

DEN OF THE BLACK DRAGON

By Larry V. Franklin

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REVIEWED BY

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When young Stepon Kutuzov steals a roll of microfilm from Central Records of the KGB's successor organization, the Russian Federal Service in Moscow, he sets in motion a chilling chain of events, which, if the microfilm's contents becomes public, will expose the existence of a Soviet sleeper cell, a spy unit clandestinely planted in the United States, embarrass Russia, and cause several political leaders to be toppled from power. From its powerful opening, the reader is pulled in, compelled to turn page after page to learn what happens next.

In this action-oriented thriller, author Larry V. Franklin, a former intelligence specialist who saw combat in Vietnam, who is also a retired police detective, has written of things about which he knows. He spins a tale around the five-member sleeper cell, Den of the Red Dragon, which had been planted in America in '79 during the Cold War. Its assignment? To submerge deeply under cover and wait - for its wake-up call. But its creators did not foresee the demise of the Soviet Union. When all of the Dragon cells were allegedly disbanded in '89 by diplomatic agreement between Russia and the allied powers, Red Dagon could not be contacted because its "father" had died, taking with him to his grave the method of reaching team members.

When Colonel Nikolai Pasternak, aide to the Director of Russian National Defense, is told that a microfilm record has been stolen and might surface in the hands of either German or Polish Intelligence, he realizes how embarrassing this revelation could be for Russia, and how damaging it could be for his boss and himself. He decides that they must find and kill all five of Black Dragon's members, and then forget that the Den had ever existed.

But Vasili Stravinsky, a senior member of Russia's new Parliament, has other ideas. He believes that the Black Dragon team, strategically placed as it is, will be useful when Russian hard-liners, himself included, return to power. Complicating matters, his niece's son, Dmitri, is one of Black Dragon's sleeper agents, now using the cover of a Houston police detective, John Burrell.

But Pasternak prevails and dispatches Russia's top assassin, Andre Petrovich, and a squad of assassins, to do the job.

Meanwhile, the American CIA learns of the existence of the Black Dragon cell and becomes a player in this deadly game. Headed by Section Chief Ron Richardson, it decides to find the Dragon members and bring them in - alive, thus triggering a race between Petrovich and the CIA to locate Black Dragon's surviving members.

As Petrovich and his band of assassins proceed with their gruesome work, Burrell, who had become convinced that the cell would never be activated, is enjoying

his life in America, with job, wife and family. He is shocked to discover the deaths of two cell members, upon whom he has been checking periodically. Realizing what is happening, he makes contact with the beautiful Ekatarina, whose cover names is Kathy Hempstead. Together, to the consternation of Burrell's angry wife, and the Houston Police Department, he and Kathy embark on a dangerous journey. They must remain alive, stop the Russian assassins from killing them, and stay out of the hands of the CIA.

This is a gripping novel of intrigue about an entirely plausible residual issue left over from the Cold War. An intense drama that you will enjoy. I heartily recommend it.