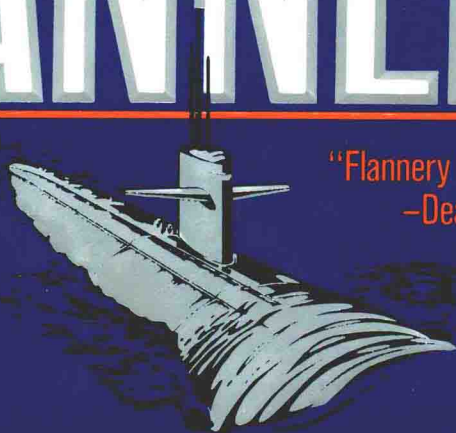


From the award-winning author of COUNTERSTRIKE

SEAN FLANNERY



"Flannery is a major find!"

—Dean Koontz

WINNER TAKE ALL

"Flannery takes his rightful place among such masters as Tom Clancy and Clive Cussler." —Ed Gorman, *Mystery Scene*

WINNER TAKE ALL

SEAN FLANNERY



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental.

WINNER TAKE ALL

Copyright © 1994 by David Hagberg

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

A Forge Book
Published by Tom Doherty Associates, Inc.
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 0-312-85417-X

First edition: March 1994

Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

WINNER TAKE ALL

ALSO BY SEAN FLANNERY

Broken Idols
*Counterstrike**
Crossed Swords
Eagles Fly
False Prophets
Gulag
The Hollow Men
The Kremlin Conspiracy
Moscow Crossing
*Moving Targets**
The Trinity Factor
*Winner Take All**
The Zebra Network

WRITING AS DAVID HAGBERG

The Capsule
*Countdown**
*Critical Mass**
*Crossfire**
*Desert Fire**
*Heartland**
*Heros**
*Last Come the Children**
*Twister**
*Without Honor**

*Denotes a Tor/Forge Book

WINNER TAKE ALL

SEAN FLANNERY



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental.

WINNER TAKE ALL

Copyright © 1994 by David Hagberg

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

A Forge Book
Published by Tom Doherty Associates, Inc.
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 0-312-85417-X

First edition: March 1994

Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This novel is for the men and women of all navies who risk their lives sailing above, upon, and beneath the unforgiving sea.

WINNER TAKE ALL

PART ONE

T-AGOS *JOHN HOPKINS*

THREE HUNDRED TWENTY MILES NORTHWEST of the Rybachi Peninsula, the T-AGOS *John Hopkins* was making fifteen knots through the angry chop of the Barents Sea. The 2,285-ton U.S. Stalwart-class ocean-surveillance vessel had been on an ELINT (electronic intelligence) gathering mission off the Russian coast for the past ten days. She had been ordered not only to monitor the numerous radar and missile bases that dotted the region and any submarine activity in the area but also to take a close look at a new naval air station at Polyarnyy. They were operating, as normal, under the guise of an ocean-floor sonar-mapping mission. They had not been bothered, even though they were so near to sensitive Russian waters. A few minutes earlier, however, that had changed. The *John Hopkins* towed the UQQ-2 SURTASS, which was the latest in passive-sonar equipment. They had picked up the footprint of a Russian submarine.

"Bridge, sonar."

The skipper, Lieutenant Commander Newton Peters, picked up the phone. "Bridge."

"I've got a positive now on that boomer."

"Go ahead."

"Looks like an Alfa. One of the older varieties, I'd say, from the noise she's making."

Peters wasn't surprised that they'd picked up a shadow, just irritated that it had come so soon. He'd been up against the small, deep-diving Alfa boats before, once on a mission in the

North Sea, and again a few years ago off the coast of Newfoundland. In both instances the titanium-hulled submarine had dived to three thousand feet, literally disappearing from his sonar as if a magician had pulled some trick.

The Alfa was noisy as long as she remained above any thermocline, but she was extremely deadly. Even the skippers of the much larger, much deadlier U.S. Los Angeles-class attack submarines were wary of the Alfas.

"What's he doing, chief?"

"He's coming to the same course as us, sir. Making about the same speed. Depth at just under one hundred meters."

Peters, a large, harsh-looking man whose friends thought he looked a lot like a younger Gary Cooper, pondered this information for a moment. "Keep an eye on him."

"Should we flash him?"

