

Top Reviews from the United States

(From 1st Edition)

Jill Rey reviewed the book in the United States on May 10, 2023.

“The Ryzhkov Vendetta” is author Barry L. Becker’s second novel in the Mark Ericksen thriller series. While book one, “The Ericksen Connection” brought with it nuclear suitcases, book two packs a punch full of cyanide in forms I never knew possible. From California to Russia and Sweden, and scenic stops in between, this quick and thrilling read brought non-stop action page after page.

Despite being the second in the series, “The Ryzhkov Vendetta” read successfully as a standalone. While nary a moment of calm, this second book brought friends from Mossad, the American alphabet of agencies, and Russians as Ryzhkov sought to carry out his agenda. Kicking off with the wedding of Mark Ericksen and Kate McDonald, the honeymoon ends quickly as Anthony Ferrari soon puts a target on Mark’s and his friends’ backs. Jampacked with assassins, evasive actions, and plans, readers are taken across continents as the spy games continue. From the luxurious Menlo Park to Moscow and many European cities in between, “The Ryzhkov Vendetta” keeps readers on the edge of their seats as Mark hopes to outrun the hit on his head and that of his friends for good.

Becker is so talented at bringing his own behind-the-scenes knowledge to the forefront of his novels. Whether it be character descriptions or industry insights, his books read like a movie as the scenes play across the reader’s mind. The political games, adversaries, and acquaintances wind together into a fast-

paced espionage thriller. Read this as a perfect complement to book one, or pick it up as a standalone; either way, you are sure to enjoy the ride.

Marshwj reviewed the book in the United States on February 16, 2023. Action-packed is an understatement: *The Ryzhkov Vendetta* moves around the world in staccato bursts, taking us into the seats of power in Washington and Russia in a deadly game of secret operations and assassins in which no mercy is ever shown. Becker's sturdy hero, Mark Ericksen, is targeted by a Russian oligarch in a revenge mission, and the tension mounts as sleeper agents and foreign terrorists have him in their sights.

Becker loads the book with terrific details, everything from wine vintages and hotels to specific addresses and technologies; he has certainly done his homework. Sentences and chapters are short, ramping up the pace as the deadly games and their players move around in Europe, the Middle East, and the U.S. over several years. Becker also trades heavily on American politics and a Russian president modeled squarely on Vladimir Putin and his obsession with undermining the West.

The Ryzhkov Vendetta

2nd Edition

A Mark Ericksen Thriller Book 2

Barry L. Becker

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The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”
Sun Tzu, author of The Art of War

Chapter One

PARIS

ON MARCH 21, 2011, ANTHONY “TONY” FERRARI was seated in the Four Seasons Hotel George V’s Le Cinq Restaurant. He had just finished his breakfast of café au lait, a croissant, Norwegian smoked salmon, baguette, jams, and orange juice. He spotted the waiter and motioned for his check. He then heard his secure cell phone ringing. On the third ring, he checked the caller ID and noticed the call was from a German cellphone number. He picked it up and said, “I’ll call you back in five minutes.”

A few minutes later, the waiter handed him the bill.

“Thank you,” Ferrari said. He placed thirty-five dollars on the table, picked up his briefcase and suitcase, and walked toward the lobby.

Ferrari stood about six feet tall and maintained a lean, athletic build. The fifty-two-year-old looked distinguished with his wavy dark brown hair, inquisitive dark brown eyes, Roman nose, and strands of gray by his temples. He fits in at the luxurious and opulent hotel, where celebrities, diplomats, business executives, royalty, and politicians stay. He wore a brown leather calfskin Italian sports jacket, a designer blue-and-gold dress shirt open at the collar, and navy blue casual slacks. Completing his suave, dignified appearance were expensive brown leather Testoni shoes.

Ferrari noticed an empty chair in the lobby. After sitting down and placing his luggage to the side, he picked up his cellphone and called the number back.

“*Gerhard Richter* speaking,” the voice said in German.

“*Wolfgang* here,” Ferrari said.

“All right. When you arrive at St. Pancras Station this afternoon, tell the taxi driver to go to the Starbucks on Caledonian Road. Tell him to wait a few minutes. Go inside and look for my brother *Egon*. He is expecting you. He is in his thirties, wearing a blue Columbia sports jacket and a Chelsea FC cap. *Egon* will sit down and raise his right hand once he spots you. He will give you a gift and my cellphone number. When you arrive at the hotel, please call that number.”

Ferrari had already met *Gerhard* in Monte Carlo three months earlier, and they had agreed to use these names.

“Affirmative,” Ferrari said in German. He figured Russian Intelligence had accumulated hundreds of pictures of him. At the same time, he was stationed at the US Embassy in Moscow, and, more recently, he was chief of station at the US Embassy in Bern.

Ferrari thought *Egon should easily recognize me*.

Ferrari had spent the last seven days working on security issues with his client at their Berlin and Paris headquarters. Tomorrow, he would finish up with his client’s London headquarters, located in the Mayfair district. Ferrari checked out of the hotel. The bellman waved the first taxi in line to move up the hotel driveway.

Wearing aviator-style sunglasses, Ferrari arrived at the Gare du Nord train station carrying his suitcase and briefcase. He glanced at his Omega dive watch and noted 10:45 am. It was a habit of his to check his watch when waiting in lines.

He stood in line for several minutes before passing through security and customs and proceeding to a waiting area. He put down his suitcase and briefcase and called a secure landline phone number at the US Embassy in London on his encrypted cell phone.

