes to Tatiana's apartment and finds tapes in Tatiana's voice that describe horrific crimes. Her account of these crimes does not agree with the Kremlin's official versions. Did her investigations mark her as an enemy to the government and was that government involved in her death? Arkady Renko is determined to find the answer to that question.

The evidence found in Tatiana's apartment leads Renko to Kaliningrad, a Cold War "secret city" that seems to be at the center of the mystery. Tatiana's sister lived there and, there, Renko meets with a famous poet who was once Tatiana's lover. Kaliningrad also is the city with the highest crime rate in Russia. Human life seems cheap there.

The solution to the mystery lies in a notebook belonging to a professional interpreter - a professional interpreter who (coincidentally?) was murdered in Kaliningrad. The notebook is filled with cryptic drawings and mysterious symbols that constitute a language known only to the interpreter.

Arkady Renko's ward, the young chess prodigy Zhenya, gets his hands on the notebook and he and a friend, another chess prodigy, begin to crack the code and figure out what the notebook says. While they work on this project in Arkady's Moscow apartment, Arkady himself continues to pursue his investigations in Kaliningrad.

*Tatiana* is written with Martin Cruz Smith's typical combination of black humor, irony, and romance, as well as a keen understanding of Russian society and the way things work in the bureaucracy there. The characters are richly drawn and the story is entertaining. I didn't feel that it was one of Smith's best, but it was an enjoyable read and Arkady Renko is always a good companion.

Renko lives with an inoperable bullet rattling around in his skull and with the knowledge that that bullet could spell his doom at any time. He has been warned against exertion, but he has come to terms with the possibility of death and he chooses to pursue his calling in life, the investigation of crime, with stoicism and fatalism. And with passion, because, in spite of everything, he really does care about pursuing justice, difficult though that may be in the society in which he lives. The important thing to Arkady may not be that justice is actually achieved but that he stubbornly never gives up the fight to achieve it. Arkady Renko, cynic, may also be the last of the Russian romantics.

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## **Ms.pegasus says**

Corruption, particularly government corruption, is one of the elements that make Arkady Renko such an appealing character. His investigations follow the trail, no matter where they lead. Here, it would seem that he has found an ideal ally. Tatiana Petrovna is an investigative reporter who has angered both politicians and mafia figures. She was relentless, even in the face of constant threats against her life. Unfortunately, she's dead. Suicide. That's the first difference in this book. Without preliminary introductions, it opens with three corpses whose connections are not at all clear.

Tatiana Petrovna's body has disappeared, an event viewed with indifference by the political officials so often targeted by her reporting. Her friends are demanding an autopsy, and Renko is swept up in the group as they are attacked by an assortment of skinheads and police. Protest equals troublemakers in the view of the latter, and Renko is kicked and stomped on before he can show his identification. Even then, the police are not necessarily apologetic. He and his partner Victor Orlov are on the scene by accident, to photograph the funeral of Grisha Grigorenko, recently assassinated mobster kingpin. This too, is a meaningless exercise; Grigorenko's death is not exactly an actuarial anomaly given his occupation.

Renko's superior, Prosecutor Zurin, should know by now that for Renko, boredom and curiosity are like a lit fuse of dynamite. Eager to get Renko out of his hair, he quickly approves Renko's request to look for Tatiana Petrovna's missing corpse. Renko's search will take him to a remote village called Kaliningrad. Is it merely

coincidence? Kaliningrad is also the site of a secret international conclave where Joseph Bonnafos had been hired as a consecutive interpreter. Fluent in six languages and discreet, he is the ideal choice for the role. His caution extends to his notes of the meeting. They are written in a personal shorthand of glyphs. Bonnafos is an avid bicyclist. He pedals his custom-made bicycle out to the beach for recreation — and is murdered.

