



Havana Bay

Martin Cruz Smith

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When the corpse of a Russian is hauled from the oily waters of Havana Bay, Arkady Renko comes to Cuba to identify the body. Looking for the killer, he discovers a city of faded loneliness, unexpected danger, and bewildering contradictions. His investigation introduces him to a beautiful Cuban policewoman; to the rituals of Santeria; to an American fugitive and a group of ruthless mercenaries. In this place where all things Russian are despised, where Hemingway fished and the KGB flourished, where the hint of music is always in the air, Arkady finds a trail of deceit that reaches halfway around the world—and a reason to relish his own life again.

From the Paperback edition.

Havana Bay Details

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From Reader Review Havana Bay for online ebook

Perry Whitford says

After the excellent third edition in the Arkady Renko series, *Red Square*, focused on the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union and a burgeoning capitalism on the Moscow crime scene, this one sends the Russian investigator to the only legitimate communist country left - Cuba.

Ostensibly there to investigate the apparent murder of his former ally/enemy and KGB agent Sergei Pribluda, he finds himself having to overcome not just the local criminals but the local police too, uncovering something much larger in scope than his initial brief suggested, as always.

He also has to overcome his own suicidal tendencies as we learn that his wife Irina has died. This lack of concern for his own future makes him reckless, but it also helps him to take chances in order to solve a mystery in a very different culture from the one he is used to back in Moscow.

Not as good as the best Renko novels, but still better than most of the competition.

T.J. says

I had forgotten how much I loved the melancholy, befuddled and mistreated investigator Arkady Renko from *Gorky Park*.

This book brought all the love, with Renko thrown into a typical no win situation in Cuba in which his presence is unwanted, his friends are few, the challenges facing him insurmountable and you spend the whole book willing him on.

Vodka noir at its best.

Craig Pittman says

A wonderful fish-out-of-water story about a melancholy Russian detective who goes to Havana on a sentimental mission and winds up joining forces with a smart and smoldering Cuban cop to solve an odd mystery: Why did another Cuban cop try to kill Moscow investigator Arkady Renko just as he was about to commit suicide?

Renko, made famous by Martin Cruz Smith's 1981 novel "Gorky Park," has good reason to be down-in-the-dumps. His beloved wife Irina is dead, leaving behind only memories and the faintest scent of her skin lingering in a cashmere coat she gave him. Now he's gotten word that his old friend and nemesis, Sergei Pribluda, is in some sort of trouble in Havana and needs his help. He spends half his savings to fly to Cuba, in part to see what's going on with Pribluda and in part to find a quiet place to kill himself, putting an end to the torment of his memories of Irina. Yet just as arrives, a decayed corpse turns up that the Cubans insist must be Pribluda (Renko is skeptical) and a Cuban cop he just met interrupts his suicide attempt by trying to kill him. Renko, reacting without thinking, kills the cop instead -- and slowly his investigative ardor, which

had deserted him, returns as he tries to figure out what happened.

In that endeavor Renko is at first opposed and, ultimately, aided by a zealous Havana detective, Ofelia Osorio. Twice divorced, with two daughters and the most hilariously sarcastic mother in the Western World, Ofelia is nobody's fool but hampered by her gender from the promotions and respect she deserves. Like Renko, she works amid a hopelessly corrupt system, where the cops sponsor underage hookers who entice wealthy foreign tourists to take them to special love motels, and everybody gets a cut.

Smith has created a great character in Osorio, and he has a ball with the mother-daughter dialogue in particular, as well as the misunderstandings and eventual comprehension that flows between Osorio and Renko, who insists on stalking around the island in his cashmere coat.

He also delineates with care the vast gulf between the poor -- particularly poor fishermen who go out to shark infested waters in inner tubes -- and the rich, particularly a pair of American fugitives with big plans for cashing in on Cuba who hang out aboard a boat they claim was once Al Capone's personal rumrunner. Fidel is a constant presence, sometimes invoked like a deity whose name you do not say but rather indicate by pretending to stroke a beard. At one point Castro himself makes an appearance -- looking, Smith reports, like an age-shrunken grandfather surrounded by grandchildren so numerous there is no way he can recall their names.

The Cubans have no love for the Russians who once supported, then abandoned, the island nation, but they're none too thrilled with how Castro's revolution worked out for them either. One repeats what is clearly an old gag: What three things did the Revolution bring to Cuba? Health, education and sports. What three things are still missing? Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

It's clear that Smith -- the son of jazz musicians -- fell in love with the city's constant musical beat, and uses it to great effect all throughout the vividly descriptive portions of the text. The book's one weakness is that it stumbles a bit toward the end as the vast conspiracy they've uncovered unravels even as a killer abducts Osorio -- but it's got one last satisfying twist in an epilogue that takes place back in Moscow. Perhaps the greatest twist, though, is that the once-suicidal Renko is still alive, and still wandering the snow-covered streets in search of the darkness that is in every human heart, whether Russian or Cuban.