“Hello, *Bob*, it’s *Mario Ivanelli*,” he said, using his old alias.

“Hello, *Mario*. When you arrive, please call my cellphone number.”

“Affirmative.”

He boarded the Eurostar and found his way to the Standard Premier section. The train departed at 11:13 am. It would arrive in London at 12:39

pm. Ferrari glanced around the entire compartment and noticed a couple in their early forties with their two children sitting across the aisle from him. They looked happy and wore expensive clothes. He thought about his ex-wife and two kids, a fifteen-year-old son and a twenty-four-year-old daughter who taught kindergarten. When he and his wife divorced three years ago, it was hardest for his young son. Over the years, being away from his family had created lots of stress in their marriage and the danger he faced in his line of work.

Over the past three years, selling their two-thousand-square-foot house on Douglass Avenue in upper-middle-class Falls Church, Virginia, the divorce costs, the damage caused by the 2008 Wall Street financial meltdown on their two rental properties, splitting the assets, alimony, and now paying off college loans created a financial burden. Seven months ago, his eighty-year-old father had an accident, rendering him paralyzed from the waist down. He and his brother shared the eight-thousand-dollar monthly expenses for his father's nursing home in Florida. His brother lived close to their father and took an active role in assisting him.

Ferrari's thoughts were interrupted as the Eurostar sped through the Chunnel, separating France from England. He marveled at the Eurostar train's speed, which reached 180 miles an hour in spots. The distance from Paris to London via Chunnel was approximately 214 miles.

LONDON

Upon arriving at St. Pancras Station at 12:40 pm, Ferrari carried his suitcase and briefcase to an awaiting taxi. He asked the driver to take him to Starbucks on Caledonian Road. Ten minutes later, he arrived and spotted *Egon*. They had a brief conversation, and *Egon* gave him a gift.

He left Starbucks and jumped back into the taxi. Ferrari removed his sunglasses as he entered St. Ermin's Hotel on Caxton Street by St. James Park. Registering for his room, he produced his passport and chatted with the front desk clerk. The hotel had the distinction of being used during World War II as the headquarters of the British Intelligence Services.

Since it was too early for check-in, he handed his luggage and briefcase to the bell captain to place in security. He took the two tags from the bell captain and walked to the lobby sofas to sit down. After opening the gift box, Ferrari spent a few minutes familiarizing himself with the burner cell phone inside. He walked outside the hotel and called *Gerhard's* new burner cellphone number, which Egon had given him.

"Hello *Gerhard*, it's *Wolfgang*," Ferrari said.

"*Wolfgang*, take a taxi to the London Eye. Look for a man wearing a Chelsea football club cap and carrying a Nikon camera with a telescopic lens. I'll be in line around 3:00 pm."

"Check out my mustache and Chelsea football cap. See you soon, *Gerhard*."

He thought for a moment. Sweat ran down his forehead. *Why am I doing this? If I change my mind, what can they do to me? What if I offer to pay them back?*

Ferrari re-entered the hotel, saw an unoccupied leather chair by the fireplace in the lobby, walked toward it, and sat down. He thought about Alexander Ryzhkov. He had first met him when Ryzhkov served as the military attaché with a general's rank in the Russian Embassy in Berlin. Ferrari served in the American Embassy from 1997-1998. They met at various foreign functions and enjoyed socializing. During 2007-2008, when he worked at the US Embassy in Moscow, he renewed his contact with the Russian billionaire.

In August 2010, they met again at a United Nations function in Geneva. After a few drinks, Ryzhkov mentioned that he had something important to tell him but that this was not the place to talk. He asked Ferrari if he could meet him in Monte Carlo in December. He had just resigned from the Agency and felt less pressure from being under surveillance. Ryzhkov discovered through Russian Intelligence in 2009 that *Mario Ivanelli's* real name was Anthony Ferrari.

Ferrari had reservations about meeting with a powerful Russian oligarch and a close friend of Prime Minister Gorshkov. However, he agreed, and a meeting was set up at the Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo, Monaco, for Tuesday morning, December 7, 2010. He was unsure if Ryzhkov was interested in spying for the

Americans. How could a former general of the GRU, the Russian Military Intelligence Service's Main Intelligence Directorate, and a multi-billionaire energy CEO become a traitor? Plus, when Ferrari factored in that Ryzhkov was a childhood friend of Russia's prime minister, it did not make any sense. Ferrari realized Ryzhkov wanted something from him.

On December 6th, Ferrari arrived in Monaco and met with several bank managers in Monte Carlo about opening a private numbered bank account.

On the 7th, they met in Ferrari's room. After spending several minutes exchanging pleasantries and drinking Stolichnaya vodka, Ryzhkov looked straight into his eyes and, with a stern voice, told him in English, "I need the names of those people who were on the CIA mission called *Operation Avenging Eagles*."

Ferrari was in debt, but at that moment, he was interested to hear what the oligarch might offer him. However, he had to be extremely careful because the Russians were masters of blackmail, intimidation, and murder. At that moment, he thought that the Agency never treated him with a faster career path, and it would not take long for the Russians to eventually get this information. Ferrari expected he would be assigned to the prestigious post of station chief in London in 2009, but CIA director Sullivan appointed Washington instead. He was tired of being in debt and now realized he was crossing a line that spelled traitor.

"General, it will cost you three hundred thousand dollars." Ryzhkov did not want to haggle with him on this figure.