Renko develops an obsession for Tatiana after listening to a box of tapes he finds in her apartment. One records the minute by minute decisions during a hostage crisis in a Moscow theater. A poison gas is released. *“Seven hundred hostages were freed and not a single one of our soldiers lost in what clearly should have been a triumph in the war against terrorism. However, the gas also killed one hundred thirty hostages....Hundreds more need hospitalization. There is an antidote, but we are informed that the nature of the gas is a state secret and cannot be divulged. The man from Special Operations says, ‘When you chop wood, chips fly.’”* (p.76) This is only one of several tragedies she narrates in a passive voice that drips with irony and unspoken accusation. Although chilling in what they reveal about the government, Smith unfortunately is not able to convey the haunting power of the tapes to the reader. Perhaps this indicates something about me. The level of corruption and the disregard for human life is no longer surprising to me. Smith seems to realize that Arkady, himself, is not surprised by these revelations. Arkady's obsession is personal. Tatiana's voice conjures the memory of his dead wife, Irina, who was also a journalist. Irina's death, however, was an unnecessary accident, the product of incompetence and bureaucratic indifference.

This begins as a promising mystery. The author's depiction of the interpreter is particularly intriguing. Joseph Bonnafos' interests are narrow but deep, and I wished we had gotten to know him better before his violent demise.

One problem is that Renko and Orlov are working separately during most of the case. Renko displays his characteristic sense of irony. When Anya, another journalist, asks him: *“How can they lose a body?”* he responds: *“They've lost bodies for years. It's one of their functions.”* (p.18) Without Orlov's exaggerated emotions, however, Renko's wit cannot be fully displayed. Despite his role, Orlov is an under-utilized character in this book.

The biggest problem I had, however, was credibility. Renko is rescued from one life-threatening situation by pure luck. He stumbles on a clue to the translator's missing bicycle through a chance conversation. The decoding of the interpreter's notes felt completely improbable. As written, I could feel the author's hand nudging his characters toward the solution.

Characters such as Zhenya, the seventeen year old street kid Renko's has assumed responsibility for, and Lotte, a chess-player Zhenya meets, felt underdeveloped and placed to enhance the plot. Zhenya was a much more vivid character in an earlier book, *THE THREE STATIONS*.

Of course, Smith's Arkady Renko books are always fun to read. I will continue to read them as long as Smith writes them. Still, in my opinion, this was not one of the best books of the series.

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## **SlowRain says**

On the same day as the funeral of a Russian gangster, Investigator Arkady Renko hears of the death of Tatiana, a journalist noted for tackling corruption in Moscow. The two events don't seem entirely coincidental to Renko and, as usual, he decides to ask a few questions.

Martin Cruz Smith has long been a favorite author of mine--starting with *Gorky Park* right on until *Wolves Eat Dogs*. However, he had lost his way with his next two novels, and so I approached *Tatiana* with apprehension. What I got was a slightly better story, but it felt like Martin Cruz Smith-lite. The narrative is lighter and the subject matter is less weighty and less thought-provoking. Part of this can be explained by his recent revelation that he has been suffering from Parkinson's disease for almost two decades and that the last several years have been quite difficult for him. However, the novel is what it is: a shadow of his former greatness.

We get a more interesting setting this time round--Kaliningrad, a Russian oblast physically cut off from the rest of the country. We learn about the area, the buildings, the birdwatchers, and the amber--none of which play much of a part in the plot, but interesting to learn about nonetheless. The plot has devolved into too much coincidence and taken a boring tangent again by featuring Arkady's pseudo-adopted ward, Zhenya, as his unwilling sidekick of sorts. Most of the events occur in the novel with little note of significance, even though we know they should be either important or suspenseful.

Not as dreadful as his two preceding novels, this one still pales in comparison to *Gorky Park* and *Rose*.

