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for

RED

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By **Tom Clancy**

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 icebreaker 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