"Tony, I will give you one hundred thousand dollars as a down payment in cash right now, and the balance of two hundred thousand will be wired to a private Monte Carlo bank of your choosing after I receive the information."

"Alexander, you got a deal."

Ryzhkov opened his suitcase, took out one hundred thousand dollars, and placed them into an expensive Italian leather case. "The money is in here," he said as he pointed to the briefcase and handed it to Ferrari.

Ryzhkov stood and knocked on the door to the suite's second bedroom. His head of security appeared and surprised Ferrari.

"Let me introduce you to my chief-of-staff, Viktor Sorokin. He will be a key person who will work with you."

Ferrari reached out with his right hand and shook Sorokin's hand. "Glad to meet you."

"From this point on, I'll call you *Wolfgang*, and I'm *Gerhard Richter*," said Sorokin in German.

"Understood."

Ferrari turned to face Ryzhkov and reverted to English.

"I have made several inquiries, and the bank I will be using is Monch and Schneider Private Bank in Monte Carlo. After I deposit the money this afternoon, I'll provide you with my bank's private numbered account."

"I'll be in my room awaiting your call," the oligarch said. They shook hands, and Ferrari departed.

Ferrari thought this would be a one-time effort and worth the risk. He called Ryzhkov's Swiss encrypted cellphone at 41-41-5536428 on his Virginia cell number. The oligarch maintained a second home and office in Zug. After he answered the phone, Ferrari provided him with his private numbered account.

An elderly, well-dressed man in a suit and tie walked past him and sat on the sofa about ten feet from him. He lost his train of thought. Ferrari glanced at his watch and held his cellphone up to his face.

Ferrari then called his friend *Bob's* direct encrypted Virginia cellphone number. The man at the US Embassy in London picked up the phone. "*Bob* speaking."

"*Mario* here."

"When did you arrive? "A few hours ago."

"*Mario*, please hold a few seconds while I take this call."

"No problem."

A minute later, he pressed his cellphone again. "I didn't recognize this cellphone number when I picked up the call. Is it a burner phone?"

"Yes, it is."

"Okay, is seven a good time for dinner?" Bob asked.

"Yes. Where?"

"Let's meet at the Grill at the Dorchester Hotel."

"Okay," said Ferrari and hung up.

He walked up to the bellmen at the front entrance of the hotel. “Please get me a taxi.”

“Yes, sir.”

Ferrari arrived at a McDonald’s and went into the men’s restroom. He placed a thick mustache above his upper lip, a Chelsea football club cap on his head, and then left the fast-food restaurant. Ferrari walked several blocks before approaching the London Eye Ferris wheel. His brow was wet with sweat. He realized his meeting with *Gerhard* was crossing the red line. From this day forward, his life could be in danger. After surveying the area where hundreds of people lined up, Ferrari finally saw a man with the Chelsea football cap on his head. In his early forties, the Slavic-looking man had blondish-brown hair, a long, thin nose, high cheekbones, and cold blue-gray eyes. He was about 6’2” and powerfully built like a gymnast. Ferrari walked up to the man, smiled, and said in German, “Good to see you again.”

Gerhard smiled back. They waited in line for about ten minutes before entering the London Eye capsule, which overlooked the Thames River. Ferrari and *Gerhard* moved to the farthest point facing the bridge and the Parliament building. Five minutes into the ride, Ferrari handed him a small tin box of breath mints. *Gerhard* placed the box in his inside jacket pocket.

“In the mint box is a USB drive with all the details, names, addresses, etc. It is encrypted in the agreed-upon software the boss recommended. Please remember the name *EyeD4 Systems* in Wilsonville, Oregon, and their key employees, Mark Ericksen and Lars Wahlberg,” Ferrari said.

Gerhard shook his head, smiled, and whispered into his ear, “In three days, your money will be in your bank account.”

“Thank you.”

When the ride was over, each man went their separate way.

Ferrari entered a hotel near the Parliament building, darted to the men’s room, opened a stall door, removed his mustache, and threw it into the trash. After exiting the hotel, he walked toward the Parliament building and hailed a taxi to his hotel. Having spent nine years as a United States military intelligence officer and the last twenty-one with the Central Intelligence Agency, he knew his knowledge and expertise would be an asset to the

American defense community. His retirement from the Agency was official on November 15, 2010.

On January 15, 2011, his firm, *AUF Consulting Group*, focused on international risk and business intelligence consulting. A prestigious Washington DC law firm retained his consulting company to handle its aerospace and defense corporation clients. The aerospace corporation's worldwide headquarters resided in Reston, Virginia.

At seven in the evening, Ferrari spotted *Richmond*, walked toward him, shook hands, and went to the Grill. *Richmond's* four-person security detail followed the men. *Richmond* was an African American, about fifty years old, approximately 5'10," muscular, and dressed in a three-piece dark blue pin-striped suit. He had large brown eyes and a neat, trim mustache. *Richmond* spent twelve years in the US Army as a 5th Special Forces unit member. When he left the service as a major, he was recruited by the CIA in 1996.

Richmond was the CIA chief of station in London, and his name was an alias. They followed the host to a table covered in white linens. The host provided them with the Grill's menu for the evening. He looked forward to meeting his old friend. The last thing Ferrari did not want to discuss was his domestic violence charges cited in the 2008 divorce.

"How's retirement, Tony?"

"I'm a business intelligence consultant on retainer with a prestigious Washington DC law firm. My first project was with *Engstrom-Knight Aerospace*, one of their major defense contractors."

