


Tom
Clancy

The
Hunt
for 
RED
OCTOBER

A NOVEL

TOM CLANCY

The Hunt for **RED OCTOBER**

Naval Institute Press
Annapolis, Maryland

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Annapolis, Maryland

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Clancy, Tom, 1947–
The hunt for Red October.

I. Title.

PS3553.L245H8 1984 813'.54 84-16569
ISBN 0-87021-285-0

Printed in the United States of America

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For Ralph Chatham,
a sub driver who spoke the truth,
and for all the men who wear dolphins

The Hunt for **RED OCTOBER**

THE FIRST DAY

FRIDAY, 3 DECEMBER

The Red October

Captain First Rank Marko Ramius of the Soviet Navy was dressed for the Arctic conditions normal to the Northern Fleet submarine base at Polyarnyy. Five layers of wool and oilskin enclosed him. A dirty harbor tug pushed his submarine's bow around to the north, facing down the channel. The dock that had held his *Red October* for two interminable months was now a water-filled concrete box, one of the many specially built to shelter strategic missile submarines from the harsh elements. On its edge a collection of sailors and dockyard workers watched his ship sail in stolid Russian fashion, without a wave or a cheer.

"Engines ahead slow, Kamarov," he ordered. The tug slid out of the way, and Ramius glanced aft to see the water stirring from the force of the twin bronze propellers. The tug's commander waved. Ramius returned the gesture. The tug had done a simple job, but done it quickly and well. The *Red October*, a *Typhoon*-class sub, moved under her own power towards the main ship channel of the Kola Fjord.

"There's *Purga*, Captain." Gregoriy Kamarov pointed to the ice-breaker that would escort them to sea. Ramius nodded. The two hours required to transit the channel would tax not his seamanship but his endurance. There was a cold north wind blowing, the only sort of north wind in this part of the world. Late autumn had been surprisingly mild, and scarcely any snow had fallen in an area that measures it in meters; then a week before a major winter storm had savaged the Murmansk

coast, breaking pieces off the Arctic icepack. The icebreaker was no formality. The *Purga* would butt aside any ice that might have drifted overnight into the channel. It would not do at all for the Soviet Navy's newest missile submarine to be damaged by an errant chunk of frozen water.

The water in the fjord was choppy, driven by the brisk wind. It began to lap over the *October's* spherical bow, rolling back down the flat missile deck which lay before the towering black sail. The water was coated with the bilge oil of numberless ships, filth that would not evaporate in the low temperatures and that left a black ring on the rocky walls of the fjord as though from the bath of a slovenly giant. An altogether apt simile, Ramius thought. The Soviet giant cared little for the dirt it left on the face of the earth, he grumbled to himself. He had learned his seamanship as a boy on inshore fishing boats, and knew what it was to be in harmony with nature.

"Increase speed to one-third," he said. Kamarov repeated his captain's order over the bridge telephone. The water stirred more as the *October* moved astern of the *Purga*. Captain Lieutenant Kamarov was the ship's navigator, his last duty station having been harbor pilot for the large combatant vessels based on both sides of the wide inlet. The two officers kept a weather eye on the armed icebreaker three hundred meters ahead. The *Purga's* after deck had a handful of crewmen stomping about in the cold, one wearing the white apron of a ship's cook. They wanted to witness the *Red October's* first operational cruise, and besides, sailors will do almost anything to break the monotony of their duties.

Ordinarily it would have irritated Ramius to have his ship escorted out—the channel here was wide and deep—but not today. The ice was something to worry about. And so, for Ramius, was a great deal else.

"So, my Captain, again we go to sea to serve and protect the *Rodina!*" Captain Second Rank Ivan Yurievich Putin poked his head through the hatch—without permission, as usual—and clambered up the ladder with the awkwardness of a landsman. The tiny control station was already crowded enough with the captain, the navigator, and a mute lookout. Putin was the ship's *zampolit* (political officer). Everything he did was to serve the *Rodina* (Motherland), a word that had mystical connotations to a Russian and, along with V. I. Lenin, was the Communist party's substitute for a godhead.

