

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES*—BESTSELLING AUTHOR

TOM CLANCY

with MARK GREANEY



A JACK RYAN NOVEL

COMMAND AUTHORITY

ALSO BY TOM CLANCY

FICTION

The Hunt for Red October
Red Storm Rising
Patriot Games
The Cardinal of the Kremlin
Clear and Present Danger
The Sum of All Fears
Without Remorse
Debt of Honor
Executive Orders
Rainbow Six
The Bear and the Dragon
Red Rabbit
The Teeth of the Tiger
Dead or Alive
Against All Enemies
Locked On
Threat Vector

NONFICTION

Submarine: A Guided Tour Inside a Nuclear Warship
Armored Cav: A Guided Tour of an Armored Cavalry Regiment
Fighter Wing: A Guided Tour of an Air Force Combat Wing
Marine: A Guided Tour of a Marine Expeditionary Unit
Airborne: A Guided Tour of an Airborne Task Force
Carrier: A Guided Tour of an Aircraft Carrier
Into the Storm: A Study in Command
with General Fred Franks, Jr. (Ret.), and Tony Koltz
Every Man a Tiger: The Gulf War Air Campaign
with General Chuck Horner (Ret.) and Tony Koltz
Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces
with General Carl Stiner (Ret.) and Tony Koltz
Battle Ready
with General Tony Zinni (Ret.) and Tony Koltz

COMMAND AUTHORITY



TOM CLANCY

with MARK GREANEY

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York

PUTNAM

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
Publishers Since 1838
Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Group (USA) LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10014



USA • Canada • UK • Ireland • Australia • New Zealand • India • South Africa • China

penguin.com

A Penguin Random House Company

Copyright © 2013 by Rubicon, Inc.

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

ISBN 978-1-101-63649-7

INTERIOR MAPS © 2013 BY JEFFREY L. WARD

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Version_1

CONTENTS

[Also by Tom Clancy](#)
[Title Page](#)
[Copyright](#)
[Principal Characters](#)

[Prologue](#)
[Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10](#)
[Chapter 11](#)
[Chapter 12](#)
[Chapter 13](#)
[Chapter 14](#)
[Chapter 15](#)
[Chapter 16](#)
[Chapter 17](#)
[Chapter 18](#)
[Chapter 19](#)
[Chapter 20](#)
[Chapter 21](#)
[Chapter 22](#)
[Chapter 23](#)
[Chapter 24](#)
[Chapter 25](#)
[Chapter 26](#)
[Chapter 27](#)
[Chapter 28](#)
[Chapter 29](#)
[Chapter 30](#)
[Chapter 31](#)
[Chapter 32](#)
[Chapter 33](#)
[Chapter 34](#)
[Chapter 35](#)
[Chapter 36](#)
[Chapter 37](#)
[Chapter 38](#)
[Chapter 39](#)
[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)
[Chapter 42](#)
[Chapter 43](#)
[Chapter 44](#)
[Chapter 45](#)
[Chapter 46](#)
[Chapter 47](#)
[Chapter 48](#)
[Chapter 49](#)
[Chapter 50](#)
[Chapter 51](#)
[Chapter 52](#)
[Chapter 53](#)
[Chapter 54](#)
[Chapter 55](#)
[Chapter 56](#)
[Chapter 57](#)
[Chapter 58](#)
[Chapter 59](#)
[Chapter 60](#)
[Chapter 61](#)
[Chapter 62](#)
[Chapter 63](#)
[Chapter 64](#)
[Chapter 65](#)
[Chapter 66](#)
[Chapter 67](#)
[Chapter 68](#)
[Chapter 69](#)
[Chapter 70](#)
[Chapter 71](#)
[Chapter 72](#)
[Chapter 73](#)
[Chapter 74](#)
[Chapter 75](#)
[Chapter 76](#)
[Chapter 77](#)
[Chapter 78](#)
[Chapter 79](#)
[Chapter 80](#)
[Chapter 81](#)
[Chapter 82](#)
[Chapter 83](#)
[Chapter 84](#)
[Chapter 85](#)
[Chapter 86](#)
[Chapter 87](#)
[Chapter 88](#)
[Epilogue](#)

