

Tom Clancy
His Life, His Style, His Books

by
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"Vampire, Vampire!" The CIC talker said aboard Ticonderoga. "We have numerous incoming missiles. Weapons free."¹

Tom Clancy, the best modern fiction writer, and probably, one of the all time best. Above was an excerpt from his second number one bestseller, *Red Storm Rising*. Tom Clancy is a civilian genius that knows more about top-secret weapons systems than the men who designed them. This makes for an explosive, could be real, story. It is because of his gripping story lines, and powerful descriptions of battle scenes that have drawn me, along with millions of other Americans to his master works of art. Ironically Mr. Clancys dream of becoming a writer was not fulfilled until he wrote *The Hunt For Red October* in 1984. Until then, he was an insurance salesman whose previous stories had been turned down. That is another thing that I like about Mr. Clancy, he doesnt give up. Clancy once said, "In America, there aint no excuses. You can go out and do anything you damn well please if you try hard enough."² Finally, this author, was the only one that didnt put me to sleep with a warm cup of milk.

Thomas L. Clancy Jr., son of a mailman and department store credit employee, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1947. He attended a local catholic parochial elementary and secondary school. Most of his friends were interested in sports, and following their favorite teams throughout the season, but Tom had more important things on his mind like guns, tanks, and planes. He went to Loyola College, a Jesuit college of liberal arts in Baltimore where he majored in English. While attending college he joined the ROTC in order to serve in Vietnam, but poor eyesight kept him from fulfilling his desire. The first short story he wrote was rejected by *Analog Sci-Fi* magazine, crushing another dream of having his name on a

book. In 1973 he became an insurance agent, as he wasn't making any head way as a writer. Eventually he joined his wife's father's insurance agency, and later bought it in 1980 for \$125,000. It was an established business with around 1,000 clients. Tom was so effective, and the business so profitable, that he could accomplish all the work in the morning and have the rest of the day to devour all sorts of technical journals and papers.³ After his writing career took off in 1984, he eventually moved into a 400 acre estate on the Chesapeake Bay. He has two tennis courts, two basketball courts, and a full size football field complete with goal posts. There is a sign that warns of a tank crossing, then there is the tank, sitting on the lawn. That along with Freddie the family dog, and an automatic security gate provides a secure home. But if someone were to get past that they would be faced with Tom, and his arsenal, as he has his own gun range downstairs.⁴ Tom Clancy has shown that though the use of hard work, even writhing books can be profitable.

Up until, *The Hunt for Red October*, Clancy's only success was the publication of an article that he did on the MX missile system, which was published by the Naval Institute Press.⁵ In the seventies Clancy started and shelved 3 plots which would later become *Patriot Games*, *Without Remorse*, and *The Sum of all Fears*.⁶ Then he read about the Russian frigate, *Storehevoy*. The crew aboard the ship, after murdering the political officer attempted to defect to Sweden. Change the frigate to a nuclear submarine, and Sweden to America, and there is now a plot for *The Hunt for Red October*. It took him 6 months to write the book, and again, he submitted his work to the Naval Institute Press for \$5,000. A year later, Ronald Regan reads it, calls it "the perfect yarn," and Clancy's career takes off like the F-14 tomcats in his books. The book was an immense success soaring to number one in hard cover and paperback. This was the first of many bestsellers Mr. Clancy wrote. Three of his books have been made into movies, netting him more than ten million dollars.⁷ Surprisingly enough, Tom Clancy doesn't care about awards, only money. "I don't want to sound commercial," says Clancy, "but I'm in it for the money, not the awards. What do I care if someone reads my books a hundred years from now? It's hard to make money when you're dead."⁸ Other than writing, Tom spends his time playing with the armed forces toys, speaking at the FBI, dining at the White House, attending meetings at the CIA, and hosts fund-raisers for his friend Oliver North.⁹

The writing style of Tom Clancy should be studied and taught at all levels of school. If one would be able to duplicate it, they would become the next literary giant. Mr. Clancy's style is one of explicit detail, paired with a gripping story line so real that the CIA and Secretary of Defense want to know who authorized it. His detail comes from endless hours of reading and studying technical, and military documents, all of which are not classified. "The really important things are never classified," says Clancy. "They're hard to find but never classified."¹⁰ As for the plots, just turn on the nightly news. One could find an endless amount of information and ideas for plots, anything from terrorism to government black-ops. If something is on the news, it is most likely to end up in one of Clancy's books.