"Indeed, Ivan," Ramius replied with more good cheer than he felt. "Two weeks at sea. It is good to leave the dock. A seaman belongs at sea, not tied alongside, overrun with bureaucrats and workmen with dirty boots. And we will be warm."

"You find this cold?" Putin asked incredulously.

For the hundredth time Ramius told himself that Putin was the perfect political officer. His voice was always too loud, his humor too affected. He never allowed a person to forget what he was. The perfect political officer, Putin was an easy man to fear.

“I have been in submarines too long, my friend. I grow accustomed to moderate temperatures and a stable deck under my feet.” Putin did not notice the veiled insult. He’d been assigned to submarines after his first tour on destroyers had been cut short by chronic seasickness—and perhaps because he did not resent the close confinement aboard submarines, something that many men cannot tolerate.

“Ah, Marko Aleksandrovich, in Gorkiy on a day like this, flowers bloom!”

“And what sort of flowers might those be, Comrade Political Officer?” Ramius surveyed the fjord through his binoculars. At noon the sun was barely over the southeast horizon, casting orange light and purple shadows along the rocky walls.

“Why, snow flowers, of course,” Putin said, laughing loudly. “On a day like this the faces of the children and the women glow pink, your breath trails behind you like a cloud, and the vodka tastes especially fine. Ah, to be in Gorkiy on a day like this!”

The bastard ought to work for Intourist, Ramius told himself, except that Gorkiy is a city closed to foreigners. He had been there twice. It had struck him as a typical Soviet city, full of ramshackle buildings, dirty streets, and ill-clad citizens. As it was in most Russian cities, winter was Gorkiy’s best season. The snow hid all the dirt. Ramius, half Lithuanian, had childhood memories of a better place, a coastal village whose Hanseatic origin had left rows of presentable buildings.

It was unusual for anyone other than a Great Russian to be aboard—much less command—a Soviet naval vessel. Marko’s father, Aleksandr Ramius, had been a hero of the Party, a dedicated, believing Communist who had served Stalin faithfully and well. When the Soviets first occupied Lithuania in 1940, the elder Ramius was instrumental in rounding up political dissidents, shop owners, priests, and anyone else who might have been troublesome to the new regime. All were shipped off to fates that now even Moscow could only guess at. When the Germans invaded a year later, Aleksandr fought heroically as a political commissar, and was later to distinguish himself in the Battle of Leningrad. In 1944 he returned to his native land with the spearhead of the Eleventh Guards Army to wreak bloody vengeance on those who had collaborated with the Germans or been suspected of such. Marko’s father had been a true Soviet hero—and Marko was deeply ashamed to be his son. His mother’s health had been broken during the endless siege of Leningrad. She died giving birth to him, and he was raised by his paternal grandmother in Lithuania

while his father strutted through the Party Central Committee in Vilnius, awaiting his promotion to Moscow. He got that, too, and was a candidate member of the Politburo when his life was cut short by a heart attack.

Marko's shame was not total. His father's prominence had made his current goal a possibility, and Marko planned to wreak his own vengeance on the Soviet Union, enough, perhaps, to satisfy the thousands of his countrymen who had died before he was even born.

"Where we are going, Ivan Yurievich, it will be colder still."

Putin clapped his captain's shoulder. Was his affection feigned or real? Marko wondered. Probably real. Ramius was an honest man, and he recognized that this short, loud oaf did have some human feelings.

"Why is it, Comrade Captain, that you always seem glad to leave the *Rodina* and go to sea?"

Ramius smiled behind his binoculars. "A seaman has one country, Ivan Yurievich, but two wives. You never understand that. Now I go to my other wife, the cold, heartless one that owns my soul." Ramius paused. The smile vanished. "My only wife, now."

