

2-4-2021

# Skillful portrayal in spy thriller

## "Trojan Horse: A Koyla Petrov Thriller"

S. Lee Manning,  
Encircle Publications 2020

Koyla Petrov, the hero of this thriller and the series soon to come, is a Russian-Jewish immigrant, an American citizen, and a spy. For many years, he has been one of the top operatives in the Executive Covert Agency, a



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Laura Stevenson

fictitious version of the CIA. The ECA is currently tracking the Romanian terrorist Mihai Cuza, who prides himself on being a direct descendant of Vlad the Impaler. As the book opens, Koyla and two other agents are waiting anxiously to hear from their young colleague Gina, who has been tasked with seducing Cuza and gaining access to his computer. She has managed to send an email; it suggests Cuza is about to sabotage 15 nuclear plants in various countries, but the attachment that would give detailed information self-destructs when it's opened. More alarmingly, Gina has not checked in. Realizing that Cuza has caught her at his computer, Koyla and his friends rush to save her, but they are too late. She has been gruesomely murdered.

The disturbing opening sets up a plot made complex by the numerous characters from whose points of view the story is told. Koyla notes that Gina is the fourth of his colleagues to be killed as they follow Cuza; he deduces that there is a mole (informant) somewhere in the small group of powerful people with whom the ECA's director, Margaret Bradford, discusses the placement of her operatives. Koyla is right; but which of the professionally murderous henchmen the reader sees in the streets is more alarming: the ones answering to the mole, or the ones Bradford has instructed to stop them? The implicit ethical question expands when

Bradford, frustrated at the ECA's inability to gain access to Cuza's computer, has her IT specialist create a bogus "security system" available to computers outside ECA's network. This is the Trojan Horse; Bradford assumes the mole will tell Cuza about the system, tempting him to get into it. When he does, the ECA will have access to Cuza's data. The difficulty is that in order to get the Trojan Horse to Cuza, Bradford needs to let the terrorist capture an ECA agent who knows how to access the false security system, thus passing it to Cuza. The agent she chooses for the plan is Koyla, but she doesn't tell him the Trojan Horse is a plant.

What follows is a thrilling series of shoot-outs, betrayals, and abductions, set off by Koyla's capture and extensive torture. Just as interesting to the reader who is turning the exciting pages, however, are the ethical issues that lurk between the lines. The determination of Koyla, his fiancée, and his friends to remain loyal to each other and their country is, as might be expected, commendable when compared to Cuza's cultured, cynical, anti-Semitic sadism and the US government's unquestioned assumption that special agents are expendable.

But Koyla, when pressed, is as capable of committing murder as Cuza's followers,

S. Lee Manning



and Bradford's betrayal is no less cynical than Cuza's election-year plotting to save a weak candidate.

The world Manning so skillfully portrays is one in which murder is seen as a regrettable necessity, deception goes hand in hand with power, and the general welfare of mankind is shrugged off without a thought.