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### **Alex Cantone says**

*"If you don't mind me saying so, you are a difficult person to be in love with."*

An interpreter speaking six languages attends a meeting in Kaliningrad. A loner, he jots down the proceedings as a series of symbols, letters and the odd reference in a notebook, and in his spare time he rides an expensive Italian-made racing cycle. He is in contact with Tatiana, a crusading journalist before his body is found in the dunes, while Tatiana apparently commits suicide by plunging six floors from a Moscow apartment block. In the same week, mafia boss Grisha Grigorenko dies from a bullet in the head.

In the eighth Investigator Arkady Renko novel, the action switches between Moscow and the Russian enclave bordered by Poland, Belarus and Lithuania. Kaliningrad, a Cold War city and home port of the Baltic fleet, was for a while left off the maps. Formerly the seat of German Kings "Koenigsburg" it is one of the world's richest sources of amber.

Martin Cruz Smith again excels in a novel rich in characters and subplots, with mafia families and corrupt government officials, casting tragic events in Russia's recent history with the personal loss suffered by Arkady Renko. Aided by Detective Viktor Orlov, and teenage chess-wizard Zhenya, there are delightful cameos of a resort town on the Baltic near the ever-shifting sands of a spit between Russia and Lithuania, visited only by birdwatchers out of season, and two Moscow detectives who take early retirement to Sochi, only to find it full of middle-aged men and specials on Australian wine. It demands a reader take note of verbal and visual clues. 4★.

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### **Michael says**

Cruz Smith is in back in high form here with chess-inspired plotting and well-drawn characterizations of a set of people trying to avoid being collateral damage in a massive corruption scheme in Putin's modern Russia. It could make a great first read of the series featuring Arkady Renko, a Moscow police detective

whose successes at achieving justice never seems to reduce his supply of enemies. But knowing some of Renko's history from prior reads makes me want to know more about his character than I really get with this tale. Instead, he is more of a lens or window on the drama among other characters.

Renko's entry to this case comes in the form of a murder of a freelance translator for business leaders on a remote beach in Kaliningrad, a geographically isolated part of Russia with a port city of the same name on the Baltic Sea. It was rebuilt during the Cold War as a military stronghold from bombed-out Königsberg after World War 2 and now is a frontier for shady development projects in the new Russia. A prominent journalist on the trail of nefarious activities in Kaliningrad, Tatiana, has disappeared or been murdered, having left a voice recording that has Renko looking for a notebook of the translator as a key to the mystery. When he succeeds in his brilliant efforts to acquire it, he finds the pictorial code it is written in totally baffling. Some of the symbols in the notebook seem to have something to do with submarines and with an ancient business of mining the beach sands for ambergris.

While Renko engages in some exciting and dangerous cat-and-mouse ploys in Kaliningrad, back at home the teenaged boy Zhenya, whom Renko serves as a guardian, takes on the challenge of translating the notebook. Zhenya is a chess genius and hustler you may have encountered in prior books in the series. With the help of a prospective girlfriend and fellow chess master, he slowly makes progress that comes to the dangerous attention of the son of a dead Russian mafia kingpin hoping to get his hand into the pie of the lucrative scheme. The playful and brave efforts of these teens to solve their conundrum and help Renko in the process is the most pleasurable part of this tale.

Ever since Renko appeared in "Gorky Park", I have savored his character through five of the other six books in the series. Here we still get the pleasure of his dogged persistence in pursuing some form of justice for powerful and corrupt figures. But I have trouble with this book getting a fix on Renko's heart and soul, and I miss the special edge to his sardonic and downtrodden character as portrayed in the books set in the Cold War epoch. That's why I rate it average despite good satisfaction overall.

