

A story = Something happens to someone.

A 'good' story = Something interesting happens to someone you sympathise with.

A 'great' story = Someone interesting overcomes great odds to achieve something worth while.



CHILD 44

BY TOM ROB SMITH



THE BASICS

- Set in deepest, darkest Stalinist Russia
- A boy is murdered but the authorities will not allow this fact to be acknowledged
- Leo Demidov (decorated war hero, MGB agent, leader) becomes wedged between a rock and a hard place
- His life is tipped upside down and his survival is at threat
- Any number of twists and turns in the plot
- Great stress and tension builds towards the end

INTRIGUING EXPOSITION

- 1930's Russia. STARVATION!!! Two boys hunt and kill a cat for food. [Twist #1] . One of the boys is snatched by a 'dark figure'. End. (more to come later)

THE HERE AND NOW

- Two boys are playing games. One boy storms off after the game gets a little out of hand.
- His body is later discovered. 'A terrible accident' say the authorities. He was struck by the passing train.
- We meet Leo Demidov who is sent to 'smooth the waters' as murder is not possible in a truly equal society (Communism). The boy is the son of a work colleague.

THE BALL STARTS ROLLING

- Leo D lives a very comfortable life as an MGB agent.
- He is being sabotaged by a disgruntled colleague who wants his job.
- Despite the efforts of his underlings Leo captures a runaway suspect and is seen as a bit of a hero.

THE GUTS

- Leo's wife, Raisa, becomes clouded in suspicion. (not a good thing in Stalinist Russia)
- Leo / Raisa's life spirals downward – both as a couple and because of what the authorities do to them. (revelation of past betrayals)
- They are demoted and banished. Lucky not to be going to a Gulag.
- At the discovery of a dead body in his new town, Leo starts connecting the dots to his friends son's murder.

CLIMAX AND TENSION

- Leo and Raisa risk their lives by travelling back to Moscow.
- Leo tries to investigate while going 'under the radar'.
- A pattern of murders is discovered. His friend's son is 'Child 44' – the 44th victim of the same murderer. Trains are the like in seeming geographically diverse murders.
- The authorities close in on Leo / Raisa.
- What will happen???

TWIST

- There is a rather large revelation at the end. This sews up the loose ends left by the exposition.

EVALUATION [WHAT I LIKED]

- Well drawn characters (sympathy for protagonist, but not a 'perfect person')
- Strong themes (Power, corruption, fear, violence, family and an examination of 'two Russias' – urban / Moscow [control] vs rural [subversive and resistant])
- Strong and interesting plot (although very complex)
- Educational. I learnt a little more about that time / place.

IT DOES LEAD ON TO THE REMAINDER OF THE TRILOGY