Putin was quiet for once, Marko noted. The political officer had been there, had cried real tears as the coffin of polished pine rolled into the cremation chamber. For Putin the death of Natalia Bogdanova Ramius had been a cause of grief, but beyond that the act of an uncaring God whose existence he regularly denied. For Ramius it had been a crime committed not by God but the State. An unnecessary, monstrous crime, one that demanded punishment.

"Ice." The lookout pointed.

"Loose-pack ice, starboard side of the channel, or perhaps something calved off the east-side glacier. We'll pass well clear," Kamarov said.

"Captain!" The bridge speaker had a metallic voice. "Message from fleet headquarters."

"Read it."

"Exercise area clear. No enemy vessels in vicinity. Proceed as per orders. Signed, Korov, Fleet Commander."

"Acknowledged," Ramius said. The speaker clicked off. "So, no *Amerikantsi* about?"

"You doubt the fleet commander?" Putin inquired.

"I hope he is correct," Ramius replied, more sincerely than his political officer would appreciate. "But you remember our briefings."

Putin shifted on his feet. Perhaps he was feeling the cold.

"Those American 688-class submarines, Ivan, the *Los Angeleses*. Remember what one of their officers told our spy? That they could sneak up on a whale and bugger it before it knew they were there? I wonder how

the KGB got that bit of information. A beautiful Soviet agent, trained in the ways of the decadent West, too skinny, the way the imperialists like their women, blond hair. . .” The captain grunted amusement. “Probably the American officer was a boastful boy, trying to find a way to do something similar to our agent, no? And feeling his liquor, like most sailors. Still. The American *Los Angeles* class, and the new British *Trafalgars*, those we must guard against. They are a threat to us.”

“The Americans are good technicians, Comrade Captain,” Putin said, “but they are not giants. Their technology is not so awesome. *Nasha lutchka*,” he concluded. Ours is better.

Ramius nodded thoughtfully, thinking to himself that *zampoliti* really ought to know something about the ships they supervised, as mandated by Party doctrine.

“Ivan, didn’t the farmers around Gorkiy tell you it is the wolf you do not see that you must fear? But don’t be overly concerned. With this ship we will teach them a lesson, I think.”

“As I told the Main Political Administration,” Putin clapped Ramius’ shoulder again, “*Red October* is in the best of hands!”

Ramius and Kamarov both smiled at that. You son of a bitch! the captain thought, saying in front of my men that *you* must pass on my fitness to command! A man who could not command a rubber raft on a calm day! A pity you will not live to eat those words, Comrade Political Officer, and spend the rest of your life in the gulag for that misjudgment. It would almost be worth leaving you alive.

A few minutes later the chop began to pick up, making the submarine roll. The movement was accentuated by their height above the deck, and Putin made excuses to go below. Still a weak-legged sailor. Ramius shared the observation silently with Kamarov, who smiled agreement. Their unspoken contempt for the *zampolit* was a most un-Soviet thought.

The next hour passed quickly. The water grew rougher as they approached the open sea, and their icebreaker escort began to wallow on the swells. Ramius watched her with interest. He had never been on an icebreaker, his entire career having been in submarines. They were more comfortable, but also more dangerous. He was accustomed to the danger, though, and the years of experience would stand him in good stead now.

“Sea buoy in sight, Captain.” Kamarov pointed. The red lighted buoy was riding actively on the waves.

“Control room, what is the sounding?” Ramius asked over the bridge telephone.

“One hundred meters below the keel, Comrade Captain.”

“Increase speed to two-thirds, come left ten degrees.” Ramius looked at Kamarov. “Signal our course change to *Purga*, and hope he doesn’t turn the wrong way.”

Kamarov reached for the small blinker light stowed under the bridge coaming. The *Red October* began to accelerate slowly, her 30,000-ton bulk resisting the power of her engines. Presently the bow wave grew to a three-meter standing arc of water; man-made combers rolled down the missile deck, splitting against the front of the sail. The *Purga* altered course to starboard, allowing the submarine to pass well clear.

