



## Red To Black

*Alex Dryden*

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## **Red To Black** Alex Dryden

A spy thriller, a love story and a chilling look at a resurgent superpower...

At the dawn of the new millennium, Finn, an MI6 spy, and Anna, a colonel of the KGB, have been sent to spy on each other. Instead they find a love that becomes to only truth they can trust. A source deep within the Kremlin tells Finn of a plan, hatched in the depths of the Cold War, to dismantle the edifice of the communist state and to bring about the rise of a new imperium within Russia: a plan to control the whole of Europe. Finn's masters in London are blinded by the new wealth pouring out of Russia and he must leave the Service and work in secrecy to uncover the deadly threat it poses to the freedom of every one of us.

## **Red To Black Details**

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Author : Alex Dryden

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## From Reader Review Red To Black for online ebook

### Linda C says

I would not recommend this book. While it had some good spots, it was slow and frankly, rather dull. The beginning was very slow, middle picked up a bit, and then the end was a disaster-- another case of the author feeling like he had written the required amount and now he was going to finish up as quickly as possible.

While the premise of the book was interesting, and the description of Putin's Russia was very good, the plot overall was jumbled and hard to follow. In most spy novels, the end of the book wraps everything up in some form of order, unless a sequel is already in the works and the author then leaves plot lines hanging.

This book did neither-- the book ended and the reader still didn't understand how Finn was betrayed at the end of the day. It just ended, leaving all these open questions, yet doesn't appear to be setting the reader up for a sequel, as the main character died. Which, by the way, was very anti-climatic. We've been following two characters for 400 pages and all of a sudden, it was like "And Finn died in the back of the car without regaining consciousness.

One thing the book did very well was to create the atmosphere that you (be it the reader or the characters) didn't know who to trust. Did Finn and Anna trust each other? Did Finn trust his co-conspirators? he was betrayed, but by whom and why? In the shadowy world of intelligence, up became down, black became white, etc. and those parts of the book were very well written. Unfortunately, too few of those and too much wandering plot lines.

Don't waste your time. There are better things to read.

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### Victoria says

Red to Black by Alex Dryden is a story about what has happened in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union. The story centers around two characters, Finn and Anna. Finn was with MI6 and Anna with the KGB, and the two have developed a romantic relationship.

The story opens with Anna sitting in a basement reading journals, trying to find Finn. The entire book is told from her point of view, which gets a little bit odd at points. For instance, there are moments where the story is only about Finn at that point with Anna nowhere in sight, and she is still narrating. How does that work? Does she have ESP (or ESPN as a friend in high school used to say)? I mean, the KGB's good, but not that good...right? I mean, I should hope so--Otherwise, the U.S. has been in deep trouble for a long time and the Soviet's were being incompetent for over half a century by not listening to their intelligence service. I doubt that's true; therefore, Mr. Dryden has a bit of a logistics issue.

Another issue was grammar and spelling. That's the editor's fault. Moving on....

Anna's character could be a bit irritating just because she was so slow and could be a bit selfish. This is more than made up for with Finn--he's the must have dreamy British spy with a devil-may-care grin. Absolutely lovely. As for Anna, she's not intolerable, just slightly annoying. I can easily look it over, though. After all, I

have noticed men have difficulty writing likable female characters (it's not their fault; we're the complicated sex).

This story was very entertaining, all of my criticism aside. I believe a good book or story must be entertaining above all else. Otherwise, it's a failure. This is why I loathe Hemingway, the old drunken bore. So, I give this story three and a half stars out of five. I really do recommend it. It was very fascinating with interesting points about politics tied in.

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## Richard Derus says

Real Rating: 3.5\* of five, rounded down for disappointment

**The Publisher Says:** Finn is a veteran MI6 operative stationed in Moscow. In the guise of an amiable trade secretary, he has penetrated deep into the dangerous labyrinth that is Russia under Vladimir Putin to discover some of its darkest secrets, thanks to a high-level source deep within the Kremlin.

