



Red Star on the Sail

Douglas E. Templin

(January 2010)

Softcover \$16.95 (421pp)

978-1-4490-5657-5

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused many sleepless nights for world leaders who wondered what would happen to the USSR's extensive stockpiles of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons: Would they fall into the wrong hands?

Douglas E. Templin has taken that scenario and crafted a three-pronged narrative involving a discontented and emotionally unstable Russian admiral, a self-absorbed, sailboat-owning couple from California, and assorted spymasters in Washington, DC.

Admiral Ivanovitch Darkotov has been given command of the Admiral Antonov Vitchidock, "a slate gray nuclear submarine of gargantuan proportions." It is one of the Russian Federation's newest and deadliest undersea weapons, and Darkotov suspects it is destined to be sold to the People's Republic of China.

Darkotov hates China almost as much as he hates America, the nation he learned to despise at his mother's knee. Darkotov's father had been inadvertently killed by US troops at the end of World War II, and his older brother was killed in Korea. The plot thickens when conflict breaks out between Darkotov and his second-in-command, Captain Mikhail Cosmonov, a childhood friend and longtime naval service compatriot.

Templin's narrative moves to Washington, where the US Chief of Naval Operations, the Vice President, the CIA, and perhaps the President himself, begin a series of spy games to manipulate events in Severodvinsk, Murmansk, and St. Petersburg.

Red Star's final setting is Newport Beach, California, where Mark and Shelly Clover are sailing blithely through yacht club society while contemplating a South Seas cruise aboard their newly acquired dream vessel, Sea Mist.

The triple narrative can work well for an adventure yarn, but Templin's 400-plus page story takes too long to reach its climax. Granted there are subplots, like Cosmonov's dalliance with Darkotov's wife and the Clovers' unforeseen pregnancy, but Red Star lingers too long over these elements, only to suddenly explode at the culmination of what nearly every reader will see coming—the accidental rendezvous of Sea Mist and the submarine.

While Templin is capable of clever turns of phrase, his book is marred by occasional grammatical errors. Readers may be also disappointed by his tendency for stilted dialogue. The author's description of life aboard a Russian submarine seems solid, although some peripheral characters use the antiquated term, "U-boat." Because he is a sailor himself, Templin's writing really shines when he describes all it takes to own, maintain, and sail a boat like the Sea Mist.

Red Star on the Sail is good entertainment, and despite an action-movie conclusion that might strain believability, interested readers will find it a sea-worthy yarn.

GARY PRESLEY (May 18, 2010)

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