Ramius looked aft at the bluffs of the Kola Fjord. They had been carved to this shape millennia before by the remorseless pressure of towering glaciers. How many times in his twenty years of service with the Red Banner Northern Fleet had he looked at the wide, flat U-shape? This would be the last. One way or another, he’d never go back. Which way would it turn out? Ramius admitted to himself that he didn’t much care. Perhaps the stories his grandmother had taught him were true, about God and the reward for a good life. He hoped so—it would be good if Natalia were not truly dead. In any case, there was no turning back. He had left a letter in the last mailbag taken off before sailing. There was no going back after that.

“Kamarov, signal to *Purga*: ‘Diving at—,’” he checked his watch, “—1320 hours. Exercise OCTOBER FROST begins as scheduled. You are released to other assigned duties. We will return as scheduled.”

Kamarov worked the trigger on the blinker light to transmit the message. The *Purga* responded at once, and Ramius read the flashing signal unaided: “IF THE WHALES DON’T EAT YOU. GOOD LUCK TO RED OCTOBER!”

Ramius lifted the phone again, pushing the button for the sub’s radio room. He had the same message transmitted to fleet headquarters, Severomorsk. Next he addressed the control room.

“Depth under the keel?”

“One hundred forty meters, Comrade Captain.”

“Prepare to dive.” He turned to the lookout and ordered him below. The boy moved towards the hatch. He was probably glad to return to the warmth below, but took the time for one last look at the cloudy sky and receding cliffs. Going to sea on a submarine was always exciting, and always a little sad.

“Clear the bridge. Take the conn when you get below, Gregoriy.” Kamarov nodded and dropped down the hatch, leaving the captain alone.

Ramius made one last careful scan of the horizon. The sun was barely visible aft, the sky leaden, the sea black except for the splash of whitecaps. He wondered if he were saying good-bye to the world. If so, he would have preferred a more cheerful view of it.

Before sliding down he inspected the hatch seat, pulling it shut with a chain and making sure the automatic mechanism functioned properly. Next he dropped eight meters down the inside of the sail to the pressure hull, then two more into the control room. A *michman* (warrant officer) shut the second hatch and with a powerful spin turned the locking wheel as far as it would go.

“Gregoriy?” Ramius asked.

“Straight board shut,” the navigator said crisply, pointing to the diving board. All hull-opening indicator lights showed green, safe. “All systems aligned and checked for dive. The compensation is entered. We are rigged for dive.”

The captain made his own visual inspection of mechanical, electrical, and hydraulic indicators. He nodded, and the *michman* of the watch unlocked the vent controls.

“Dive,” Ramius ordered, moving to the periscope to relieve Vasily Borodin, his *starpom* (executive officer). Kamarov pulled the diving alarm, and the hull reverberated with the racket of a loud buzzer.

“Flood the main ballast tanks. Rig out the diving planes. Ten degrees down-angle on the planes,” Kamarov ordered, his eyes alert to see that every crewman did his job exactly. Ramius listened carefully but did not look. Kamarov was the best young seaman he had ever commanded, and had long since earned his captain’s trust.

The *Red October*’s hull was filled with the noise of rushing air as vents at the top of the ballast tanks were opened and water entering from the tank floods at the bottom chased the buoying air out. It was a lengthy process, for the submarine had many such tanks, each carefully subdivided by numerous cellular baffles. Ramius adjusted the periscope lens to look down and saw the black water change briefly to foam.

The *Red October* was the largest and finest command Ramius had ever had, but the sub had one major flaw. She had plenty of engine power and a new drive system that he hoped would befuddle American and Soviet submarines alike, but she was so big that she changed depth like a crippled whale. Slow going up, even slower going down.

“Scope under.” Ramius stepped away from the instrument after what seemed a long wait. “Down periscope.”

“Passing forty meters,” Kamarov said.

“Level off at one hundred meters.” Ramius watched his crewmen now. The first dive could make experienced men shudder, and half his crew were farmboys straight from training camp. The hull popped and creaked under the pressure of the surrounding water, something that took getting used to. A few of the younger men went pale but stood rigidly upright.

