ForeWord Reviews
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GENERAL

Under the Cover of Darkness
Duane De Mello
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

If you've ever suspected that the CIA sanctions assassinations of heads of state, *Under the Cover of Darkness* offers convincing confirmation.

> *The powers that be at the Agency, up on the 7th floor at Langley, have been given a new set of marching orders from the White House. It's a presidential finding that places us back in the business of conducting executive action, or as we prefer to call it, lethal operations. The section of old Executive Order 12333 that bans assassinations in now voided.*

Mitch Vasari, a CIA operations officer, listens as his inside-Agency contact, Jack Benson, explains the guidelines. Jack is pleased that Mitch, the best one-shot kill man in the Agency, is on his team to carry out the new instructions. Mitch operates completely outside the organization. In fact, he's never been to Agency headquarters.

It's not long before Mitch finds himself planning to conduct his first head-of-state operation. Meanwhile, Gabriela Rivera Torres, an agent with the Special Missions Unit, Department of Defense, accepts her assignment to eliminate another foreign dictator.

Each job is planned and executed to perfection. Few characters are who they seem to be. With cover careers and multiple identities they slip in and out of countries, assignments, and agencies as easily as most of us change clothes. Only someone who knows how covert operations work could create such minute detail so convincingly.

And Duane De Mello knows CIA operations. After receiving a master's degree at Stanford University and serving two tours of duty in Vietnam as a military intelligence adviser, he was an operations officer in the CIA. He's now retired, and *Under the Cover of Darkness* is his second novel.

As De Mello's expert plot unfolds, readers have the opportunity to slip inside the minds of the assassins, learning their rationale for killing and how they prepare themselves for their missions. The author manages to create characters who fascinate, frighten, or repulse, depending on the reader's mindset: "The topic of death never particularly interested Gabriela as a subject for any kind of serious study. As a U.S. soldier and Special Forces intelligence operative, killing when necessary is something to face in the line of duty … she found no pleasure or desire to celebrate following the taking of an enemy's life. While she was prepared to lay down her own life for her country, she made damn sure it was the enemy, instead, that gave up theirs."

Although the plot and characters are well-developed, the book could have used a good proofreader. Typos and grammatical errors mar an otherwise well-written story. If mistakes can be overlooked, the reader will be treated to a tale that will linger in the mind long after the book is finished.

Paty Avery