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## THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER

Tom Clancy. *The Hunt for Red October*. Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press, 1984. 387 pages. Hard covers. Dust jacket. \$14.95.

*The Hunt for Red October* is a novel that has made many people happy. For the publisher, Naval Institute Press, it has proven to be a huge commercial success. The novel's sympathetic portrayal of men who serve their country under the sea has made it popular in naval circles. It has doubtless been a dream come true for author Tom Clancy, an insurance salesman who has seen his premier novel climb to the top of the best-seller list and become entrenched there. (As of mid-June, *The Hunt for Red October* had been on *The Washington Post's* top-ten list for 31 weeks and 235,000 copies of the book were in print.) Finally, *The Hunt for Red October* has been a source of satisfaction for readers who enjoy tales of adventure and suspense.

"Red October" is the name of a new Soviet ballistic missile submarine that has embarked on its maiden operational voyage. Its half-Russian, half-Lithuanian skipper, Marko Ramius, decides to defect to the United States and deliver his vessel into American hands. Once at sea, Ramius informs the Kremlin of his plan and dares the Soviet Navy to stop him. Meanwhile, the Americans, led by the novel's other major protagonist, CIA analyst Jack Ryan, surmise Ramius' intentions and the race is on between the two superpowers to see who can retrieve the priceless trophy.

The commercial success of *The Hunt for Red October* is testimony to the author's talent for spinning a good yarn. Though the reader at times may find himself overwhelmed by the technical and naval terminology sprinkled throughout *The Hunt for Red October*, given the novel's high-tech setting, emphasis on such detail was probably unavoidable. In any event, it gives Clancy's novel a ring of authenticity that encourages the reader to deposit his imagination into the author's safekeeping.

I confess that interest in naval life, much less in the cold war waged in the depths of the ocean, is not what drew me to this novel. Rather, it was Clancy's treatment of the Soviet Union and Soviet sailors that caught my attention. In particular, I was curious to read about his half-Russian, half-Lithuanian protagonist. Overall, Clancy demonstrates a sober view of the Soviet system. It is evident that Clancy researched his major Soviet character and got the basic facts straight so that the average reader coming across the passages pertaining to Marko Ramius' Lithuanian background would receive a fairly accurate account of the Baltic nation's unhappy fate.

In developing the character of Marko's father, Aleksandr, Clancy briefly recounts the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in mid-1940 and the deportations that began soon thereafter. Aleksandr Ramius is a high-ranking Communist who leaves his native Lithuania to join Lenin's Red Guards. The elder Ramius returns to Lithuania with the Red Army in 1940, and again in 1944, participating actively in the Soviet reign of terror against the Lithuanian populace. For his loyal service Aleksandr Ramius is rewarded, first by being appointed chief of Vilnius' Communist Party Central Committee and later to candidate-member status in the Soviet Politburo.

His Russian mother having died during childbirth, her only child, Marko, is brought up by his paternal grandmother Hilda, a devout Roman Catholic who secretly gives her grandson religious instruction. This grounding in the tenets of Catholicism does not so much make Marko Ramius embrace Christianity as cause him to question the official state religion — Marxism-Leninism — and to reject its primacy over all other ideologies. The exposure to Christian doctrine, coupled with Marko's growing realization, even in childhood, of the horrible deeds committed by his father and others against the Lithuanian people in the name of a perverted revolution, alienate him from the state. The tragic death of his Russian wife, Natalia, caused by a chain of events linked together by the corruption and ineptitude of the Soviet system, is the final straw that causes him to break completely with the state and to lay out a plan for wreaking vengeance on it.

Clancy goes to considerable lengths to establish a motive for Ramius' defection. To make the protagonist Lithuanian, or Latvian, or Estonian, would be motive enough for a reader who understood the history of the Baltic States and their current

plight. The author spares no less effort in attempting to convince the reader that the Kremlin actually would entrust a highly sensitive position of responsibility outside the „fraternal" borders of the USSR to a half-Lithuanian. Clancy does indeed succeed in this endeavor. In Ramius, Clancy creates a character who on the surface appears to blend in completely with the official, Russian environment: he leaves Lithuania to pursue a naval career, marries a Russian and surrounds himself with Russian friends and proteges. In fact, one is left wondering to what extent Ramius considers himself to be Lithuanian, how deep and how strong are his Lithuanian cultural roots. Since *The Hunt for Red October* is a novel primarily about a defection, not a defector, Clancy cannot be faulted for declining to pursue the issue of his protagonist's ethnic identity much further than he did. (Perhaps this is one of the reasons why reviewers of the book have chosen to ignore the question of Ramius' non-Russian background and the motives for his defection. See, for example, *The Washington Post Book World*, October 22, 1984.) Even so, it would have been interesting to see more of Ramius' innermost being, beyond the immediate impulses that drove him to defect.

Though Clancy's right to develop his characters to the degree of his own choosing must be respected, he should not escape gentle admonition for the factual errors he commits. A Lithuanian reader of this review will have noted them by now. Ramius is not a Lithuanian surname. One is hard pressed to think of a single instance in Lithuanian-language usage when the syllable "ius" is preceded by the consonant "m." Substituting "č" for "m" (Račius) or dropping the "i" between "m" and "u" (Ramus) would have made the protagonist's surname plausible. Nor is Marko a Lithuanian name; however, perhaps the first name of this half-Russian character was meant to be Slavic. (I leave it for others to determine whether Marko is a Slavic name.) The name of Marko's father should be Aleksandras, not Aleksandr. And Marko's paternal grandmother cannot have the German name of Hilda unless it was Clancy's intention to show that Marko Ramius was part-German in addition to being part-Lithuanian and part-Russian.

These are minor points, to be sure, but they constitute mistakes of which the knowledgeable reader is reminded throughout the novel. They are minor irritations that could easily have been avoided. According to an article about Tom Clancy (*Baltimore Sun*, November 28, 1984), a Russian-language expert reviewed the manuscript of the novel before it was published. The Naval Institute Press would have been well advised to find someone expert in the Lithuanian language to do the same.

All things considered, from a Baltic perspective, *The Hunt for Red October* is a welcome addition to the literary world. It provides a brief and, on the major points, accurate introduction to Lithuania for thousands of readers who previously had at best only the foggiest notion about the history and current status of the Baltic nations. And it tells a darn good story to boot.

**VICTOR A. NAKAS**