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

John Patrick “Jack” Ryan: President of the United States

Dan Murray: attorney general of the United States

Arnold Van Damm: President’s chief of staff

Robert Burgess: secretary of defense

Scott Adler: secretary of state

Mary Patricia Foley: director of the Office of National Intelligence

Jay Canfield: director of the Central Intelligence Agency

Admiral James Greer: director of intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency

Judge Arthur Moore: director of the Central Intelligence Agency

Keith Bixby: chief of station, Kiev, Ukraine, Central Intelligence Agency

THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

Admiral Mark Jorgensen: chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Eric Conway: Chief Warrant Officer Two, United States Army, OH-58D Kiowa
Warrior pilot

Andre “Dre” Page: Chief Warrant Officer Two, United States Army, OH-58D Kiowa
Warrior copilot

Barry “Midas” Jankowski: lieutenant colonel, United States Army, 1st Special Forces
Operational Detachment Delta

Harris “Grungy” Cole: captain, United States Air Force, F-16 pilot

THE CAMPUS / HENDLEY ASSOCIATES

Gerry Hendley: director of The Campus / Hendley Associates

John Clark: director of operations

Domingo “Ding” Chavez: operations officer

Sam Driscoll: operations officer

Dominic “Dom” Caruso: operations officer

Jack Ryan, Jr.: operations officer / intelligence analyst

Gavin Biery: director of information technology

Adara Sherman: director of transportation

THE BRITISH

Sir Basil Charleston: director general of Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)

Anthony Haldane: international financier, ex-Foreign Office

Victor Oxley aka Bedrock: 22nd Special Air Service Regiment—Officer, British Security Service (MI5)

David Penright: officer, SIS (MI6)

Nicholas Eastling: SIS officer, Counterintelligence Section

Hugh Castor: managing director, Castor and Boyle Risk Analytics Ltd

Sandy Lamont: senior business analyst, Castor and Boyle Risk Analytics Ltd

THE RUSSIANS / THE UKRAINIANS

Valeri Volodin: president of the Russian Federation

Roman Talanov: director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of the Russian Federation

Stanislav Biryukov: director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) of the Russian Federation

Sergey Golovko: ex-director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) of the Russian Federation

Oksana Zueva: leader of the Ukrainian Regional Unity Party

Tatiana Molchanova: television newscaster, Novaya Rossiya (New Russia)

Dmitri Nesterov, aka Gleb the Scar: vory v zakonye (“thief-in-law”), operative of the Seven Strong Men criminal organization

Pavel Lechkov: Seven Strong Men operative

OTHER CHARACTERS

Caroline “Cathy” Ryan: First Lady of the United States

Edward Foley: husband of Mary Pat Foley, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency

Dino Kadic: Croatian assassin

Felicia Rodríguez: Venezuelan university student

Marta Scheuring: “urban guerrilla” of the Red Army Faction

Malcolm Galbraith: owner of Galbraith Rossiya Energy Holdings, Scottish entrepreneur

PROLOGUE

The flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics flew high above the Kremlin in a rain shower, a red-and-gold banner waving under a gray sky. The young captain took in the imagery from the backseat of the taxi as it rolled through Red Square.

The sight of the flag over the seat of power of the largest country in the world jolted the captain with pride, although Moscow would never feel like home to him. He was Russian, but he'd spent the past several years fighting in Afghanistan, and the only Soviet flags he'd seen there had been on the uniforms of the men around him.

His taxi let him out just two blocks from the square, on the north side of the massive GUM department store. He double-checked the address on the drab office building in front of him, paid his fare, and then stepped out into the afternoon rain.

The building's lobby was small and plain; a lone security man eyed him as he tucked his hat under his arm and climbed a narrow staircase that led to an unmarked door on the first floor.

Here the captain paused, brushed wrinkles out of his uniform, and ran his hand over his rows of medals to make certain they were perfectly straight.

Only when he was ready did he knock on the door.

"*Vkhodi!*" Come in!

The young captain entered the small office and shut the door behind him. With his hat in his hand, he stepped in front of the one desk in the room, and he snapped to attention.