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## **Larry says**

The following dialogue sums up the life of Arkady Renko, senior investigator for Moscow's chief prosecutor: "That will be on your tombstone, 'Things got complicated.'" The fact that Arkady carries a bullet fragment in his brain, and that it could dislodge, causing his death, leads him to live for the moment. At this set of moments, he is investigating the death of a crusading woman reporter named Tatiana Petrovna, and looking into the consequences of the murder of a major crime figure. No one else, including the prosecutor and Renko's partner, wants him to investigate, but, as a character observes later, "You can only push Arkady so far." The key to both crimes is locked in the cypher of a professional translator's notebook, found after that person's death in Kaliningrad, the worst of pre-Soviet cities. How the three cases come together, and how Arkady reconciles with his sort-of son, escapes death, and finds something that might be love, all while trying to spike a ploy of stunning cynicism, even by Russian standards, makes a wonderful book, with a wonderful last paragraph. (It should be noted that the eighth Arkady Renko book, like its predecessors, is full of wonderful paragraphs, shrewd observations, and black humor.)

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## Paromjit says

This is another jewel in the Arkady Renko series. It begins with the murder of a translator. Renko finds himself at the funeral of a murdered gangster billionaire presided over by his heir apparent, Alexi, and attended by the cream of gangster society. Arkady then finds himself caught up in a protest about the so called suicide of the investigative journalist, Tatiana, a thorn in the side of the Russian authorities. Anya, a reporter who has been sleeping with Arkady, gives him a notebook which Tatiana had which belonged to the murdered translator. The notebook proves to be well nigh impossible to decode and others are after it.

Arkady takes on the investigation of Tatiana's death and becomes even more determined after her body disappears. It is assumed that the authorities are behind the disappearance so it does not become a rallying point for people to get behind. Arkady's persistence takes him to Kaliningrad, amber mining companies, a poet by the name of Maxim who knew Tatiana and he uncovers other secrets. This whilst facing untold dangers lurking everywhere. Arkady still has a bullet rattling around in his head that he acquired in Stalin's Ghost and there is every possibility that that alone could kill him instantly. Arkady's hard drinking partner, Victor, really proves his worth as he attempts to protect Zhenya and his newly acquired friend, Lotte, from gangsters and assassins.

Arkady encounters corruption at earth shattering levels to steal from the Russian people. The author incorporates the real history of Russia and uses it as a framework to weave a spellbinding mystery for the uncompromising Renko to follow. So we read about the Kursk disaster, the Chechen school hostage scenario and the suspicious deaths of investigative journalists that threaten the State. This lends the novel credibility and authenticity. Brilliant storytelling with the formidable Arkady.

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## Bettie? says

Rosado on the road!

*'Where were the anti-putins?'*

4\* Gorky Park (Arkady Renko, #1)

4\* Polar Star (Arkady Renko, #2)

3\* Three Stations (Arkady Renko, #7)

CR Tatiana (Arkady Renko, #8)

4\* December 6

3\* Nightwing

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## Frank Hughes says

Classic Renko, this book feels as if it is starting off slowly, but soon you find yourself hooked and, at least in my case, up until 3:00 AM finishing it. Renko is the Russian Philip Marlowe, a relentless investigator who simply won't do what is in his own best interest, so concerned is he with solving the puzzle. And this is a puzzle indeed, the essential clues locked in the personal shorthand of a murdered interpreter. How is the murder tied to a journalist's suicide, a mobster's assassination, and a poet's obsession?

Martin Cruz Smith does what all good thriller writers do: he takes some fascinating facts he has discovered about amber, or interpreters, or bicycles, or naval disasters, and weaves a compelling story around them. He also pays homage to a classic noir thriller, which I will not name because it would give things away. Smith spares us this time, by the way, Arkady's usual encounter with offal or rendered animal flesh or other disgusting materials that are often part of the Renko experience.

Be warned: you cannot just jump into the Arkady Renko world. Familiarity with the character and his previous adventures is essential, as Smith does not waste a lot of time explaining who the recurring characters are or how they relate to Renko. Best to start with the first novel, *Gorky Park*, and enjoy the journey.