"I'll bet the money is better than what we get paid."

"I'm happy with the consulting fees," Ferrari said, smiling. "Where are you living these days?" *Richmond* asked.

"I bought a condo in Alexandria on Madison Street. It's a two-bedroom, two-bath unit with a pool, a gym, and a view."

"Glad to hear you're doing well," said *Richmond*.

They had met years ago at the CIA during their German language training.

In 1997, *Richmond* moved to the US Embassy in Berlin as a political attaché', while Ferrari went to the US Embassy in Vienna in the same capacity. 2004-2006, the men worked at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Both men and

their wives socialized and were good friends during this time. They both enjoyed talking about their military experience during *Operation Desert Storm*. 2007-2008, Ferrari became the political attaché' at the US Embassy in Moscow, Russia. He spent eight months at CIA headquarters in 2008 and his last two years, 2009-2010, as CIA chief of station at the US Embassy in Bern, Switzerland.

The waiter approached their table with two glasses of water and asked, "What would you gentlemen like to start with?"

"I would like to order the Dover sole with the seasonal vegetables and a bowl of blue lobster chowder soup," said *Richmond*.

"I'll also go with the blue lobster chowder soup, the Black Angus beef fillet, and your potatoes and seasonal vegetables," said Ferrari.

The waiter asked, "How would you like your Black Angus cooked?"

"Medium, please."

"Have you had a chance to look at the wine list?" asked the waiter.

Richmond replied, "Just pick a nice Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa."

"We have several exquisite Cabernets from that area," the waiter replied. "They start at ninety-five British pounds and go up."

"Please get us one in that price range."

"I'll have it brought to your table shortly," the waiter replied. "*Bob*, when are you planning on retiring?" Ferrari asked.

"My wife is pushing me to retire next year, but I want to stay with the Agency for a few more years."

"Then what would you like to do after you retire?"

"Not sure. Probably work for a lobbyist on K Street or a defense contractor."

He told Ferrari his real name a few years ago. Ken Washington and Tony Ferrari worked in the shadow world, and their real names while in the employ of the CIA were classified as top-secret. Ferrari hoped Washington would volunteer if he had heard rumors of another mole in the CIA but decided not to ask.

Over the past thirty years, the CIA has discovered three moles within its ranks: Howard E. Lee, Aldrich Ames, and Jim Nicholson. During that time, the FBI has uncovered a mole within its own ranks: Robert Hanssen. Those convicted Russian spies did devastating damage to the United States of

America. MI6 had moles like Kim Philby. The KGB had Oleg Gordievsky, who spied for Britain's MI6, and Adolph Tolkachev, who spied for the CIA. Both men did significant damage to Russia.

Ferrari looked at Washington and said, "Have you heard anything from your sources about Igor Kublanov's life being in danger?"

Washington looked up with surprise and shrugged. "No, I haven't heard anything from our Russian assets."

"I heard he secretly supports the opposition in next year's presidential elections," said Ferrari.

Washington said, "If he wants to continue owning an energy company and enjoying his billions, he shouldn't underestimate Prime Minister Mikhail Gorshkov."

Ferrari nodded, "Gorshkov will have no trouble winning the presidential election. He is definitely in total control."

"I agree."

Two hours passed after enjoying the meal, wine, and good conversation. The CIA station chief paid for the dinner. They left the restaurant with the security detail in tow. They got into the limo, drove to Ferrari's hotel, and dropped him off.

Ferrari expected the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) to have a case officer or two following them. He would not be surprised to find the British Domestic Secret Intelligence Service (MI5) case officers following the Russians. He knew the games and the dangers of espionage.

Chapter Two

PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

ON MARCH 23, 2011, POUL KASTRUP, CEO, AND founder of *Cyberburst Communications* was surrounded by Logan Mitchell, the Executive Vice President/COO, and Albert Alioto, the CFO. They were seated around a large redwood table at their headquarters on Page Mill Road in Palo Alto.

Kastrup founded the company in 1995 after a successful marketing management career in the aerospace and defense industry. His last position was as vice president of Raytheon.

“I know you’re extremely high on Mark Ericksen for this position,” Mitchell said to Kastrup, “but do you believe he is the right candidate?”

“Your candidate at *A7 Aerospace Systems* is excellent, but Ericksen is well-connected within the Department of Defense and the Intelligence community.” Kastrup looked like a Marine drill sergeant, with a full head of wavy silver-gray hair, a jutting jaw, and hairy eyebrows with piercing, sparkling light blue eyes. He was of average height and weight, with a lean and athletic build, high cheekbones, and a trim beard.

Staring down at both men and with an authoritative voice, Kastrup said,

“Ericksen not only served with distinction as a Navy SEAL Team Six officer, but for the past nine years, he has worked for three defense contractors, delivering impressive results. He joined *EyeD4 Systems* in 2006 as their senior vice president of marketing and sales, and their sales significantly increased.

When we acquired the company in November 2009, we promoted him to President and CEO. The company’s sales went from \$7 million in 2009 and

will reach about 50 million dollars by the end of this September. That is proven leadership!” Kastrup abruptly looked at his executive team and continued, “I’ve made my decision, and that’s final, gentlemen!”

