

## ***Hotel Ukraine, by Martin Cruz Smith***

### ***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy***

Russian investigator Arkady Renko, Martin Cruz Smith's iconic character, makes his final appearance in *Hotel Ukraine*. Smith had introduced Arkady, deemed "the most honest man in Moscow," to generations of readers in *Gorky Park*, his acclaimed 1981 novel.

*Hotel Ukraine* begins with a demonstration in a Moscow square soon after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Zhenya, Arkady's adopted 22-year-old son, is arrested for protesting Russia's "special military operation."

After Arkady pulls strings to get his peace-activist son released from detention, he is handed a politically charged case. Alexei Kazasky, the deputy minister of defense, was found brutally murdered in the Hotel Ukraine, a luxury hotel in Moscow's city center. When Arkady arrives at the hotel to begin his investigation, Marina Makarova, an FSB (formerly known as KGB) agent, is already on the scene.

Arkady and Marina had been off-and-on lovers before he met investigative reporter Tatiana Petrovna. Arkady knew that the murder of a senior defense minister would prompt the arrival of an FSB agent, but he did not expect it to be Marina. From the start, Marina makes it clear that she, not Arkady, would oversee the Kazasky homicide.

Marina and her FSB agents soon have a suspect under surveillance: Yuri Blokhin, a low-level advisor from the Ukrainian embassy. When Arkady efficiently blows apart Marina's weak case against Blokhin, she schemes to remove him from the investigation. Discovering that Arkady has late-stage Parkinson's disease, Marina forces his retirement for medical reasons.

Enlisting Tatiana's help, Arkady goes undercover to solve the case. The two travel to Ukraine with Blokhin to his home in Bucha, where they find the city totally devastated by the war. "What can you tell people who ask how this happened?" asks Blokhin. "Some questions simply don't have answers."

Arkady suspects a cover-up involving Kazasky's assassination and a connection to the war in Ukraine. "You only need one book to understand Russia," Arkady thought. "Not Tolstoy or Pushkin, not Dostoyevsky, but one my mother used to read to me as a child: *Through the Looking-Glass*, otherwise known as *Alice in Wonderland*."

In an ironic twist of fate, a few days after the publication of *Hotel Ukraine* this past July, Martin Cruz Smith succumbed to Parkinson's disease, the same condition with which his character Arkady was afflicted. Timely and memorable, *Hotel Ukraine* is a fine coda to a master writer's stellar career.