"Captain Roman Romanovich Talanov, reporting as ordered."

The man behind the desk looked like he was still in his twenties, which greatly surprised Captain Talanov. He was here to meet a senior officer in the KGB, and he certainly did not expect someone his own age. The man wore a suit and tie, he was small and thin and not particularly fit, and he looked, to the Russian soldier, like he had never spent a day of his life in military service.

Talanov showed no hint of it, of course, but he was disappointed. For him, like every military man, officers in the KGB were divided into two classes. *Sapogi* and *pidzhaki*. Jackboots and jackets. This young man before him might have been a high-ranking state security official, but to the soldier, he was just a civilian. A jacket.

The man stood, walked around the desk, and then sat down on its edge. His slight slouch contrasted with the ramrod-straight posture of the officer standing in front of him.

The KGB man did not give his name. He said, "You just returned from

Afghanistan.”

“Yes, comrade.”

“I won’t ask you how it was, because I would not understand, and that would probably just piss you off.”

The captain stood still as stone.

The jacket said, “You are GRU Spetsnaz. Special Forces. You’ve been operating behind the lines in Afghanistan. Even over the border in Pakistan.”

It was not a question, so the captain did not reply.

With a smile, the man slouched on the desk said, “Even as a member of the most elite special operations unit in military intelligence, you stand out above the rest. Intelligence, resilience, initiative.” He winked at Talanov. “Loyalty.”

Talanov’s blue eyes were locked on a point on the wall behind the desk, so he missed the wink. With a powerful voice, he replied with a well-practiced mantra: “I serve the Soviet Union.”

The jacket half rolled his eyes, but again Talanov missed it. “Relax, Captain. Look at me, not the wall. I am not your commanding officer. I am just a comrade who wishes to have a conversation with another comrade, not a fucking robot.”

Talanov did *not* relax, but his eyes did shift to the KGB man.

“You were born in Ukraine. In Kherson, to Russian parents.”

“Yes, comrade.”

“I am from Saint Petersburg myself, but I spent my summers with my grandmother in Odessa, not far from where you grew up.”

“Yes, comrade.”

The jacket blew out a sigh, frustrated at the continued formality of the Spetsnaz man. He asked, “Are you proud of those medals on your chest?”

Talanov’s face gave away his first emotion now. It was indecision. “I . . . they are . . . I serve the—”

“You serve the Soviet Union. *Da*, Captain, duly noted. But what if I told you I wanted you to take off those medals and never put them back on?”

“I do not understand, comrade.”

“We have followed your career, especially the operations you have conducted behind the lines. And we have researched every aspect of your private life, what little there is of it. From this we have come to the conclusion that you are less interested in the good of the Communist Party, and more interested in the work itself. You, dear Captain, have a slavish desire to excel. But we do not detect in you any particular passion for the joys of the collective or any unique wonderment at the command economy.”

Talanov remained silent. Was this a test of his loyalty to the party?

The jacket continued. “Chairman Chernenko will be dead in months. Perhaps weeks.”

Captain Talanov blinked. *What madness is this talk?* If someone said such a thing in front of a KGB man on base back in Afghanistan, they would be shuffled away, never to be seen again.

The jacket said, “It’s true. They hide him from the public because he’s in a wheelchair, and he spends most of the time up in Kuntsevo at the Kremlin Clinic. Heart, lungs, liver: Nothing on that old bastard is working anymore. Gorbachev will

succeed him as general secretary—surely you’ve heard he’s next in line. Even out in some cave in Afghanistan, that *must* be common knowledge by now.”

The young officer gave up nothing.

“You are wondering how I know this?”

Slowly, Talanov said, “*Da*, comrade. I *am* wondering that.”

“I know this because I have been told by people who are worried. Worried about the future, worried about where Gorbachev will take the Union. Worried about where Reagan is taking the West. Worried everything might come crashing down on top of us.”

There were a few seconds of complete silence in the room, and then the KGB suit said, “Seems impossible, I know. But I am assured there is reason for concern.”

Talanov couldn’t take it anymore. He needed to know what was going on. “I was ordered to come here today by General Zolotov. He told me I was being considered for recruitment into a special project for the KGB.”