Mitchell looked grim. “Poul, we’re going to support your decision.” The next day, Mark Ericksen woke up at 6:00 am, put on his jogging suit, sneakers, and Oregon State University baseball cap, and left his hotel room. The handsome Danish-born, sandy gold-haired, blue-eyed muscular- built forty-year-old was an inch over six feet, with high cheekbones and a Hollywood movie actor’s look. He left the Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel on Sand Hill Road and ran at a good clip until he reached the Stanford Shopping Center. He stopped, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and began the jog back up the hill. Returning to his room, he took a cold shower and put on a sharp dress suit, a white shirt, and a blue tie.

Kastrup, Mitchell, and Alioto were seated around the conference table in the CEO’s office. The time was 8:30 am, and the intercom buzzed.

“Mr. Kastrup, Mr. Ericksen has arrived in the headquarters’ lobby,” the executive assistant said.

“Please have the security officer issue him a badge and escort him to the fifth floor.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Department of Defense had granted *Cyberburst Communications* a facility clearance, enabling top-secret security clearances for several departments within its headquarters and several manufacturing plants and divisions.

When the elevator arrived on the fifth floor, Ericksen walked twenty feet to the executive office door. A receptionist saw him through the video camera outside the secure lobby office. She pressed a button that opened the door to the executive office. She called Kastrup’s staff assistant to meet her there. The staff assistant opened the thick oak door, entered, and closed the door. She met Ericksen and turned to face the iris biometrics system on the wall next to the door.

The staff assistant approached the unit, looked directly into the iris camera, optically scanned her iris in real-time, and, within a few seconds,

matched her template stored in the CPU of the biometrics system. This process activated the door shunt that opened the oak door to the top-secret offices.

Ericksen walked confidently into Kastrup's spacious wood-paneled executive office. After making eye contact with Mitchell and the chief financial officer, Ericksen shook hands with everyone. He sat opposite Kastrup and looked directly at him.

"Mark, we would like to offer you the position of vice president of strategic planning and business development. This position's primary responsibility is analyzing and evaluating emerging biometrics and satellite espionage technology companies. We're interested in these fields for potential acquisitions," said Kastrup.

Ericksen gently nodded his head. Then, Alioto gave Kastrup the compensation package to review.

Kastrup continued, "The starting salary is \$400,000 plus fifteen thousand shares of *Cyberburst Communications*. You already own twenty-five thousand shares from *EyeD4 Systems*. If you accept our offer, you need to start on August 1st. Would you be interested in joining our company?"

Ericksen broke into a big smile. "I am grateful for this opportunity and gladly accept your generous offer."

The other men stood to offer congratulations. "Welcome aboard," Mitchell said.

"Congratulations," Alioto said.

Everyone left the office except Ericksen and Kastrup. Displayed on the wall were Kastrup's college diploma, a B.S. degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and Defense Industry Association honors.

Photos of his wife, two adult children, and grandchildren were on a redwood credenza table.

"We're looking forward to attending your upcoming wedding in May." Ericksen smiled, "You'll have a wonderful time."

Ericksen boarded a flight to Portland on Alaska Airlines from San Jose International Airport four hours later. He had a remarkable history over the past decade. If it were not for his last operation in Afghanistan, he probably

would still be in the Navy and might have reached the rank of commander by this time.

In April 2002, Ericksen was second-in-command of an elite tier-one Bravo team consisting of eighteen operators of the Joint Special Operations Command, JSOC, departing out of Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan, on a high-level target operation. He was a navy lieutenant of *DEVGRU*, commonly known as SEAL Team Six, who was all about duty, honor, and country. His loyalty focused on the mission and his teammates.

During that operation, his commanding officer of the Bravo team, Jeb Templeton, a Delta Force major, was wounded. Ericksen saved his life and took over the mission. Several men died in that operation, and the deputy commander of JSOC ordered him to kill his Afghan intelligence officer, who was part of the team. The commander, a bird colonel, told him they received information from a Pashtun village elder who claimed the Afghan intel officer was a Taliban member. Ericksen worked with this intel officer and did not believe it. Thus, killing him was the furthest thing from his mind.

The commander was furious with Ericksen, who ignored the kill order. Several minutes later, the colonel lied to him and said he received Agency intercepts confirming the allegations. Ericksen had no choice but to kill the Afghan intelligence officer.

The next day after the Bravo team's briefing, he learned from Dex, the CIA operations chief at Bagram Air Base, that they never had intercepts on the Afghan intel officer. Ericksen's JSOC deputy commander lied to him. He could not ask for an investigation into the commander's criminal malfeasance because the one witness to this travesty was involved in the conspiracy. From that day forward, his guilt and depression led to PTSD. To make matters worse, a year earlier, his wife died in an automobile accident.

In May 2002, he resigned from his commission at the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development headquarters at Dam Creek, Virginia. Ericksen was awarded the Silver Star in 2002 for bravery during *Operation Enduring Freedom* and received the Purple Heart from a classified mission in North Africa a year earlier. Over the next several years, he worked for three defense contractors, maintaining his top-secret security clearance while concealing his PTSD.

THE RYZHKOV VENDETTA

Four years later, Templeton, who was Deputy Director for the Department of Defense's Biometrics and Forensics Enterprise, recommended him for the senior vice president of marketing position at *EyeD4 Systems* in Wilsonville, Oregon.

In July 2009, *EyeD4 Systems'* CEO sold the company to *Cyberburst Communications*, and Ericksen became the CEO in November. Now, seventeen months after becoming the CEO of a subsidiary of the Palo Alto corporation, he has accepted a senior management position at corporate headquarters.