Kamarov began the procedure for leveling off at the proper depth.

Ramius watched with a pride he might have felt for his own son as the lieutenant gave the necessary orders with precision. He was the first officer Ramius had recruited. The control room crew snapped to his command. Five minutes later the submarine slowed her descent at ninety meters and settled the next ten to a perfect stop at one hundred.

“Well done, Comrade Lieutenant. You have the conn. Slow to one-third speed. Have the sonarmen listen on all passive systems.” Ramius turned to leave the control room, motioning Putin to follow him.

And so it began.

Ramius and Putin went aft to the submarine’s wardroom. The captain held the door open for the political officer, then closed and locked it behind himself. The *Red October*’s wardroom was a spacious affair for a submarine, located immediately forward of the galley, aft of the officer accommodations. Its walls were soundproofed, and the door had a lock because her designers had known that not everything the officers had to say was necessarily for the ears of the enlisted men. It was large enough for all of the *October*’s officers to eat as a group—though at least three of them would always be on duty. The safe containing the ship’s orders was here, not in the captain’s stateroom where a man might use his solitude to try opening it by himself. It had two dials. Ramius had one combination, Putin the other. Which was hardly necessary, since Putin undoubtedly knew their mission orders already. So did Ramius, but not all the particulars.

Putin poured tea as the captain checked his watch against the chronometer mounted on the bulkhead. Fifteen minutes until he could open the safe. Putin’s courtesy made him uneasy.

“Two more weeks of confinement,” the *zampolit* said, stirring his tea.

“The Americans do this for two *months*, Ivan. Of course, their submarines are far more comfortable.” Despite her huge bulk, the *October*’s crew accommodations would have shamed a gulag jailer. The crew consisted of fifteen officers, housed in fairly decent cabins aft, and a hundred enlisted men whose bunks were stuffed into corners and racks throughout the bow, forward of the missile room. The *October*’s size was deceptive. The interior of her double hull was crammed with missiles, torpedoes, a nuclear reactor and its support equipment, a huge backup diesel power plant, and bank of nickel-cadmium batteries outside the pressure hull, which was ten times the size of its American counterparts. Running and maintaining the ship was a huge job for so small a crew, even though extensive use of automation made her the most modern of Soviet naval vessels. Perhaps the men didn’t need proper bunks. They would only have four or six hours a day to make use of them. This would work to Ramius’ advantage. Half of his crew were draftees on their first operational cruise, and even the more experienced men knew little enough. The strength of his enlisted crew, unlike that of Western crews,

resided much more in his eleven *michmany* (warrant officers) than in his *glavnyy starshini* (senior petty officers). All of them were men who would do—were specifically trained to do—exactly what their officers told them. And Ramius had picked the officers.

“You want to cruise for two months?” Putin asked.

“I have done it on diesel submarines. A submarine belongs at sea, Ivan. Our mission is to strike fear into the hearts of the imperialists. We do not accomplish this tied up in our barn at Polyarnyy most of the time, but we cannot stay at sea any longer because any period over two weeks and the crew loses efficiency. In two weeks this collection of children will be a mob of numbed robots.” Ramius was counting on that.

“And we could solve this by having capitalist luxuries?” Putin sneered.

“A true Marxist is objective, Comrade Political Officer,” Ramius chided, savoring this last argument with Putin. “Objectively, that which aids us in carrying out our mission is good, that which hinders us is bad. Adversity is supposed to hone one’s spirit and skill, not dull them. Just being aboard a submarine is hardship enough, is it not?”

“Not for you, Marko.” Putin grinned over his tea.

“I am a seaman. Our crewmen are not, most never will be. They are a mob of farmers’ sons and boys who yearn to be factory workers. We must adjust to the times, Ivan. These youngsters are not the same as we were.”

“That is true enough,” Putin agreed. “You are never satisfied, Comrade Captain. I suppose it is men like you who force progress upon us all.”