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## Scott Rhee says

\*\*\*\*This review is based on an advance uncorrected proof from the publisher, so the version that appears on bookshelves on its release date may be somewhat different from the version I read\*\*\*\*

I don't know how I have missed ever reading a Martin Cruz Smith novel. Smith's hero is a Russian investigator named Arkady Renko, a good man in an extremely corrupt world. "Tatiana" is, I believe, his twelfth novel in the series, which started with the best-selling "*Gorky Park*" (which was made into a decent movie starring William Hurt). Unfortunately, it is the only one I have read, a mistake that will be rectified soon.

Renko's world is the epitome of noir: shadowy, depressing, violent. Renko himself is the epitome of the noir detective hero. He has a tragic past that he can't seem to get over, and he has an obsessive personality, especially when it comes to seeking justice, something that is seriously lacking in contemporary Russia. Post-Soviet era Russia is a bleak and terrifying country, but it's home to Renko and the thousands of poor souls who know no other life. The poverty gap is as wide as it is here in the states. Millionaire Russian mobsters drive around in sporty Italian cars donning \$5,000 suits and eat in expensive restaurants with politicians who are essentially in their back pockets. Meanwhile, average Russian citizens struggle to find food and heat for their homes.

The novel begins with the murder of a well-known journalist, Tatiana Petrovna, known for her scathing articles berating the Putin Administration and defending the Chechen people. Authorities are calling her fall from her six-story apartment building a suicide. Never mind that a few witnesses heard her screaming prior to the fall. Not that it matters because the witnesses have disappeared, and so has the body. Sadly, this is not an atypical occurrence for the Russian police. For the lazy ones, it just means less paperwork.

Detective Renko, however, is not one of the lazy ones.

His investigation (with the help of his partner, Victor, an alcoholic but intrepid detective in his own right) leads him to Alexei Grigorenko, a rising young star in the local mob after the mysterious murder of his mob-boss father put him in charge. Alexei is looking for a notebook that Tatiana supposedly had in her possession the night of her murder. It's supposedly full of gibberish, a code that may be not be decipherable. Nobody knows for sure, though, because the notebook went missing with the body.

Until Arkady's adopted son, Zhenya, finds it. Now the mob is after the only person Arkady can legitimately call family, and they're not exactly on speaking terms.

"Tatiana" is, besides being an excellent crime thriller, a wonderful peek into life in modern-day Russia. For those who keep up on current events (I myself don't, at least not as much as I probably should), Tatiana's character will be recognizable as based on the real-life Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, a Pulitzer Prize winner who was tragically gunned down in front of her apartment building in 2006. Her murder is still unsolved.

I highly recommend "Tatiana" for fans of good old-fashioned noir detective fiction, soaked in vodka, with a twist.

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## **Matt says**

This is the second Renko book in a row that I've given two "it's OK" stars to here on Goodreads. At the end of my last review for *THREE STATIONS* I wrote:

"Maybe I'm letting nostalgia cloud my eyes and make me think the previous volumes in the Renko series were much better than they truly were, but I just can't help it-- I'll keep reading the Renko books as long as Smith keeps writing them, but I hope the next one is better than *THREE STATIONS*."

Oddly enough, *TATIANA* has even LESS insight (in my opinion, anyway) to say about Russia than the previous volume. We get information that the government is inept and corrupt (old news), that most of the economy is run by scamming mafia-esque billionaires (old news), and that the Glasnost generation who saw the fall of the Berlin wall and felt the power to change the world are now feeling like impotent old weaklings (which is actually a very interesting viewpoint I hadn't heard of or thought of before).

I would have LOVED this book to focus on that last aspect much more than it did. Unfortunately, it didn't.

*TATIANA* is a pretty run-of-the-mill "thriller" which is falling into a standard formula -- Renko finds a mystery everyone tells him to avoid, his adopted "son" acts like an asshole, women randomly give themselves to Renko with the barest of effort on his part, things wrap up successfully and vaguely in the last chapter.

If you've read all previous volumes in this series, I am sure you're going to keep riding this train to the end of the line (as I am). I just wish they could continue to surprise me and take me someplace I haven't seen before, rather than be something I feel I "should" read because I've done all the others.

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