"Not for the moment. Just keep us posted if he changes course, speed, or depth."

"Aye, aye, sir," the sonarman said.

Peters felt edgy. He put down his telephone and motioned for his executive officer, Lieutenant Ronald Lindsey, and his ELINT officer, Lieutenant John Christiansen, to follow him back to the wardroom.

When they were settled and the door was closed, the skipper turned to his exec. "What do you think, Ron?" His voice was soft.

"Well, he knows we're here, all right, no doubt about that. The question is, does he know *why* we're here?"

Peters studied his ELINT officer. "How soon before we're in range to find out what we've come to find out, Chris?"

Lieutenant Christiansen looked at his watch. It was a few minutes past 0230 local. "Not for another nine or ten hours. Let's say around noon."

"Depends on what that boomer down there is going to do when we get close to the coast," Lindsey said, clearly nervous. "He might shoot."

Peters, who'd joined the Navy when his exec was still in grade school, was an old enough hand not to be too excited when the enemy came sniffing around. "He's not going to start a shooting war unless he gets jumpy, or we do something stupid."

"He could try to jam us. Their ECMs are fairly sophisti-

cated these days," Lieutenant Christiansen said. He was even younger than the exec.

"How effective would that be?"

"Not very, but he might think it would work."

"So," the skipper said, "we either forge ahead and see what the boomer will do about us, or turn tail and head home."

"We could radio for . . ."

Lieutenant Commander Peters shook his head, cutting off his exec. "Radio silence, Ron. You read the same orders I read. We either do what we've been sent out here to do, or we make a one-eighty. Let's go for it."

"I agree," the ELINT officer said. "We're here to do a job, let's do it."

Lieutenant Commander Peters paused again. There were just as many aggressive skippers at the bottom of the ocean as there were collecting pensions. But what the hell. He nodded and got up from the table. "Let's go active and ping the bastard half a dozen times so that he damned well understands we know he's down there."

SSN *POGIN*

The Russian-built nuclear-powered attack submarine *Pogin* did not bother to mask its reactor or propeller noises as it shadowed the American surface vessel. She had been on patrol in the Barents Sea north of Polyarnyy for thirty days with nothing to do until now. The crew was grateful for the diversion, although most of them had no real idea what was going on.

Captain Second Rank Mikhail Badim had just returned from speaking with his navigator in the next compartment when the first sonar pings hit them. He, as well as the other forty-five men and officers, looked up reflexively. It was a sound that every submariner respected. They had been found.

The pinging went on for ten seconds and then stopped.

"Sonar, what's his status?" Badim asked.

"Still on course two-nine-five, making fifteen knots, Comrade Captain."

“Range?”

“Three thousand meters, relative bearing one-six-five.”

The American ship was behind them and off to the right. “Come right five degrees to three-oh-oh, reduce speed to one-fourth.”

“Aye, aye, Comrade Captain,” the helmsman replied.

He was a farmboy. But so were they all. A good crew, Badim thought, but with no combat under their belts, and not even any shadow work these days with American warships. Well, all that was about to change.

His *starpom* (executive officer), Valeri Melnik, standing behind the ECM (electronic countermeasures) console, looked up, a knowing expression on his face. Only he, their navigation officer, Kirill Karpovich, and their *zampolit* (political officer), Aleksei Grichakov, had been advised of their real orders. The rest of the crew didn't even know they'd left the Black Sea eleven days ago. The *Pogin* was a Ukrainian Navy vessel, not Russian.

Badim had served in the submarine service for seventeen years, working his way up the hard way, by dogged persistence. He had no father or even an uncle who had been a high-ranking military officer, no politburo connections, no one to give him sponsorship. But then with the breakup of the Soviet Union he had transferred to the Ukrainian Navy's Black Sea Fleet. There was no love lost in Kiev for Great Russians.

“They know we're here,” Melnik said.

Badim managed a tight smile. “So it would appear.”

Karpovich looked up from his chart table. “We have seventeen minutes to intercept on this course and speed, my Captain.”

“I want a range on the beam of one thousand meters within the next ten minutes. You have the conn.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Badim motioned for his exec and *zampolit* to leave the bridge with him. They went back to the cramped officers' wardroom. Grichakov was last in and he drew the heavy curtain.

“Well,” the *zampolit* said. “It seems that we've gotten lucky.”