Jon Rees says

This is a compelling novel, set in a dystopian future that imagines Cuba as the last remaining Communist country, with its relations to Russia soured. I was recommended this book by another teacher following a trip to Cuba and Martin Cruz Smith does an amazing job rendering the crumbling beauty of the Malecon and Havana Vieja in whose shadows, his haggard, yet compassionate Russian detective, Arkady Renko, paces in search of the truth of the death of his fellow undercover officer.

The eccentric, paradoxical world of Cuba, that is haunted and controlled by the eternal figure of El Fidel, gives rise to all manner of beguiling, beautiful and insane characters and is the perfect backdrop for the reader to suspend their disbelief and go with Renko in search of answers.

David Highton says

Not my favourite Renko book, much too slow moving in the first half and a generally confusing plot set in Cuba, but Renko's usual remorseless style is evident again

David B says

The first three novels about Arkady Renko were strengthened by a powerful story arc that developed throughout the books--his banishment from and return to mainstream Russian society and the slow development and eventual consummation of his romance with Irina. Irina's presence figured heavily in Arkady's life throughout those books; even when she was not present, her presence was strongly felt.

With those story arcs concluded, "Havana Bay" feels a bit superfluous. Worse than that, Irina has been eliminated before the events of the novel even begin. Was this really necessary? For those of us who followed Arkady as he struggled through that difficult romance, this is a very disappointing choice on the part of the author. Couldn't Irina have been waiting at home while Renko had his Cuban adventure? Is the idea of a happy Renko so intolerable? Cut the man a little slack, Mr. Smith!

Nevertheless, this book is very enjoyable. The milieu is perfect: decadent, sleazy opportunists scheming in the midst of a crumbling society. Although Martin's Cuba isn't as fully realized as his European locales, his eye for telling detail and interesting local color remains sharp. Arkady's ally, Ofelia Osorio, is a fascinating protagonist--I would be happy to read a book about her alone. She possesses the passion for finding the truth that seems to be somewhat dimmed in Renko this time around.

Ubik 2.0 says

Romanzo datato, ma...

Havana è un romanzo che, letto oggi (scoperto in un angolo remoto della libreria...) marca la distanza che la narrativa di genere thriller, nel bene o nel male, ha percorso in un ventennio inflazionato da una pletora di opere di maestri o ben più spesso di mestieranti che ne hanno riproposto i cliché in tutte le combinazioni possibili! Forse, letto a fine secolo allorché venne pubblicato, avrebbe prodotto un effetto e un interesse che oggi è difficile provare se non al cospetto di narratori del calibro di Durrenmatt, Scerbanenco, Chandler e qualcun altro (Simenon è, come sempre, un caso a parte...).

Romanzo datato, in parole povere, ma in una certa misura M.C.Smith riesce a limitare la patina del tempo e del dejà-vu giostrando le armi del mestiere con abilità e, a differenza del mediocre "La Rosa Nera" unica altra opera che ho letto dell'autore, catturando l'attenzione col supporto di alcuni elementi di qualità.

La location di L'Avana, in primo luogo, è resa con notevole e approfondita padronanza, ben oltre il semplice sfondo esotico, ricreando un verosimile crogiuolo di esiliati, avventurieri, affaristi di ogni nazionalità e provenienza, nella fase di decadenza del castrismo. Secondo punto di forza è l'anomalo protagonista, il malinconico detective russo (post caduta del Muro) Arkadj Renko, fuori posto ai Caraibi fin dall'inconsueto abbigliamento e dall'insopprimibile depressione mal conciliabile con la diffusa allegria cubana.

Sull'altro piatto della bilancia un finale particolarmente affrettato, alcuni caratteri stereotipati, la stessa

ingiustificata lunghezza del racconto, impediscono a un discreto romanzo di rivelarsi una vera (ri)scoperta

Luca Cozzi says

Bellissimo romanzo. Martin Cruz Smith è un grande narratore e tessitore di trame coinvolgenti e sempre nuove. Il personaggio di Renko è realistico e caratterizzato con maestria a mio parere superiore a quella dimostrata da Jo Nesbo con Harry Hole. Non impeccabile la traduzione.

Peter says

A badly decomposed body is discovered surrounded by fishing gear and floating in an inner tube in Havana Bay. The deceased was a uniquely Cuban concept, a *neumatico*, a fisherman who uses an inner tube. On site at the discovery are Havana Detective Ofelia Osorio, forensic pathologist Dr. Blas, an interpreter from the Russian Embassy named Rufo Pinero, and Arkady Renko, a Russian detective who had just arrived from Moscow. The fisherman is identified as Colonel Sergei Pribluda, an officer in the SVR (the former KGB) attached to the Russian Embassy in Havana. So begins Martin Cruz Smith's *Havana Bay* (1999), the fourth in his Arkady Renko series.