“Misha Zolotov knew what he was doing when he sent you to me.”

“You *do* work for the KGB, yes?”

“I do, indeed. But more specifically, I work for a group of survivors. Men in KGB and GRU, men who know that the continued existence of our organizations is the survival of the nation, the survival of the people. The Kremlin does not run this nation. A certain building in Dzerzhinsky Square runs this nation.”

“The KGB building?”

“*Da*. And I have been tasked with protecting this building, not the Communist Party.”

“And General Zolotov?”

The jacket smiled. “Is in the club. As I said, a few in GRU are on board.”

The man in the suit came very close now, his face inches from the chiseled cheekbones of Roman Talanov. In a voice barely above a whisper he said, “If I were you I would be saying to myself, ‘What the fuck is going on? I thought I was being recruited into the KGB, but instead I’ve just met a crazy man talking about the impending death of the general secretary and the possibility of the fall of the Union.’”

Talanov turned to face him and squared his shoulders. “Every word you’ve said here, comrade, is treasonous.”

“That is true, but as there are no recording devices in this room, it would take you to stand up as a witness against me. That would not be wise, Captain Talanov, as those survivors that I mentioned are at the very top, and they would protect me. What they would do to you, I can only imagine.”

Talanov looked back to the wall. “So . . . I am being asked to join the KGB, but not to do the work of the KGB. I will, instead, do the work of this group of leaders.”

“That’s it, exactly, Roman Romanovich.”

“What will I be doing specifically?”

“The same sort of things you have been doing in Kabul and Peshawar and Kandahar and Islamabad.”

“Wet work?”

“Yes. You will help ensure the security of the operation, despite what changes the Soviet Union undergoes in the next few years. In return, you will be protected no matter what might happen in the future regarding the Union.”

“I . . . I still do not understand what you think will happen in the future.”

“Are you listening to me? It’s not what *I* think. How the fuck should *I* know? It’s like this, Talanov. The USSR is a large boat, you and I are two of the passengers. We are sitting on the deck, thinking everything is just perfect, but then”—the KGB man moved around the room dramatically, as though he was acting out a scene—“wait . . . what’s this? Some of the boat’s best officers are preparing to abandon ship!”

He moved back in front of Talanov. “I might not see the iceberg in our path, but when those in charge are looking for the *fucking* lifeboat, I’m smart enough to pay attention.

“Now . . . I have been asked to tend to the lifeboat, a great responsibility entrusted to me by the officers.” The jacket grinned. “Will you help me with the lifeboat?”

Captain Talanov was a straightforward man. The metaphors were starting to piss him off. “The lifeboat. What *is* it?”

The jacket shrugged his narrow shoulders. “It’s money. It’s just fucking money. A series of black funds will be established and maintained around the world. I will do it, and you will help me keep the funds secure from threats both inside and outside the Union. It will be a simple assignment, a few years in duration, I should think, but it will require the best efforts of us both.”

The man in the suit walked to a small refrigerator that sat against the wall between two bookshelves. He pulled out a bottle of vodka, and then he grabbed two stemmed shot glasses from a shelf. He came back to the desk and filled them both.

While he did all this, Captain Roman Talanov just looked on.

“Let’s have a drink to celebrate.”

Talanov cocked his head. “Celebrate? I haven’t agreed to anything, comrade.”

“No. You haven’t.” The man in the suit smiled and passed over one of the glasses to the bewildered military man. “Not yet. But you will come around soon enough, because you and I are the same.”

“The same?”

The jacket raised his glass to Talanov. “Yes. Just like the men at the top who came up with this scheme, you and I are both survivors.”

1

Present day

The black Bronco shot through the storm, its tires kicking up mud and water and grit as it raced along the gravel road, and rain pelted the windshield faster than the wipers could clear it.

As the truck charged along at sixty miles an hour, the back doors opened and two armed men climbed out and into the rain, one on each side. The men stood on the running boards and held on to the door frame with gloved hands. Their eyes were protected from the mud and flying rocks and water by large goggles, but their black Nomex suits and the submachine guns around their necks were wet and mud-splattered in moments along with the rest of their gear: helmets with integrated headsets, ballistic protection on their chests and backs, knee and elbow pads, and magazine pouches. Everything was soaked and caked with mud by the time the Bronco closed on a cabin in the center of a rain-swept pasture.