WILSONVILLE, OREGON

Ericksen arrived at his office at 5:00 pm. He briefed his three top officers at *EyeD4 Systems* about accepting a senior marketing position at *Cyberburst Communications* in Palo Alto. Sitting in that meeting were Jeb Templeton, his Senior Vice President of Marketing; Lars Wahlberg, his COO; Sofia Kastrup, the Chief Financial Officer; and the daughter of Poul Kastrup.

Kastrup stipulated only one condition for acquiring *EyeD4 Systems* from the privately held company's founder: Hamilton had to hire his daughter, Sofia Kastrup. Since Sofia Kastrup had an MBA from Harvard University and was a CPA with a Silicon Valley software company, its CEO and founder had no objections. A Portland law firm recruited his daughter's husband, and Poul Kastrup could not be happier about their move to Oregon.

They were excited about Ericksen's new position. He told them he would start on August 1st and recommended them for new positions within the company with *Cyberburst Communications'* top management's approval.

WEST LINN, OREGON

In October 2010, Kate McDonald, an attractive thirty-six-year-old redhead with sparkling green eyes, moved in with Ericksen and joined an executive recruiting firm in Lake Oswego, Oregon's banking and financial sector. Shortly after that, they became engaged. She was happy about their upcoming

wedding in May. McDonald's exciting life started when she left her home in Sandpoint, Idaho, to attend Stanford University. She was a member of the Pi Beta Phi Sorority. The CIA approached McDonald after she graduated from Stanford University in 2000 with a degree in international relations and German language proficiency. After extensive vetting, they hired and trained her a year later in their directorate of operations. She assumed several aliases over her brief career at the CIA. Her first assignment was as a political counselor at the American Embassy in Berlin. 2005-2007, under a pseudonym (*Elizabeth Caldwell*), she attended the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Switzerland and received an MBA in banking and finance.

Proficient in both French and German, she landed a job with a Swiss firm in Geneva. One year later, she became a manager at *Prentice and Aubert*, a New York executive recruiting firm and a shell company for the CIA. In that position, she recruited talented Swiss candidates for Swiss banking and financial firms from her Geneva-based location and worked as a NOC (a non-official CIA officer). Her intelligence mission was to turn over those new hires' names to *Dave Jacobson*, an alias Lars Wahlberg used. He was a NOC assigned to work as an economics counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Bern. Once he received their names, his job was to turn them into assets.

In 2009, the Agency received actionable intelligence about the terrorist mastermind's mission to attack American cities. Ericksen and McDonald were part of *Operation Avenging Eagles*, a mission tasked by the CIA to sabotage a terrorist mastermind's plans aided by Russian arms dealers to attack two American cities with nuclear suitcase bombs.

The mission's secondary objective focused on discovering money laundering operations in private Swiss numbered accounts linked to Russian arms dealers, terrorists, corrupt politicians, government, and military leaders.

There was not a week that went by when McDonald did not experience the terrible nightmares from her time being abducted in Switzerland. She never forgot the trauma she suffered from Sergei Ryzhkov and Oleg Kupchenko in Switzerland. Nor did she ever forget the torture and sexual assault the Russian arms dealer Kupchenko inflicted on her.

THE RYZHKOV VENDETTA

When McDonald left the CIA in late November 2009, she returned to her hometown in Idaho. Over the next several months, she received treatment for PTSD that lifted her spirits. When she moved in with Ericksen, he provided her love and additional support during her battle. She continued therapy with a Lake Oswego psychologist.

Ericksen arrived at their home around 7:00 pm. McDonald greeted him with hugs and kisses. They were heading up to Mount Hood tomorrow afternoon and planned to spend two days skiing at Timberline Lodge ski area and Mt. Hood Meadows. During a nice dinner at the Portland Chart House, they celebrated the exciting news of his new position with *Cyberburst Communications* in Palo Alto and their promising future.

Chapter Three

MOSCOW

ON MARCH 25, 2011, SOROKIN FLEW FROM BERLIN on the Russian airline Aeroflot and arrived at Sheremetyevo International Airport Moscow at 4:30 pm. His bodyguards met him, escorted him into an armored Mercedes limo outside, and drove him to Moscow International Business Center. Upon arrival, Sorokin walked to the Naberezhnaya Tower entrance at 10 Presnenskaya Nab, Block C, at 6:00 pm.

The sixty-one-story tower stood near the Moscow River, about two miles west of Red Square. Many well-known international corporations, major Russian banks, and industrial firms had headquarters in the building. A contingent of FSB (Russian Domestic Intelligence Services) officers also had an office there.

Sorokin approached the elevator banks, went to the single elevator marked 50th floor, and pressed the button. When the elevator door opened, he looked directly at a camera mounted on the sidewall. The facial recognition system immediately took a picture of his face and compared it to the template housed in the computer. The match was successful within five seconds, and the elevator door closed and lifted off.

Fifteen seconds later, the elevator arrived at *Ryzhkov Energy and Mining Company's* headquarters on the fiftieth floor. The company occupied the entire floor, which consisted of ten office suites. He entered the executive lobby, and an administrative assistant immediately welcomed him.

“Viktor Vladimirovich Sorokin, welcome back,” she said in Russian, “Mr. Ryzhkov is expecting you.”

“Thank you.”

Sorokin served as Mr. Alexander Ryzhkov’s head of security and trusted advisor for the past three years. The former Spetsnaz captain and SVR Intelligence operative used many aliases in his secret life, and *Gerhard* was his latest. He walked past several office suites before entering Ryzhkov’s expansive office. At forty-one, he projected confidence and strength as he strode forward.