The youngest female colonel in the KGB, Anna is the ambitious daughter of one of the former Soviet Union's elite espionage families. Charged with helping to make Russia strong again under Putin, she is ordered to spy on Finn and discover the identity of his mole.

At the dawn of the new millennium, these adversaries find themselves brought together by an unexpected love that becomes the only truth they can trust. When Finn uncovers a shocking and ingenious plan—hatched in the depths of the Cold War—to control the European continent and shift the balance of world power, he and Anna are thrust into a deadly plot in which friend and foe wear the same face. With time running out, they will race across Europe and risk everything —career, reputation, and even their own lives—to expose the terrifying truth.

**My Review:** I enjoyed this read more than I expected to, and less than I should have. It's a very, very scary and plausible tale of a plot to use the West's greed to bring it down. After all, Marx wrote, "The last capitalist we hang shall be the one who sold us the rope." He was a prescient thinker, was Marx.

I'm not going to go into the bits of the story because the spoilers would be epic. And also, the story told is either instantly obvious...the New Russia is a viciously capitalist and socially Darwinian funhouse mirror of the West's nastiest, least admirable qualities, and will therefore succeed in out-competing the West...or completely incredible, as to a triumphalist Teabagger idiot.

I'm on the instantly obvious side, obviously, and that's why I enjoyed the book more than I expected to. Russia's manifold social problems are all traceable to its insanely lopsided wealth distribution. That should ring an entire cathedral's worth of bells for anyone in the USA. If it doesn't, then the Teabagger idiot triumphalism is likely to obscure the evidence of a calculated takedown of Western economies.

Anyway. What didn't work well for me was the narrative structure of the book, with its reported-not-experienced quality, and the fact that the main characters were sketched more than drawn. I need to feel some sense of connection, positive or negative, to the people who are taking me on the journey that is a book. Here, in Anna and Finn, I felt I was being told a bit about the people in a not-very-close friend's long, detailed story. That was, I think, a result of the all-flashback narrative structure. The past can enhance the

present in a story, there is no doubt, but the past doesn't enhance the past with anything like as much intensity. It simply becomes more flashback.

Overall, in the scheme of things, is this a thriller I'd recommend to a fellow subway rider? Maybe not, since it's so slow-paced. But for me, and those like me who lean to the political left, it's got a lot of confirmation-bias appeal. The fact that the author makes a very strong point of thanking Russian sources who need to remain anonymous is telling. And unsurprising.

And very, very disheartening.

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### **Michael Drakich says**

A lot of excellent detail that sadly didn't add up to a good story.

I picked up this novel at my local bookstore without having read anything about it before. With all that was happening in the Ukraine at the time, I thought this might be an enjoyable book.

There is no doubt that the author did his homework when drafting this novel. There is a depth of knowledge regarding European politics, places and people that shines through the writing. The romantic sub-plot between the two main characters was good and the next round of major characters were all unique and enjoyable. These things were the positives that this book brings.

His decision to have the story swing back and forth through time was disconcerting. I prefer my thrillers to have more of a linear approach so that I, as a reader, can be guessing at what comes next, not what happened before.

Unfortunately, despite the plusses, he was unable to tie it together into a plausible spy story. Things like people always showing up conveniently wherever Finn was at, even though he may have just arrived, stretched the believability. Also, a very slow start. You could probably not read the first two hundred pages and still have the entire story.

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### **Caitlin says**

Not such a great read, although there are some things I admire about the book.

I love John Le Carre's books & expected this to be somewhat like The Russia House which has a similar love story at its center, although moved forward in time. & maybe that was the root of my problem with this book - I wanted it to be as good as Le Carre & it just wasn't. It also wasn't enough of its own thing to be very

enjoyable.