The vehicle decelerated quickly, skidding to a stop just twenty feet from the front door. The two men on the running boards leapt off and raced toward the building, their weapons scanning the trees all around, searching for any targets. The driver of the Bronco joined soon after; just like the others, he carried an H&K submachine gun with a fat silencer on the end of the barrel.

The three operators formed in a tight stack near the entrance, and the man in front reached forward and tried the door latch.

It was locked.

The man in the back of the stack—the driver—stepped forward now, without a word. He let his H&K drop free on his chest, and he reached behind his back and pulled a pistol-grip shotgun from his pack. The weapon was loaded with Disintegrator breaching rounds: three-inch magnum shells with fifty-gram projectiles made of a steel powder bound by plastic.

The operator placed the barrel of the shotgun six inches from the top hinge of the door, and he fired a Disintegrator directly into the hinge. With an enormous boom and a wide blast of flame, the steel powder load slammed into the wood, blowing the hinge from the door frame.

He fired a second round into the lower hinge, then kicked the door, which fell into the room beyond.

The shotgunner stepped to the side and the two men holding automatic weapons rushed into the dark room, guns up and weapon lights burning arcs in the black. The driver restowed his shotgun, grabbed his H&K, and joined up with the others in the

room.

Each man had a sector to clear and did so quickly and efficiently. In three seconds they began moving toward a hallway that led to the rear of the cabin.

Two open doorways were in front of them now, one on each side of the hall, with a closed door down at the end. The first and second men in the train peeled away; number one went left through the doorway, and number two went into the room on the right. Both men found targets and fired; suppressed rounds thumped loudly in the confined space of the cabin.

While the first two men were engaging in the rooms, the lone man still in the hallway kept his weapon trained on the door ahead, knowing full well he would be exposed from behind if anyone entered the cabin from the outside.

Quickly the two men returned to the hallway and aimed their guns forward, and the man at the rear turned around to check behind them. A second later they moved on to the closed door. They stacked up again, and the first man quietly checked the latch.

It was unlocked, so he paused only long enough to lower his body a few inches while his mates did the same. Then the three men moved in as a team, and the lights under the three guns swept their sectors.

They found their precious cargo in the center of the unlit space. John Clark sat in a chair, his hands in his lap, squinting straight into the bright lights. Inches from him on both his left and his right, the tactical lights illuminated two figures standing, and a partial face of a third man was just visible behind Clark's own head.

The three gunmen in the doorway—Domingo Chavez, Sam Driscoll, and Dominic Caruso—all fired simultaneously. Short bursts from their weapons cracked in the room, flashes erupted from their muzzles, and the scent of gun smoke replaced the dank smell of mold in the cabin.

John Clark did not move, did not even blink, as the bullets slammed into the three figures around him.

Holes appeared in the foreheads of the targets, but the figures did not fall. They were wooden stands, upon which photorealistic images of armed men had been attached.

Quickly the tactical lights scanned the rest of the room independently, and one of them centered on fourth and fifth figures, positioned next to each other in a far corner. The wooden target on the left was the image of a man with a detonator in his hand.

Ding Chavez double-tapped this target in the forehead.

A second light swept to the corner and illuminated the image of a beautiful young woman holding an infant in her right arm. In her left hand, low and partially hidden behind her leg, she held a long kitchen knife.

Without a moment's hesitation, Dom Caruso shot the female target in the forehead.

Seconds later a call came from across the room. "Clear," Driscoll said.

"Clear," Caruso repeated.

"We're clear," Ding confirmed.

John Clark stood up from his chair in the center of the room, rubbing his eyes after catching the full intensity of three 200-lumen tactical lights. "Make your weapons safe."

Each of the three operators thumbed the safety of his MP5 on and let his weapon

hang freely from his chest.

Together the four men surveyed the holes in the five targets and then headed outside the room and checked the targets in the rooms off the hall. They stepped outside of the dark cabin, where they stood together on the porch to stay out of the rain.

“Thoughts, Ding?” Clark asked.