Both men knew exactly why Soviet missile submarines spent so little of their time—barely fifteen percent of it—at sea, and it had nothing to do with creature comforts. The *Red October* carried twenty-six SS-N-20 Seahawk missiles, each with eight 500-kiloton multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles—MIRVs—enough to destroy two hundred cities. Land-based bombers could only fly a few hours at a time, then had to return to their bases. Land-based missiles arrayed along the main East-West Soviet rail network were always where paramilitary troops of the KGB could get at them lest some missile regiment commander suddenly came to realize the power at his fingertips. But missile submarines were by definition beyond any control from land. Their entire mission was to disappear.

Given that fact, Marko was surprised that his government had them at all. The crew of such vessels had to be trusted. And so they sailed less often than their Western counterparts, and when they did it was with a political officer aboard to stand next to the commanding officer, a second captain always ready to pass approval on every action.

“Do you think you could do it, Marko, cruise for two months with these farmboys?”

“I prefer half-trained boys, as you know. They have less to unlearn.

Then I can train them to be seamen the right way, my way. My personality cult?"

Putin laughed as he lit a cigarette. "That observation has been made in the past, Marko. But you are our best teacher and your reliability is well known." This was very true. Ramius had sent hundreds of officers and seamen on to other submarines whose commanders were glad to have them. It was another paradox that a man could engender trust within a society that scarcely recognized the concept. Of course, Ramius was a loyal Party member, the son of a Party hero who had been carried to his grave by three Politburo members. Putin waggled his finger. "You should be commanding one of our higher naval schools, Comrade Captain. Your talents would better serve the state there."

"It is a seaman I am, Ivan Yurievich. Only a seaman, not a schoolmaster—despite what they say about me. A wise man knows his limitations." And a bold one seizes opportunities. Every officer aboard had served with Ramius before, except for three junior lieutenants, who would obey their orders as readily as any wet-nosed *matros* (seaman), and the doctor, who was useless.

The chronometer chimed four bells.

Ramius stood and dialed in his three-element combination. Putin did the same, and the captain flipped the lever to open the safe's circular door. Inside was a manila envelope plus four books of cipher keys and missile-targeting coordinates. Ramius removed the envelope, then closed the door, spinning both dials before sitting down again.

"So, Ivan, what do you suppose our orders tell us to do?" Ramius asked theatrically.

"Our duty, Comrade Captain." Putin smiled.

"Indeed." Ramius broke the wax seal on the envelope and extracted the four-page operation order. He read it quickly. It was not complicated.

"So, we are to proceed to grid square 54-90 and rendezvous with our attack submarine *V. K. Konovalov*—that's Captain Tupolev's new command. You know Viktor Tupolev? No? Viktor will guard us from imperialist intruders, and we will conduct a four-day acquisition and tracking drill, with him hunting us—if he can." Ramius chuckled. "The boys in the attack submarine directorate still have not figured how to track our new drive system. Well, neither will the Americans. We are to confine our operations to grid square 54-90 and the immediately surrounding squares. That ought to make Viktor's task a bit easier."

"But you will not let him find us?"

"Certainly not," Ramius snorted. "Let? Viktor was once my pupil. You give nothing to an enemy, Ivan, even in a drill. The imperialists certainly won't! In trying to find us, he also practices finding their missile

submarines. He will have a fair chance of locating us, I think. The exercise is confined to nine squares, forty thousand square kilometers. We shall see what he has learned since he served with us—oh, that's right, you weren't with me then. That's when I had the *Suslov*."

"Do I see disappointment?"

"No, not really. The four-day drill with *Konovalev* will be an interesting diversion." Bastard, he said to himself, you knew beforehand exactly what our orders were—and you do know Viktor Tupolev, liar. It was time.