When he entered the executive suite, Ryzhkov hugged him and said in Russian, “Viktor Vladimirovich, I’m glad to see you.”

Sorokin smiled, removed a thumb drive from his suit pocket, and gave it to Ryzhkov. “Good job. I presume everything went well with our asset?”

“Ferrari came through for us.” He reached into his suit pocket and handed Ryzhkov a three-page letter. “I decrypted the USB drive he gave me. It lists the operatives’ names on *Operation Avenging Eagles*, addresses of both the company and their home residences.”

Ryzhkov picked up the intercom and spoke to one of his assistants, “Please bring us some tea.”

“Yes, sir.”

Ryzhkov was fifty-nine years old, medium height, with a full head of steely gray hair and a muscular build. His face looked more like a professional prizefighter since he had a broken nose and scars on his eyebrows. Years later, He graduated from a Russian Military Academy and earned a master’s degree in geology from Moscow State University. Ryzhkov acquired the company six years ago as a reward for his loyalty to Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Gorshkov, his best boyhood friend. He cherished many happy memories from his Leningrad childhood. A year later, he changed the company’s name, and since that time, accelerated the company’s operations and growth. Last year’s revenues reached \$10 billion. An hour later, Ryzhkov picked up his secure landline and called Prime Minister Mikhail Yuryevich Gorshkov.

Gorshkov’s chief of staff, Sokurov, picked up the phone. “Hello, General Ryzhkov; Prime Minister Gorshkov is not available currently. Can I help you?”

“It is important for me to see him immediately. It is about our friend *Wolfgang*. What is the earliest time you can schedule me?”

“Tuesday, the 29th, at ten in the morning.”

“That will work. Thank you.”

Chapter Four

MOSCOW

THE DACHA IN NOVO-OGARYOVO WAS A PALATIAL Estate in the Odintsovsky District, west of the city of Moscow. Ryzhkov's armored Mercedes Benz limo stayed close behind the Mercedes, driving his bodyguards. Behind his limo, a third Mercedes carried more bodyguards. The whole convoy pulled up to the prime minister's driveway.

Ryzhkov retired six years ago as the Commanding General of the GRU. He had a net worth of approximately \$3 billion and considerable influence in Russia's energy and mining industries.

Ryzhkov and Gorshkov grew up in Leningrad, lived two blocks from each other, were classmates in grammar school, and were best friends. In 1963, when Gorshkov's father was asked to join President Nikita Khrushchev's administration, the family moved to Moscow.

Ryzhkov served Prime Minister Gorshkov on critical operations, several dealing with killing traitors. However, the Russian strategic mission involving a Saudi terrorist mastermind, which had been uncovered and destroyed by the CIA, impacted Russian oil exports. In that operation, Ryzhkov's younger brother Sergei, his former staff advisor, Oleg Kupchenko and many Russian Spetsnaz bodyguards lost their lives in Switzerland and the Middle East.

Sergei Ryzhkov had been a former KGB and FSB Intelligence colonel. Kupchenko was a retired Spetsnaz colonel and an advisor to General Ryzhkov ten years ago at the GRU. He was also a senior member of the Largest Russian organized crime syndicate in Moscow. Alexander Ryzhkov wanted revenge for

the murder of his team and the destruction of the mission.

The USB drive he now possessed revealed the identities of the principal operatives in the CIA operation that had led to those losses.

As he sat outside the prime minister's office, awaiting Sokurov's prompt to enter, he thought about the failed mission. It began three years earlier when Gorshkov had given him the approval to infiltrate a Saudi master terrorist's internal organization. The overriding plan was to sell four Russian nuclear suitcase bombs, each containing three kilograms of fissionable plutonium and highly enriched uranium, to the terrorist sleeper-cell network, along with the list of two US cities to target. The terrorist attacks would create another 9/11 and bolster the American desire for revenge. The uproar from the American government would force a boycott of Saudi oil and encourage other allies to do the same. This action would create a significant imbalance of oil on the market and accelerate demand, benefiting Russia.

When Gorshkov graduated from Moscow State University with a law degree, the KGB recruited him and sent him to the Academy of Foreign Intelligence. After finishing his foreign intelligence training, he began his career at the KGB. Many years later, his last KGB position as chief of residency at the Russian Embassy in East Berlin was with the rank of colonel. Both Gorshkov and Ryzhkov were devastated when the Soviet Union broke down. They blamed the Americans for being the driving force in that effort.

Ryzhkov hated the Americans because he was a Lt. Colonel in Afghanistan in 1986, commanding a Spetsnaz battalion when the war changed drastically. The Russians could not hold on to Mujahideen's territory because the CIA provided the Afghan government with Stinger missiles that destroyed many aircraft. The war endured from 1979-1989 and killed over fourteen thousand Russian soldiers.

Gorshkov's dream was to re-establish the former Soviet Union's Republics into the Russian Federation.

Gorshkov's chief-of-staff entered the prime minister's office.

"Sir, General Alexander Leonidovich Ryzhkov is here for his appointment."

"Have him come in," Gorshkov calmly said.

As Ryzhkov entered, the prime minister stood, walked forward, and shook

his hand. Gorshkov wore a Patek Phillipe watch on his right wrist.

The muscular prime minister excelled in handball at five feet seven in height and 160 pounds. He had earned two championship titles from the Russian Handball Federation in Moscow in the late 80s. His brilliant mind had no time for small talk; he was all business and could turn into a cold-blooded killer in the blink of an eye should he be challenged. He enjoyed playing handball with Ryzhkov, who also excelled in the sport. However, Gorshkov usually won.