Chavez said, “It was fair. It slowed things down when I had to catch up to the guys so we could stack up at the door. But any way we roll this, if we want to breach with at least three operators, we’re going to have to wait on the driver.”

Clark conceded the point. “That’s true. What else?”

Caruso said, “When Ding and Sam engaged in the rooms off the hall, I was on my own. I covered the space we hadn’t cleared yet, which was the doorway at the end of the hall, but I couldn’t help thinking it would have been nice to have one more man to check six. Any hostiles who entered from the outside would have had an open shot at the back of my head. I kept my head on a swivel, but it’s not the same as having another gun in the fight.”

Clark nodded. “We are a small force.”

“Smaller now without Jack Junior,” Dom Caruso added.

Driscoll said, “We might want to think about bringing someone new into the unit.”

“Jack will be back,” Chavez replied. “You know as well as I do that as soon as we reactivate he won’t be able to stay away.”

“Maybe so,” said Dom. “But who knows when that will happen.”

Clark said, “Be patient, kid,” but it was clear to the others on the porch that Clark himself was champing at the bit to do something more impactful with his time. He was a warrior, he’d been in the middle of most every conflict the United States had been involved in for more than forty years, and although he’d retired from active operations with The Campus, he was clearly ready to do more than train.

Clark looked out off the porch at the Bronco now; its doors were wide open, and the storm had only increased in intensity. By now the floorboards would have an inch of standing water, and the torn fabric upholstery would be waterlogged. “Glad I told you to use the farm truck.”

Ding said, “It needed a good interior detailing.”

The men laughed.

“All right. Back to work,” Clark said. “You guys head back up the road, wait twenty minutes, and then try again. That will give me time to rehang the front door and move the configuration around. Dom, your grouping on the second target in the bedroom could have been a little tighter.”

“Roger that,” Dom said. He’d fired his MP5 three times at target two, and all three rounds had struck the target’s head within two and a half inches of one another, but he wasn’t going to argue the point with Clark. Especially since all of Driscoll’s and Chavez’s targets had sub-two-inch groupings.

“And Sam,” Clark said. “I’d like to see you breach the door a little lower. If you can get your head down another three inches as you enter, it could mean the difference between catching a round to the forehead and just getting a haircut.”

“Will do, Mr. C.”

Dom started to head off the porch, but he looked out at the weather. “No chance

we are going to wait for the rain to stop before trying this again?”

Ding walked straight out into the mud and stood under the heavy downpour. “I had a drill instructor back at Fort Ord, an Alabama redneck but a hell of a DI, who liked to say, ‘If it ain’t rainin’, you ain’t trainin’.’”

Clark and Dom laughed, and even Sam Driscoll, the quietest of the bunch, cracked a smile.



The Russian Federation invaded its sovereign neighbor on the first moonless night of spring. By dawn their tanks ground westward along highways and back roads as if the countryside belonged to them, as if the quarter-century thaw from the Cold War had been a dream.

This was not supposed to happen here. This was Estonia, after all, and Estonia was a NATO member state. The politicians in Tallinn had promised their people that Russia would never attack them now that they had joined the alliance.

But so far, NATO was a no-show in this war.

The Russian ground invasion was led by T-90s—fully modernized fifty-ton tanks with a 125-millimeter main gun and two heavy machine guns, explosive-reactive armor, and a state-of-the-art automated countermeasure system that detected inbound missiles and then launched missiles of its own to kill them in midair. And behind the T-90 warhorses, BTR-80 armored transporters carried troops in their bellies, disgorging them when necessary to provide cover for the tanks, and then retrieving them when all threats had been neutralized.

So far, the land war was proceeding nominally for the Russian Federation.

But it was a different story in the air.

Estonia had a good missile defense system, and Russia's attack on their early-warning systems and SAM sites had been only marginally successful. Many SAM batteries were still operational, and they had shot down more than a dozen Russian aircraft and kept dozens of others from executing their missions over the nation.

The Russians did not yet own the skies, but this had not slowed down their land advance at all.

