



Dragon Head: An Aleksandr Talanov Novel

James Houston Turner

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James Houston Turner's complex spy thriller *Dragon Head* drags a former KGB agent into an impossible situation with unavoidable deaths.

A thief makes off with a hoard of stolen money from the Hong Kong criminal underworld before throwing himself in front of a speeding train. With the access keys forever lost, *Dragon Head* commands his army of hackers to crack into America's defenses. The first target is the GPS system, which leads to aircraft collisions.

Dragon Head leverages this newfound threat to pressure the CIA to find his lost money. Neither side believes the other; both target Aleksander Talanov. Despite not knowing anything about the funds, Talanov races to find any solution that minimizes the loss of life, but the clock is ticking down.

The fourth entry in a series centered on Talanov, a former KGB agent turned CIA asset with a troubled past, the book is episodic in nature and aimed at series fans. Emphasis is placed on Talanov's attempts to achieve emotional distance while still caring for those around him. His escapades with a local group of high schoolers show the importance of building and maintaining social connections. Even with a target on his back, Talanov's drive to feed and educate students plays an important role in the primary story line, adding humor and heart.

A rat-a-tat conversation between Talanov and his superiors at the CIA encapsulates the snappy dialogue present throughout. Characters rattle off witty one-liners while attempting to outsmart others in showdowns more tense than the book's violent fights. Scenes crackle with life, as when Talanov chases down a would-be bomber; civilians on the street react with fear, cars sway when one bomb goes off, and Talanov keeps his analytical eye on the chaos.

Dragon Head is a character-driven spy thriller that delivers charm and thrills in equal measure.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May / June 2020)

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