Russians are unwelcome in Cuba since they ended financial support of Fidel's regime, an act of treachery in the eyes of the Cubans. Arkady is told to butt out and return to Moscow on the next flight, one week hence. This still leaves plenty of time for some local investigating. Soon there is an attempt on his life by Rufo in one of the more ironic scenes in the genre. Arkady has been depressed by his wife's recent death following an injection of the wrong medication at a Russian hospital. When he returns to his Havana apartment from the seaside, Arkady is about to kill himself by an injection when Rufo bursts in and tries to kill him. Survival instinct takes over and Arkady kills Rufo. Poor Rufo; bad timing!

Rufo's motive is unknown but now Arkady's nostrils are aquiver and the game's afoot! Was the badly decomposed corpse really Pribluda? What was Pribluda up to that led to his death? Did Pribluda really die of a heart attack as the pathologist concluded? Who wanted Arkady dead, and why? Arkady and Detective Osorio team up to get the answers. And they find that the answers include the Havana Yacht Club, operations in Angola, police corruption, and Fidel Castro.

This one will keep your interest and the pages will turn quickly.

Four Stars.

Gerald Sinstadt says

From Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown to Commissario Brunetti and Bruno, Chief of Police, by way of Maigret, Poirot and Spenser, crime fiction has given us some memorable investigators. In Arkady Renko, Martin Cruz Smith has created a policeman to stand comparison with the best.

The author conjures an atmosphere which may or may not be authentic but feels so in the reading. This is a work of fiction; no claims for authenticity are made. Reviewers seeking to make political points are missing the entertainment, not to mention overlooking prose with style and consistently apt imagery. The plot is intricate, the characters are vivid and real - Ofelia's grandmother is a joy. But Renko with his laid-back sardonic humour is the star in Cuba as he has been previously in Moscow.

Just occasionally the thought occurs that 450 pages may be fifty too many but that can be levelled at other novels not half as good as this.

Christian, Kelanth, Scala says

*Brindo alla nostra casa in rovina
ai dolori della mia vita
alla nostra solitudine insieme
E a te sollevo il bicchiere
a labbra malvagie,
che ci hanno tradito
ad occhi gelidi e spietati
e alle dure realtà della vita
che è rozza e brutale
che Dio non ci ha salvati.*

Havana, in originale "Havana Bay" è un romanzo poliziesco scritto da Martin Cruz Smith e pubblicato nel 1992. E' ambientato principalmente a Cuba. E' il quarto romanzo per l'investigatore Arkady Renko. Nello stesso anno, il romanzo ottenne il The Dashiell Hammett Awards per la migliore opera poliziesca; un anno dopo arrivò in finale al Gold Dagger Award. Cruz Smith ha dichiarato che il libro gli ha permesso di esplorare la relazione "folle" dell'America con Cuba.

Il protagonista è Arkady Renko, capo della Polizia Criminale di Mosca e figlio di un famoso generale dell'Armata Rossa, tanto disilluso dal regime brezneviano quanto poco attratto dall'Occidente. Vero erede di Marlowe dallo sguardo cinico e acuto, Renko si muove in un'Unione Sovietica prossima al disfacimento, mostrando il volto oscuro di Mosca.

La trama di questo romanzo: Renko è depresso perché la sua amata moglie Irina è morta a causa di un malinteso per incuria da parte di un medico russo e la sua infermiera e comincia a pensare al suicidio. D'improvviso viene chiamato a Cuba perché un cadavere irriconoscibile sta galleggiando nella baia dell'Avana. Solo il giorno prima, Arkady aveva ricevuto un messaggio dall'ambasciata russa che il suo amico Sergej Pribluda era scomparso da alcuni giorni. Arkady, depresso dalla recente perdita della moglie Irina, trova una siringa nella sala delle autopsie e decide di farla finita.

Proprio mentre sta per suicidarsi un interprete cubano dell'ambasciata russa tenta di pugnalarlo. Arkady usa la siringa con cui doveva suicidarsi contro il suo aggressore e si salva. L'episodio apparentemente senza senso riaccende la curiosità di Renko, che decide di scoprire perché qualcuno lo vuole morto. L'ostilità della polizia locale nei confronti di Arkady cresce, quando questi non accetta la facile soluzione proposta dalla milizia cubana e, ostinato come sempre, continua le indagini per suo conto. Purtroppo Renko non parla spagnolo, trova però un aiuto in Ofelia, detective della Policia Nacional de la Revolucion. In una Cuba affascinante, piena di Buick e donne stupende, e al tempo stesso di viveri razionati e palazzi in disfacimento, Arkady scoprirà un complotto per frodare alla Russia molti milioni di dollari. Lungo la sua strada,

l'investigatore dovrà affrontare poliziotti corrotti, eroi della Rivoluzione e americani senza scrupoli.