In the first four hours of the war, villages were flattened, towns lay in rubble, and many of the tanks had yet to fire their main guns. It was a rout in the making, and anyone who knew anything about military science could have seen it coming, because the tiny nation of Estonia had focused on diplomacy, not on its physical defense.

Edgar Nõlvak had seen it coming, not because he was a soldier or a politician—he was a schoolteacher—but he had seen it coming because he watched television. Now as he lay in a ditch, bloody and cold, wet and shaking from fear, his ears half destroyed from the sustained crashing of detonating shells fired from the Russian tanks poking out of the tree line on the far side of the field, he retained the presence of mind to wish like hell his country's leaders had not wasted time with diplomacy in Brussels, and had instead spent their time constructing a *fucking* wall to keep the *fucking* Russians out of his *fucking* village.

There had been talk of an invasion for weeks, and then, days earlier, a bomb exploded over the border in Russia, killing eighteen civilians. On the television the Russians blamed the Estonian Internal Security Service, a preposterous claim given credence by Russia's slick and state-sponsored media. They showed their manufactured proof and then the Russian president said he had no choice but to order a security operation into Estonia to protect the Russian people.

Edgar Nõlvak lived in Põlva; it was forty kilometers from the border, and he'd spent his youth in the seventies and eighties fearing that someday tanks would appear in that very tree line and shell his home. But over the past twenty-three years that fear had been all but forgotten.

Now the tanks were here, they'd killed scores of his fellow townspeople, and they would surely kill him with barely a pause on their way west.

Edgar had gotten a call two hours earlier from a friend who lived in Võuküla, several kilometers to the east. His friend was hiding in the woods, and in a voice flat and detached from shock he told Edgar the Russian tanks had rolled on past his village after firing only a few shells, as there was nothing in Võuküla except for some farmhouses and a gas station. But behind the tanks and the soldiers in the armored personnel carriers, just minutes behind them, in fact, a force of irregulars came in pickup trucks, and they were now systematically burning and pillaging the town.

At that moment Edgar and the other men with him here sent their families away, and then, bravely or foolishly, they'd taken their rifles into the ditch to wait for the armor to pass and for the irregulars to appear. They could do nothing to stop the tanks, but they would not let their village be burned to the ground by Russian *civilians*.

This plan evaporated the instant a half-dozen tanks broke off the main force moving up the highway, formed a picket line in the trees, and then began pounding Põlva with high-explosive rounds.

This was Edgar's childhood nightmare come to life.

Edgar and the men with him had vowed to fight to the death. But then the tanks came; this was no fight.

This was just death.

The schoolteacher had been wounded almost immediately. As he moved from one position to another he'd been caught in the open as a round hit the high school's parking lot. Shrapnel from an exploding station wagon had sliced through his legs, and now he lay in the mud on his rifle, waiting for the end.

Edgar Nõlvak did not know much about military things, but he was sure that at the pace they were moving, the Russians would be in the city of Tartu, to the north of his village, by midafternoon.

A sound like paper tearing filled the air. He'd been listening to this sound for an hour, and he knew it meant incoming fire. He pressed his face back into the cold mud.

Boom!

Behind him, a direct hit on the gymnasium of the high school. The aluminum-and-cinder-block walls blew out ahead of a billowing cloud; the wood flooring of the basketball court rained down in splinters over Edgar.

He looked again over the edge of the ditch. The tanks were only a thousand meters to the east.

"Where the *fuck* is NATO?"

One thousand meters away, Captain Arkady Lapranov stood in the open hatch of his tank, Storm Zero One, and shouted, “Where the *fuck* is my air cover?”

It was a rhetorical question; the commanders of the five other tanks he controlled heard it but did not respond, and the two men in his vehicle, the driver and the gunner, waited silently for orders. They knew there were helicopter gunships they could call forward if any air threats appeared, but so far they’d seen no sign of Estonian aircraft, nor had the Russian airborne warning and control system detected any aircraft in the area on radar.

The skies were clear.

This was a good day. A tanker’s dream.

A thousand meters away the cloud of dust and smoke over the gymnasium settled enough so that Lapranov could see behind it. Into his mike he said, “I want more rounds in that building beyond the previous target. HE-FRAG. Without proper air support I am not moving forward on that road until I can see what’s to the right of the intersection.”