Set in Putin's Russia, this could have been an excellent novel filled with interesting details about what Russia is about now. Unfortunately, the novel moves at a snail's pace & that pacing doesn't really work for a successful thriller. The narrator's voice is pretty muddled & the writing, while competent, just doesn't work for me. I want my spy novels & thrillers to move & this one just doesn't.

The author does do a good job of beginning to flesh out a picture of Russia today. He also creates a wonderful almost film noir feel to the novel which could have reaped real dividends for him if he had taken that pulp reality to its logical pulpy end.

Ultimately this is an okay spy novel that could have been a pretty good spy novel had its author been clear about what he wanted to do with it.

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### **?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✨\*♥? says**

I am laughing my head off!!! Impossible to read this ugh.... SPY-CULTURAL (?) -HISTORICAL (?!)-FICTION-THRILLER (?) -MYSTERY (!?) (according to the GR classification)... with any semblance of seriousness. Are there really any people who read this not as a humoristic attempt but as, I dunno, a THRILLER? If so, there's little thrilling about this plot. And the only thing mysterious is why and exactly HOW this novel got good ratings. But hilarious, it (and its delivery!) most definitely are. Not just hilarious but worthy of stand up comedy.

Basically, this one's a prime example of terribly written propaganda fiction. And I'm not even starting on the Russia-phobia dripping from these pages. It's literally (used literally!) bad beyond the point of hilarious, on par with these beautiful gems of mangled lit: Atlanta Nights and Moon People. Even where the 'Moon People' introduces us to 'a very special telescope', this one provides us with 'one bank... not like any other bank'...

**I'm keeping this one, though. For laughs, only.**

**And I'm gonna document some of the awesomely not just bad but far off the cliff stuff.** I can't help wondering, why there are so many stellar reviews of this masterpiece of bad grammar and allergy to editing? Is Russia-bashing the new indulgence to write shit and get praised for it, these days?

**The characters are demonstrating impossibly acrobatic feats defying the limitations of human body at each step:**

Q:

He doesn't look up, or in either direction, but walks fast to the left, his face to the pavement but his eyes looking carefully to the right. (c) **Must have been tricky, this!**

Q:

There is no hesitation, he literally jumps into the air with joy. If he had four legs, all of them would have left the ground. But I still ask him what he thinks we should do. (c) **Yeah, and had he been in possession of a hundred legs, he would have been a human centipede. And I'm not gonna think what would have happened, had he had a tail and a couple of tentacles...**

**The sentences sometimes get at odds with composition as well:**

Q:

If Westbank, one of the world's two clearing banks, can behave illegally, nearly everyone knows about it—everyone in Luxembourg's elite, that is. (c)

Q:

He said it genuinely. And so I declined, content that it was something he'd like me to have done. (c)

Q:

THERE IS ONLY one photograph of Mikhail in the public domain, and in it his face is so obscured that you'd have to know it was him in order to identify him. He is hidden behind the face of Vladimir Putin. (c)

**Uh-huh, there's his photo. But it's not of him but of Putin. But it's his photo.**

Q:

We had microphones, watchers, tails, people in every corner. (c) **That's quite a lot of stuff to have lurking in corners. Must've been a stampede.**

Q:

Do I mean that we had the malevolence of others, or do we still have it? (c) **Well, if they misplaced their malevolence, they should have looked in the corners: it seems they had a lot of public who might have helped them looking for it.**

Q:

We had shining slivers of time to snatch for last minute walk-ins in hotel rooms across the city. (c) **Time always shines well. I confirm.**

Q:

Is Finn now the past or is he still in the present? (c) **That's a hell of a way to put it.**

Q:

'It was the venue for our first official fuck, Rabbit, endorsed by Her Majesty and the KGB.' (c) **I feel our cumulative taxes get spent well endorsing official fucks.**

Q:

... his leaden ex-KGB security boss Chimkov (c) **I can just imagine them hauling a leaden bust of this guy around to meetings. Quite a workout.**