Cruz Smith scrive un ottimo thriller, ambientato all'Avana, di cui fa una fotografia splendida, anche se realisticamente triste: Cuba e la sua popolazione, con i suoi usi e costumi è descritta come una meta turistica sessuale, dove regna la povertà e l'ignoranza, con personaggi ben disegnati. La scrittura è avvincente, con molti colpi di scena, tipici di questo autore. Il libro è il più pessimista della serie dedicata ad Arkady Renko. Vi regna una malsana malinconia che pervade moltissime pagine.

Le storie della serie di Renko, che reputo uno dei migliori personaggi che abbia mai incontrato in poliziesco, sono costruite in maniera eccelsa, sono tutti dei buoni gialli che sconfinano nel noir e nella spy-story. Il primo romanzo del ciclo "Gorky Park" è stato definito dal Time «il thriller degli anni ottanta», e a ragione. Stra consigliato anche per le ambientazioni della Russia a cavallo tra la caduta del muro di Berlino e la nuova Russia capitalista.

Vanessa says

I'm not expert but I read a fair amount of international mysteries, partly because it's learning world history and geography the sluggard's way. The male protagonists are inevitably divorced or widowed, haunted by the past and world weary. And while I like several series (Wallander and Rebus for example), my very favorite is Martin Cruz Smith's Arkady Renko. He leaps off the page like a real person. I can predict his reactions like someone I've known for years and I adore his utterly deadpan Soviet humor. Cruz Smith's writing is of literary fiction quality and his descriptions of locales are precise and vivid-I now feel like I've seen and smelled Havana. And his unique talent for getting into the mindset of citizens of various crumbling Socialist republics is the best crash course in political science you'll ever take. This is the fourth book in the series and is my favorite so far. Love, love, love this writer.

I prefer Renko when he is gloomy and I suppose the author does as well because in the interval between the third book, Red Square and this one he has married his longtime love Irina only to see her die in a random Russian hospital clusterfuck. He has come to Havana to collect the body of his old frenemy Pribluda, whom the locals claim has died in a fishing accident when a body matching his description washes up in the bay. The local authorities claim he is a spy and are neither planning to investigate further nor happy to have a meddling Russian investigator in the mix. Renko meanwhile isn't sure that this really is his friend or that an old-school comrade like Pribluda would be caught fishing in an inner-tube Cuban style in the first place. Renko has also come to Havana intending to kill himself out of grief over Irina's death but fortunately his plans abruptly get changed and he gets sucked into the mystery of Pribluda's final hours. From there, he devotes himself to the task with his usual tenacity and gift for making enemies. What ensues is a tale of sugar cane, American expats, El Comandante, Santeria, sex tourism, rhino abuse, Cuban ballerinas and a Havana detective named Ofelia Osorio who is every bit as well-rounded and brilliant a character as Renko. If you can hear me Mr. Smith, mas Ofelia por favor.

I learned so much about Havana's history and the hard times that hit Cuba following the Soviet collapse-what Cubans officially call the Special Period. Meanwhile, one Soviet character blames the Soviet economy's collapse on keeping Cuba's "floating circus" alive. The story is a typical labyrinthine Cruz Smith tale and I can't say for sure that I understand exactly why everything happened as it did. But I don't care. While other reviewers complain that story ends abruptly-and it does-this is fitting as it's an abrupt conclusion for Renko too. Perfection.

Sandi says

Another excellent story featuring Russian investigator Arkady Renko. The setting is Cuba and since the time period is after the break-up of the Soviet Union Russians are not the most popular and Renko's quest for information does not make him many friends. I was glad to find an older audio version read by **Frank Muller** who was one of the best.

C-shaw says

This book was a bit out of my usual comfort zone, so to speak. The protagonist, Arkady Renko, is pretty dark and the story rather complicated. I enjoyed reading about Havana and life there after the Cubans under Fidel parted ways with the Russians. *Havana Bay* is an interesting and entertaining story, very compelling.

James says

This time Arkady, griefstricken again, continues his amateur attempts at suicide in as the title indicates Havana. The bay incidentally is involved to the extent that a dead Russian has been found floating there. In the grand tradition of heroes giving a damn when they are repeatedly warned off instead of contenting himself with the identification of the body and going home he seeks instead to find out why. Why the doggedness, why not just mind one's own business say I can tell I am not wanted and tootie do. It always feels a little odd to me, like when people move into a haunted house the walls start to bleed or a cushion hovers. Me personally I am getting out of there as soon as I can. Cowardly aside this is a good solid thriller, good twist and some lush if slightly overfevered depictions of Cuba. The whole formulaic nature of the genre is a little hollow at times.