“Yes, sir!” Lapranov’s gunner shouted from below.

The gunner pressed a button, and the autoloader computer chose a high-explosive-fragmentation round from the magazine, and its mechanical arm chambered it. The gunner used his video-viewing device to find the building, then put his forehead against the rubber pad on the sight panel and aimed his crosshairs on target. He pushed the fire button on the control panel, and then, with a violent lurch, the 125-millimeter smoothbore gun launched a shell through the blue sky, across the fallow field in front of them, and directly into the building.

“Hit,” said the gunner.

They had been proceeding like this all morning. So far they had moved through four villages, shelling big targets with their 125-millimeter gun and raking small targets with their coaxial machine guns.

Lapranov had expected more resistance, but he was starting to allow for the fact that Russia’s president, Valeri Volodin, had been right. Volodin had told his nation NATO would have no stomach to fight for Estonia.

In his headset, Lapranov heard a transmission from one of the tanks under his command.

“Storm Zero Four to Storm Zero One.”

“Go, Zero Four.”

“Captain, I have movement in a ditch in front of the last target. Range one thousand. I see multiple dismounts.”

Lapranov looked through his binoculars, scanning slowly across the ditch.

There. Heads popped up out of the mud, then disappeared again. “I see them. Small-arms position. Don’t waste a one-twenty-five. We’ll clean them up with the coax when we get closer.”

“Roger.”

Another salvo was fired into the buildings on a low hill beyond the intersection, and Lapranov scanned through his optics. The town was deathly quiet; there was virtually no resistance.

“Keep firing,” he ordered, then he knelt back down into his commander’s station to get a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. “Wipe this place off the map.”

Seconds later, another transmission came through his headset: “Storm Zero Two to Storm Zero One.”

“Go,” Lapranov said as he lit his smoke.

“Movement to the south of the hospital. I . . . I think it is a vehicle.”

Lapranov dropped his lighter back inside and looked through his binoculars. It took a moment to find the area; the hospital was a few kilometers beyond the high school, on a small hill. But he scanned to the south of the building and finally he saw the movement on the road in the shadows.

At first he thought he was looking at a jeep, or maybe an SUV.

Another T-90 called in. “Storm Three to Storm One. I think it’s a helicopter.”

“*Nyet*,” said Lapranov, but he looked closer. The dark vehicle seemed to stop at an intersection, then began moving laterally into a parking lot.

“What the *fuck*?” Lapranov said. “Maybe it is a helo. Gunner, can you ID it through your Catherine?” The Catherine long-range fire-control thermal imager built into each tank allowed the gunner to see distant targets on a video screen. Lapranov himself had access to a Catherine screen, but he’d have to sit down inside the turret for that, and he was having too much fun up here.

The gunner came over Storm Zero One’s intercom. “Confirmed light helicopter. Single rotor. Can’t make out markings—he is behind a truck in the shade. Shit, he is low. His skids must be just a meter aboveground.”

“Armament?” Lapranov asked. He squinted into his binoculars to get a better view himself.

“Um . . . wait. He has twin pylons with machine guns. No missiles.” The gunner chuckled. “This guy wants to come out and play against us with his pop guns?”

Lapranov heard a commander of one of the other tanks on the net laughing.

But the captain did not laugh. He took a long drag on his cigarette. “Designate it as a target.”

“Roger. Designated as a target.”

“Range to target?”

“Four thousand two hundred fifty meters.”

“Shit,” Lapranov said.

The effective range of the 9M119 Refleks missile system, used against tanks as well as low and slow aircraft like helicopters, was four thousand meters. This small helo hovered just out of range.

“Where is my air support? They should have seen this fucker on radar.”

“They won’t see his signature. He’s moving between the buildings. Too low to the ground. He must have flown over the hill through the entire town like that to stay off radar. Whatever the hell he’s doing, he’s a good pilot.”

“Well, I don’t like him. I want him dead. Call in some support. Pass on his coordinates.”

“*Da*, Captain.”

“All Storm units, load HE-FRAG and resume the attack.”

“*Da!*”

Within seconds, all six tanks fired 125-millimeter main gun rounds into the