**And geography/history get frisky too!**

Q: He was born in Komi out to the north-east of Moscow in western Siberia... (c)

**Akin to saying that Japan is to the South-east of Moscow. It technically is but plenty far out there.**

Q:

We called it the 'colony' and referred to our homes as 'white houses', a typically white, racist Russian expression; in Russia anyone with even a faintly dusky skin—which included everyone in the Soviet southern republics—was considered inferior. (?) **Actually, no. A total cultural miss. The 'White House' thing was borrowed from the US ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House)) in late 1980s-early 1990s. This borrowing happened, at least partially, because that one house of the USSR was, guess what, WHITE.** Before that period it wasn't a popular or even a usable descriptor in the USSR. And no, racism wasn't a thing in the USSR. Mostly because even within Caucasian and Mongoloid races there are lots of differences, which doesn't make the race structure too visible. The skin color in the USSR wasn't a big thing, many Caucasian nationalities have been dusky for ages and it never ever bothered anyone (working in a field, anyone?), it's the eye and cheek bone structure that was most noticeable for this population mix, and even Asian eyes were (and still are) very often considered beautiful...

Q:

Russian elitism remains unchanged from the Middle Ages and is far worse than anything in the West. (c) **Actually, the Russian Imperia elites had been replaced during Revolution with the USSR and partially European plebs... And the Middle Ages' elites had been not just decimated but likely at least halved during the Tatar-Mongol yoke... before the Russian Imperia arose. So... This piece of propaganda wisdom makes no sense whatsoever.**

Q:

‘What is it that epitomises Luxembourg as the hub of the world’s financial dealings?’..‘It is one bank. But this bank is not like any other bank. (c) **Actually, there seem to be over 100 banks in Luxembourg:** <https://www.statista.com/statistics/6...> A bunch of them international (i.e. could be found elsewhere), others domestic. Besides, there’re lots of other offshores out there, no less hub-bish.

**These characters insist on having totally inanest conversations throughout the book.**

Q:

We have supper that evening with Willy and Finn tells him. Willy says that he’d like to have a baby too, by which he means in his environment, I think, rather than literally. ...

‘He or she has a mother and a father and I’ll be his or her grandfather and I have cousins who’ll be cousins. ... (?)

Q:

I think to myself that there is something about having two men, Willy and Finn, that makes the whole idea seem more palatable. (c) **I'd have loved this plot way more, had this gal thought to someone else.**

Q:

‘What on earth are you doing in that silly hat?’ he said.

‘It seems I have a small head,’ ...

‘Don’t they sell hats in Israel? You look like you’ve just arrived.’

‘Just off the flight from Tel Aviv,’ the man replied.

...And I have a message for you. From our side.’

‘Your side? Is that the same side as my side?’ (c)

Q:

‘Most people I know put their kids down for some school ten years before they’re born, ... (c) **Putting one's kids down? That's an interesting way to put them but... isn't it frowned upon by the Social Services and law?**

Q:

... then they sign it up for piano lessons, karate classes, swimming diplomas, extra maths, post-birth therapy, nannies and a nutrition expert. (c) **I think, those kids might have preferred to have actually been put down instead of being subjected to maths, diplomas and post-birth therapy, all at once.**

Q:

‘Maybe there’s something in between,’ I say.

‘There must be.’

‘We aren’t safe, Finn.’

‘We’ll make ourselves safe.’

‘We need to think about this carefully,’ I say, and then I hug him. ‘I’m glad you’re so happy. I really am. Thank you.’

‘Aren’t you?’ he says.

‘I don’t know.’