Gorshkov had a full head of light brown hair streaked with gray and piercing pale blue eyes.

“Sasha, my old friend,” he said as he embraced him in a bear hug and kissed his cheeks three times.

“Misha! Thanks for seeing me on such short notice.” Gorshkov smiled and said, “Please be seated.”

Ryzhkov sat on a sofa facing the prime minister, who sat behind a large oak desk.

“Sasha, your niece Marina Viktorovna Smirnova is doing great as our deep-cover SVR Intelligence officer in San Francisco.”

“Our family is very proud of her. Once she graduated from Saint Petersburg State University with top honors, a degree in economics, and a minor in computer engineering, I believed she would be a top prospect for the FSB Academy.”

“She followed the playbook, applied for graduate school at Kings College, married an aristocrat, became a British Citizen, divorced him, joined an American video game developer in London, and a few years later applied for an L-1A transfer to *Viskin Dynamics* in California under the name of Marina Kingsborough,” chuckled Gorshkov.

“The family appreciated your recommendation of her to the FSB Academy,” said Ryzhkov.

Gorshkov nodded.

“Did you get the information?” Gorshkov asked.

“Ferrari has provided us with the names of those responsible for destroying our Saudi operation.”

“What do you propose?” asked Gorshkov.

“The key operatives were Mark Ericksen, Lars Wahlberg, Fico Delgado, Kate McDonald, and Hans Christian Scharz.”

“Leave the Swiss federal police officer off the list. Too many of our friends have their money in Swiss banks.”

“Let me add Sullivan’s name to the list since the bastard directed the operation.”

“Sasha, are you mad? We don’t want to start a war by killing the American Secretary of Defense.”

“All right, but let me wait until he retires from the government,” said Ryzhkov.

“Do not push the issue on Sullivan. That’s an order!” Ryzhkov’s lips tightened into a scowl.

“How do you propose killing them?” asked Gorshkov.

“There are only three left: Ericksen, Wahlberg, and McDonald. I will have our German agent, Heinrich Schroeder, get in touch with the Iranian intelligence agency to contract Hezbollah for the hits.”

“Once you meet with Schroeder, said a sterned-faced Gorshkov, coordinate the dates and places with Sokurov. There must not be any visible footprints leading back to the Kremlin. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You and I both know our economy depends on the world market price of oil! We came close to accomplishing our mission, only to have the Americans mess it up!”

“We’ll put together a new operation next year,” Ryzhkov said.

“We’ll wait and see. The presidential elections are coming up next year, and we must ensure that since I’m running for president, we have the support of the oligarchs.”

“I’ll make sure they are with us or else!” said Ryzhkov.

“Winning the presidency is critical for Russia’s future. We must gain more influence in the Middle East and re-capture some countries we lost during the breakup. On another topic, I want to congratulate you on your company’s innovative strategies and increased profitability.”

“Misha, thanks to you for giving me this golden opportunity.”

“I will never forget my good friends, especially you. You are one of my best friends. When we have more time, let us plan on going to my estate on the Black Sea with our wives, or would you prefer our mistresses?”

Ryzhkov shook his head and smiled. “Misha, definitely our mistress.”

They stood and hugged, and then Ryzhkov left the office. Gorshkov picked up his phone and said, “Send the director in.”

“Yes, sir.”

Ten minutes later, Leonid Mararov, the SVR Director, entered.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Gorshkov explained the operation Ryzhkov was managing for him.

“Once I get his plans, I’ll provide all the details. I want you and your operatives to monitor all activity and report to me without his knowledge. Is that clear?”

“Understood, Mr. Prime Minister.”

Gorshkov thought about the first time he met Secretary of Defense Sullivan. It was the winter of 1996, and they were both at a diplomatic party hosted by the British Ambassador. Gorshkov enjoyed his meetings at social events with Sullivan, whose alias at the time was *Wade Davis*. Sullivan’s official title was economics officer at the US Embassy, and he spoke Russian.

Gorshkov never knew if Sullivan was even a CIA officer, let alone the station chief. He suspected that most of the Americans employed at the embassy were spies. However, he learned in 2003 that when Sullivan’s photo appeared next to President Ridgeway, his title was Director of the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center. Gorshkov had fond memories of Sullivan, who struck him as a knowledgeable and engaging person to talk to at these functions.

MOSCOW, METROPOLE HOTEL

On April 1st, Heinrich Schroeder and his son Otto arrived at Moscow’s Domodedovo International Airport at 5:05 pm. The bald Schroeder stood five-eight and was of medium weight. He had a pepper-gray beard, red cheeks,

and small, mousy brown eyes. At sixty-two years of age, Schroeder was the CEO of an industrial company in Hanau, Germany, a Frankfurt suburb. His son Otto was the executive vice president and chief operations officer. Heinrich Schroeder's company has been doing business for thirty years with Iran, exporting dual-use biological and chemical agents the Iranian Ministry of Defense quietly used to make biological and chemical warfare.

A Mercedes limo driver met him in the hall outside security and drove them to the Metropole Hotel. After checking in to the Metropole Suite on the sixth floor, the telephone rang. He picked it up. "Hello."

"Herr Schroeder, this is Alexander," he said in German. "I'm in the Ambassador Suite. Please come up."

They enjoyed dinner and vodka over the next two hours while discussing the Iranians' proposed meeting.