

The world's most dangerous man is on the run, and both the United States and Russia want him dead. Former NYPD detectives Pete Nazareth and Tara Gimble track Dalton Stark, once the CIA's top spy, to Maine's Mount Desert Island, a vacation paradise that's about to get turned upside down.

Eyes in the Cave: Sequel to The Kirov Wolf

by R.H. Johnson

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R. H. Johnson



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First Edition

Other books by R.H. Johnson:

Widow-Taker
A Measure of Revenge
Hunting in the Zoo
The Kirov Wolf

Prelude

Hurricane Callista roared ashore at Steinhatchee, Florida, savaging the tiny Gulf Coast community with sustained winds of one hundred and forty-three miles per hour and dumping more than two feet of rain before rampaging through Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. By the time it approached the nation's capital the next evening the storm had been downgraded from Category 4 to Category 1, but the ferocious wind gusts and blinding rain remained a severe threat. Mayor Jenna Malfont ordered residents of low-lying areas to evacuate their homes while Pepco warned its utility customers to expect widespread electrical outages. For nearly fourteen straight hours the overworked D.C. police, stretched thin by the state of emergency, divided their efforts between assisting flood victims and battling looters who swarmed over the city's stores like army ants as soon as the blackouts began.

Shortly after Callista arrived, the lights flickered then died in Southeast Washington, including the Central Detention Facility, more commonly known as the D.C. Jail, where nearly two thousand inmates were either serving time or awaiting trial. For reasons no one would ever satisfactorily explain, the jail's new eleven-hundred-kilowatt emergency generator failed to kick in for

nearly one hour, during which time dozens of prisoners were stabbed, beaten, and thrown over second-floor railings while corrections officers with flashlights and tasers desperately struggled to restore order.

Amid the rioting a man in gray sweatpants, black hoodie, and royal blue Nike Air Max running shoes calmly walked from his cell to the warden's office, lowered himself from a smashed window, and sprinted across E Street into the Congressional Cemetery. In less than four minutes he was at the White Sails Yacht Club untying a seventeen-foot Boston Whaler whose Mercury outboard was, as he had been promised, already running. The ninety-horsepower engine carried him up the rain-swollen Anacostia

River to the Maryland border in twenty minutes. Lightning crackled around him as he scrambled over the muddy embankment and began jogging east through flooded streets toward a self-storage unit where his new life was set to begin.

Virtually no one escapes from Washington's Central Detention Facility, yet somehow the man widely regarded as perhaps the most dangerous criminal in American history had vanished without a trace.

1.

For three straight days White House press secretary Aaron Blount systematically tortured the facts in a futile attempt to downplay the significance of Dalton Stark's escape, but the press corps wasn't buying it. Barbara Chandler of the *Washington Post* was particularly incensed by Blount's effort to rewrite recent history. Her newspaper had, after all, been the first to run with the story of Stark's capture two weeks earlier, and she didn't intend to let Blount or anyone else dilute the impact of what she believed was Pulitzer-worthy coverage.

"Two weeks ago you stood at that podium," she jabbed furiously with a Montblanc pen, "and agreed it was impossible to overstate the damage that Dalton Stark had done to America and its allies. But now that he's strolled out of the D.C. Jail and disappeared, you want us to believe it's not really a big deal? Are you serious?"

She looked around the briefing room at her press colleagues, most of whom were as furious as she was, and shook her head in utter disbelief. "America's top spy turns out to be a Russian agent, and his escape isn't a big deal?"

As though on cue the press briefing disintegrated into chaos as every reporter in the room either shouted questions or hurled insults whenever Blount vainly called for order. When someone from the back of the room threw a poorly aimed paperback copy of *1984* toward the press secretary, a dozen uniformed Secret Service officers rushed in, scuffled briefly with several of the more demonstrative members of the audience, and cleared the room. Most of the reporters later filed stories accusing the White House of dealing once again in "alternative facts" -- an irritating and often frightening hallmark of the new administration -- and all of them continued to portray Dalton Stark as public enemy number one.