‘You’ve always been a slow developer,’ he says. (c) **Boomer.**

**Besides I just noted that the coat of arms on the cover is mostly a bastard of the Palaiologos' dynasty with the one of today's Germany and of the Nazi one. Never, ever, Russian coat of arms had 1 slim tail without claws or wings of this shape or no sceptre & imperial orb grasped in very prominent claws. Besides, there usually are more than 1 crown on the eagles' heads in the Russian variant. The image of Saint George the Victorious is missing from this coat of arms as well. So, WTF?**

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## **Kara Jorges says**

If you've been craving a moody, Russian tragedy cloaked as a thriller, I recommend this book. However, anyone craving any actual action or a cohesive story is in for a disappointment. The book has plenty of intriguing factors, but its protagonist is the least interesting character within and she does little but ruminate and reminisce about whatever everyone else is doing.

It was the end of the cold war when Anna, an attractive KGB agent often used as a honey trap, meets Finn, an MI6 agent stationed in Moscow. They are charged by their governments to learn everything they can about each other and repeat it, but Finn and Anna fall in love. Finn comes across a dangerous scheme and goes off the reservation when his government calls him home. Before he leaves, he asks Anna to run away with him and tells her he loves her. Then they separate while he cooks up a plan of action.

After this point, the timeline of events is rather jumbled and confusing, made all the more inaccessible by Anna's disconnection from everything. The action is all with Finn, who is absent for much of the story. What we learn of his activities is gleaned by Anna reading his journals while she waits for him after the fact. Anna also comes across as far too clingy for the youngest female colonel in the KGB.

The ending didn't endear me any either. When I thought about it, it was rather cliché for a novel with a Russian heroine. I have a feeling this book will appeal to a number of readers, but it was simply not to my taste.

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## **Michael Martz says**

Alex Dryden's 'Red to Black' is a detailed account of the origin of his Anna Resnikov series, narrated by the then KGB officer as she begins the relationship with a male British spy that sets it all in motion. Can enemy spies fall in love? That seems to be the question over the first 2/3 of the book, and when finally answered things move quickly.

The plot is fairly complex. Finn, the British spy, has been in place in Moscow for an extended period. The Russians successfully use a beautiful KGB agent, Anna, to get close to him to find out what or who he's working with.... not the classic 'honey trap', but nearly so. They develop a relationship, Anna dutifully reports back details to her superiors, but she's not giving them everything. In the meantime, Finn discovers a huge Putin plot against the West, but his superiors think he's gone off the rails. He 'retires' as a spy, but opts to free-lance his investigations using an assortment of characters from his past. Will Anna help, or burn him? You need to read Red to Black to find out. It's worth it.

By the way, although first published in 2008, the Putin-related passages and descriptions of how Russia began to devolve from a potentially democratic country to an authoritarian regime that's almost a criminal enterprise on a grand scale couldn't be any more timely. Although it's fiction, the author has done his homework.

I've unfortunately read the series in reverse order. They've all been decent and this is the best of the lot. The writing is fine but the dialogue, as I've found through the series, is uneven, though that may be related to the diverse nationalities of the characters involved. Descriptions of tradecraft seem real, which is always a bonus

in espionage novels, and the characters were fleshed out very well. It's an exciting beginning to the series and explains a lot- would've been better for me to start here!

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### **Theresa Leone Davidson says**

An interesting although somewhat less than suspenseful story of a woman who works for the Russian intelligence service and a man who works for MI6 in England. They become involved in the so called 'new' Russia led by Vladimir Putin, which is really the subject of this book, and its connection to the old Cold War Russia. A very scary book when you realize the premise is that nothing has really changed for the better in Russia, and that the author, who is a journalist using a pseudonym to write this story, backs up his claims with a lot of hard evidence. I was so engrossed in this that I returned to the library to check out a non-fiction book about modern day Russia. Would recommend *Red to Black*.

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### **Will Byrnes says**

LeCarre in love! This is one of those books you hate to put down. It combines a riveting spy tale with a love story, offers a chilling portrait of how today's Russia came to be and should scare the bejesus out of everyone. She is KGB, from a family of KGB. He is MI6, from a family of hippies. She is assigned to keep tabs on him. He spends a lot of time in Russia picking up information from an asset code-named Mikhail. Can two spies ever be really honest with each other? In his quest to learn the details of "The Plan," is he in more danger from the east or the west? Can she really betray her country to be with him?