A well planned Muslim attack on the Soviet Union's largest oil refinery begins World War III in *Red Storm Rising*. With the Soviet Union's oil economy crippled the politburo decides to invade the Middle East, but first in an attempt to destroy NATO, they will invade Europe. The book explodes into a race of U.S. intelligence against the Russians' war plans. Fortunately the U.S. has numerous intelligence experts who catch on to the plan. In addition to that, a Spetsnaz commando is captured and forced to reveal the plans to cripple strategic NATO sites in Europe. With that threat out of the way, the Air Force uses F-19 stealth fighters (Frisbees) to take out strategic bridges and Russian AWACs aircraft that give NATO air supremacy. Then the ground war begins. It is all based on NATO supplies vs. Russian oil reserves. This becomes the main focus of the book, with specific detail to NATO convoys from America to Europe. Early on the aircraft carrier

Nimitz is badly damaged from an air attack that results in a major setback. While this is going on, the Russians invaded Iceland in order to cut off the NATO SOSUS line. This line is an anti submarine sonar that alerts NATO forces of enemy subs coming into the northern Atlantic from their northern Russian bases. One man and a handful of marines manage to escape capture on Iceland, and set up surveillance. Finally after all these setbacks, the U.S. scores some victories. First a group of U.S. submarines penetrate deep into Soviet territory and blow up their long range bombers that were harassing convoys. Second, a reinforced task force from the Pacific Fleet manages to escort a convoy nearly intact to Europe thereby changing the course of the war. Finally, as an indirect result of the submarine attack, some of the senior members of the Politburo seek to use tactical nuclear weapons. This leads to a successful takeover of the Russian government by more sensible people. These new leaders, realizing defeat, call a cease fire to the war in Europe, shortly after U.S. forces recapture Iceland. The book ends with the war over but many loose ends are not covered. This provides Clancy with the opportunity to start World War IV.

With every great literary work, there are critics looming around ready to tear the book apart for better or worse. There is no exception when it comes to *Red Storm Rising*. Most of the critics agreed that the book was an exceptional piece that captured the true spirit of war. One said, "He didn't write about soulless machines clashing on the battlefield of the future, he wrote a very human story that is surprising apolitical without being naive."¹¹ Another said, "[it] explores themes of change on a personal a societal level."¹² Finally Martin Greenberg said, "In the final analysis, *Red Storm Rising* must be judged a huge success. The story is powerful and inspiring, suspenseful and fast paced."¹³ Unfortunately for Clancy, others were not so pleased. Most of the negative remarks said the story was untrue and written as propaganda. "Some critics accuse Clancy of sanitizing war."¹⁴ Though heads being blown off, men drowning and sinking to an icy grave, being burned alive, and blown out of the air by an unseen aggressor were common responses to that remark. Other critics believe the weapon systems used in the war were too perfect and Clancy's story was a fairy tale and propaganda for Ronald Reagan's arms build up. Clancy dismisses these claims and claims to downgrade all weapon performances fifty percent from the manufacturer's specs.¹⁵ All in all the critics were mostly supportive of *Red Storm Rising*.

Red Storm Rising is one of the best books I have ever read. The technical detail, is one to rival classified military documents. The characters are developed just enough for you to get a feel for them, yet not too much as to put you to sleep. The opening chapter of the book hooks the reader into reading through the mildly slow introduction. In addition to that, Clancy turns the book into a mystery in the form of the U.S. trying to figure out what the Soviets are up to. Clancy tries to let the reader in on what is happening, which keeps them guessing how the U.S. is going to figure out the hideous Warsaw Pact plan. After the first hostilities commence, Clancy gives NATO a little success in the form of stealth fighters and the capture and destruction of Spetsnaz troops. Then reality hits when the Russians successfully cripple the USS *Nimitz* and capture Iceland. From there it's all about kicking Russian butt back to Moscow. The action scenes are vivid and descriptive enough to be more entertaining than a movie. I like the characters as well as the machines. To me they are the new John Wayne, James Bond, or any of the figures from all those World War II movies I've seen. Overall I have to give the book two thumbs up. I hope they make the book into a movie, God knows it would sell at the box office.

Most people would think selling insurance would be an extremely boring job, where one would sell insurance to old even more boring people. Then there is Tom Clancy. He compressed his work into the first half of the day, then had the afternoon to read technical documents or write. He has been a fan of war and technology since a child¹⁶, and has expanded his hobby to computers with the war

games Harpoon and Convoy 84. In fact the designer of Harpoon, Larry Bond has become a great friend, and co-author in some of Toms books. Now