The Ghost: A Novel by Robert Harris

The Moment I Heard How McAra Died, I Should Have Walked Away. I Know That Now.

The stunning new novel from the No. 1 bestselling author of Fatherland; Enigma; Archangel; Pompeii and Imperium.

“The moment I heard how McAra died I should have walked away. I can see that now. I should have said, ‘Rick, I’m sorry, this isn’t for me, I don’t like the sound of it,’ finished my drink and left. But he was such a good storyteller, Rick — I often thought he should have been the writer and I the agent — that once he’d started talking there was never any question I wouldn’t listen, and by the time he had finished, I was done for.”

After five books set firmly in the past, Robert Harris returns with a contemporary novel that brings the reader face to face with some of the biggest issues of our time — the result is a gripping and genuinely thrilling read.

From the Hardcover edition.

**Personal Review: The Ghost: A Novel by Robert Harris**

Robert Harris' Fatherland: A Novel (Mortalis) was one of the last century's finest novels in my estimation. In 'The Ghost,' Harris again shows that he's a master of conjuring up wonderfully almost-real-life experiences and playing them out in thrilling, suspenseful narratives.

Harris' ex-PM Adam Lang has Blair-like charisma and a similar fall in standing due to his role in a war against terror and a decision regarding extraordinary rendition. Lang's wife, Ruth, is said to be the smarter of the two, not standing for office but influencing career, campaign and policy behind the scenes (hello, Cheri). Spin doctors, lawyers and personal aides flesh out the former PM's retinue.
New to Lang's inner circle is Lang's would be ghostwriter, named, um, well, hold on, it's in here somewhere...

Ah. We _never learn_ this character's name. After 400 pages of fiction, and with his protagonist appearing on almost every page, Harris skilfully dodges revealing the man's name. Every other character either already knows the writer, or - in the case of Adam Lang - refers to 'the ghost' in an indirect way like 'man.' The Ghost mistakenly interprets this as a sign of Lang's comfortableness with him. Others pop his bubble: Lang's just terrible with names and has forgotten yours. [Another novel that used this same technique to good effect: Joanne Harris' Gentlemen and Players: A Novel (P.S.).]

This feat is more than a parlor trick by Harris: The Ghost is meant to be an unseen force shaping Lang's work-in-progress memoir. [That's why 'The Ghost' - the novels' original UK release name - is better than the US release's 'Ghost Writer.' That title is akin to redundant phrases like 'ATM Machine' or 'PIN Number'.] Lang's efforts have stalled (cough,cough). The Ghost is here to reboot the effort. Indeed, The Ghost's first review of Lang's draft with his previous collaborator reveals a dreadfully boring, leaden text. While our protagonist is warming to the task, larger forces in The Hague and Washington (and a certain Virginia suburb) are about to turn Lang's life upside down.

The Ghost - heretofore known for his light confections with aging rockers and others of that ilk - shows surprising gumption and nerve as an investigator. It's this steeliness that leads him into a web of intrigue and danger that he could not have foreseen. As the novel's first two lines ominously predestine: "The moment I heard how McAra died, I should have walked away. I know that now."

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