Putin finished his cigarette and his tea before standing. "So, again I am permitted to watch the master captain at work—befuddling a poor boy." He turned towards the door. "I think—"

Ramius kicked Putin's feet out from under him just as he was stepping away from the table. Putin fell backwards while Ramius sprang to his feet and grasped the political officer's head in his strong fisherman's hands. The captain drove his neck downward to the sharp, metal-edged corner of the wardroom table. It struck the point. In the same instant Ramius pushed down on the man's chest. An unnecessary gesture—with the sickening crackle of bones Ivan Putin's neck broke, his spine severed at the level of the second cervical vertebra, a perfect hangman's fracture.

The political officer had no time to react. The nerves to his body below the neck were instantly cut off from the organs and muscles they controlled. Putin tried to shout, to say something, but his mouth flapped open and shut without a sound except for the exhalation of his last lungful of air. He tried to gulp air down like a landed fish, and this did not work. Then his eyes went up to Ramius, wide in shock—there was no pain, and no emotion but surprise. The captain laid him gently on the tile deck.

Ramius saw the face flash with recognition, then darken. He reached down to take Putin's pulse. It was nearly two minutes before the heart stopped completely. When Ramius was sure that his political officer was dead, he took the teapot from the table and poured two cups' worth on the deck, careful to drip some on the man's shoes. Next he lifted the body to the wardroom table and threw open the door.

"Dr. Petrov to the wardroom at once!"

The ship's medical office was only a few steps aft. Petrov was there in seconds, along with Vasily Borodin, who had hurried aft from the control room.

"He slipped on the deck where I spilled my tea," Ramius gasped, performing closed heart massage on Putin's chest. "I tried to keep him from falling, but he hit his head on the table."

Petrov shoved the captain aside, moved the body around, and leapt on the table to kneel astride it. He tore the shirt open, then checked Putin's eyes. Both pupils were wide and fixed. The doctor felt around the man's

head, his hands working down toward the neck. They stopped there, probing. The doctor shook his head slowly.

“Comrade Putin is dead. His neck is broken.” The doctor’s hands came loose, and he closed the *zampolit*’s eyes.

“No!” Ramius shouted. “He was alive only a minute ago!” The commanding officer was sobbing. “It’s my fault. I tried to catch him, but I failed. My fault!” He collapsed into a chair and buried his face in his hands. “My fault,” he cried, shaking his head in rage, struggling visibly to regain his composure. An altogether excellent performance.

Petrov placed his hand on the captain’s shoulder. “It was an accident, Comrade Captain. These things happen, even to experienced men. It was not your fault. Truly, Comrade.”

Ramius swore under his breath, regaining control of himself. “There is nothing you can do?”

Petrov shook his head. “Even in the finest clinic in the Soviet Union nothing could be done. Once the spinal cord is severed, there is no hope. Death is virtually instantaneous—but also it is quite painless,” the doctor added consolingly.

Ramius drew himself up as he took a long breath, his face set. “Comrade Putin was a good shipmate, a loyal Party member, and a fine officer.” Out the corner of his eye he noticed Borodin’s mouth twitch. “Comrades, we will continue our mission! Dr. Petrov, you will carry our comrade’s body to the freezer. This is—gruesome, I know, but he deserves and will get an honorable military funeral, with his shipmates in attendance, as it should be, when we return to port.”

“Will this be reported to fleet headquarters?” Petrov asked.

“We cannot. Our orders are to maintain strict radio silence.” Ramius handed the doctor a set of operations orders from his pocket. Not those taken from the safe. “Page three, Comrade Doctor.”

Petrov’s eyes went wide reading the operational directive.

“I would prefer to report this, but our orders are explicit: Once we dive, no transmissions of any kind, for any reason.”

Petrov handed the papers back. “Too bad, our comrade would have looked forward to this. But orders are orders.”

“And we shall carry them out.”

“Putin would have it no other way,” Petrov agreed.

“Borodin, observe: I take the comrade political officer’s missile control key from his neck, as per regulations,” Ramius said, pocketing the key and chain.

“I note this, and will so enter it in the log,” the executive officer said gravely.

Petrov brought in his corpsman. Together they took the body aft to the medical office, where it was zippered into a body bag. The