By the time Aaron Blount reached the Oval Office, badly shaken by the hostilities, President Roland Armstrong was in the mood for

a human sacrifice after having watched the press briefing on closed-circuit TV.

“Another pathetic performance, Aaron. I told you to get this off page one, but every time you meet with reporters the story seems to get bigger. Am I not making myself clear?” Armstrong’s jowly face was redder than usual, and his blue eyes flashed angrily across the massive ornate desk that symbolized his power.

“You’ve been perfectly clear, Mr. President,” Blount said meekly, hoping to dial down his boss’s fury, “but it’s a hot story, and I need a little time to make it go away.”

“I’ll make *you* go away if you can’t get the job done, understand? Dalton Stark had a fancy CIA title, but he didn’t have access to even one percent of the secrets he supposedly stole. That’s a fact,” Armstrong fumed, “and that’s what I want to begin hearing on the evening news. Make it happen!”

Blount slunk out of the Oval Office like a mutt that had been kicked once too often, and the president seemed momentarily appeased. He realized, of course, that the story of Stark’s escape was every bit as big as the press had reported and wouldn’t be disappearing anytime soon. Yet he desperately wanted to elbow the issue aside as quickly as possible. There was, after all, simply no point in beating this particular dead horse. Stark was gone, would most likely never be captured, and that was that.

Armstrong had been blindsided by news of Stark’s arrest, which had broken just as Aaron Blount was kicking off the daily press briefing two weeks earlier. In the absence of guidance from his boss, Blount had vigorously agreed with the press corps’ assessment that having a Russian operative as America’s top spy was a disaster of monumental proportions. Only later that day, after nearly being skinned alive by the president, did Blount learn he was never again to think for himself. But it was already too late to help in this situation. The damage had been done, and all he could hope was that the story would gradually fade. That, in fact, is what had begun to happen.

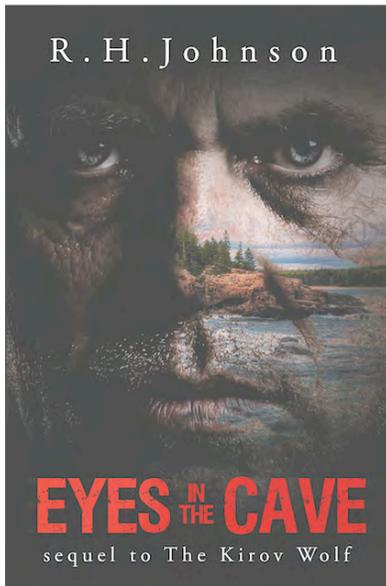
Then came the escape.

Dalton Stark was certainly no ordinary criminal. Throughout his tenure first as White House intelligence liaison and later as the CIA's deputy director for operations, he had been a Russian spy who successfully undermined U.S. covert operations and maintained a steady flow of sensitive information to his masters in Moscow. Along the way he had also skillfully used his extremely powerful position to discredit some of America's most talented intelligence agents and to put a dozen or more of his enemies, chiefly those who had strayed too near his alternate life, in early graves.

But this was hardly the worst of it. The damage Stark had already done was a mere pinprick compared to the grave threat he posed now that he had been unmasked. All of the documents he had stockpiled but not yet delivered, all of the secrets only he could have known, and all of the names, dates, and addresses he had previously been unable to reveal without implicating himself were suddenly in play. If he succeeded in leaving the country and returning to Russia, he could expose some of America's greatest security vulnerabilities while at the same time wreaking havoc on diplomatic relations with key allies, especially NATO members.

Armstrong understood all of this but saw little to be gained by revealing the full extent of Stark's treachery, past or future. The new administration was already under the gun, and the president did not intend to make things worse by shining a bright light on the ugly details of a stupendously successful Russian spy mission.

The less people knew about the whole thing, the better.



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