Dryden offers a history lesson here, on post-Cold-War Russia, on Putin, the oligarchs, not only their dark motives towards Europe, but the ways and means by which they will prosecute their aims, and on some of the darker crevices of western banking. And he provides a wealth of insight into the machinations, the wheels and gears of both eastern and western intelligence. The Intel on *Red to Black*, and its no secret is that you are in for a fun read.

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### **Amirbek Satimov says**

Very slow and uninteresting book. Normally I am fine with books taking interesting plots and flipping them around, like maybe having the Nazis become the good guys or something interesting. But it's obvious this book has serious Russia-phobia. Especially since it starts off with dedicating the books to Russians who want freedom. This is uninteresting since it doesn't consider other perspectives. Also, I gave up half way through because how boring it was.

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## **Donna says**

After The Sentinels, I just didn't have the patience to actually get through this one. I didn't even get 100 pages in before I gave up on it. Despite the larger font and even larger margins, it was like sludging through molasses and when you get to a point where you're dreading to pick up and read anymore of a book, it's time to stop reading it.

It was nearly pure exposition up until my stopping point, and nonlinear at that. The stories the MC kept telling were jumping all over the time line and I found myself having a hard time keeping track of what happened when and where. If you're a Russian history buff, I'm sure it wouldn't have been a problem. Seeing as I'm not, the facts of the story kept getting lost on me because I couldn't remember them.

I wish the MC had a little more emotion. Maybe she does and it doesn't appear until later in the book, because that this point, not all that much has happened so there isn't much to get worked up over. But right now, she's kind of blah and doesn't react much one way or another to what she does see and/or do. But I won't know because I just can't bring myself to keep reading. I don't have the patience and I have better books to read in my TBR pile.

I'm not going to rate this one because it's not fair to. It could rightly get amazing after all the exposition's out. I just don't have the patience to wait that long.

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## **Robin says**

Superior spy thriller that is strong reminiscent of John Le Carre. It's let down by the unfortunate decision to make the point of view character a female Russian FSB colonel. No matter how well Dryden writes her - and he does a respectable job - she was never going to be convincing enough to tell the story.

What makes the book very well worth reading is its chilling take on Putin and his KGB connections. The plot is set up to make that point and does so in alarming and plausible style.

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## **Val says**

Laced with errors in tense, misplaced modifiers, and bogged down in minutiae, Red to Black is the slowest read I've endured in a long time. It is marketed as a thriller, a spy story, a love story, and according to Emma Thompson "unputdownable". Stephen Fry says it is "brilliant and unforgettable" "compulsively readable" "nothing short of miraculous". My experience of this novel was so completely different that I am left to wonder if these reviews are invented like the stories in the book made up by the KGB. While presenting an informative and most likely true picture of Putin's Russia and the KGB, this book reads like a dry history text book and not an exciting novel. Part of the problem is the removal of the reader from the subjects. It is told in a sort of third person third person. The heroine, a beautiful KGB colonel Anna, reads the journals of the man she is tied to, an English spy, and the story is related in that way. It is not until the last three chapters that any action takes place. You have to slog through a slowly uncovering story that could have been told in a few chapters. Not only is the pacing agonizing but the editing is terrible. In one sentence the author describes a sum on money in millions of dollars and then the exact same amount but in pounds. Errors in tense fill the book as do misplaced modifiers. The writing improves toward the end and I did grow to care for

the characters but I cannot recommend this book to anyone.

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### **Hayley says**

It was okay but far from good. The writing was unimaginative with large swathes of expository dialogue, the love story unconvincing, characters underdeveloped and choice of narrator unfortunate. There may be a good story here but it's not told particularly well.

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