

Entertainment

A chilling *Red October*

International hunt charges plot of military thriller

by Robb Frederick
Entertainment Editor

At a time when the spirit of glasnost and the wildfire expansion of capitalism are continuing to erase the Cold War, a military thriller bringing the United States to the brink of Armageddon with the Soviet Union loses some of its feasibility. *The Hunt for Red October*, however, pilots viewers through a frantic, pressure-cooker mission which reminds them of the all-too-potential threat of a confrontation between the superpowers.

Adapted from Tom Clancy's techno-thriller bestseller, *The Hunt for Red October* tracks the defection of Marko Alexandrovich Ramius (Sean Connery), the commander of the Soviet Union's most lethal submarine.

Ramius' *Red October* is more than just another submarine. Named after the 1917 Soviet revolution, the aircraft carrier-sized vessel is propelled by a "caterpillar" mechanism which permits it to move undetected by military sonar. This advance arms the Soviet Union with a virtually unstoppable first-strike weapon.

No wonder the Kremlin panics when Ramius announces his defection. As the *Red October* speeds through the Atlantic, the Soviets deploy their entire naval fleet in order to retrieve the prized submarine. Ramius initiates radio silence, isolating the crew of the *October*, and the hunt is on.

The USS *Dallas*, an American sub, spots the *October* and then sits helplessly as the vessel disappears from radar. Military leaders are informed of the *October's* presence, and the United States, unsure of Ramius' true intentions, treats the situation as a Soviet attack. A flotilla of American submarines and surface ships joins the search for the *October*.

At this point, the film's focus alternates between Ramius and CIA analyst Jack Ryan, played by Alec Baldwin.

Ramius commandeers his ship with unyielding authority,

asserting control over the other defectors who compose the submarine's command. In one harrowing scene, he unwaveringly maneuvers the *October* through the rocky sea bottom, disregarding the precise navigation his crew is accustomed to.

Ryan, on the other hand, must persuade several U.S. officials to consider his theory of Ramius' defection. Once he is finally heard out, the bookish analyst finds himself submerged in the search for the *October*.

Although the stealth of the *Red October* provides Ramius with an edge over his Soviet counterparts, the commander's defection faces several internal obstacles. The crew of the *October* contains a saboteur

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whose efforts jeopardize the secrecy of the submarine's location. Several of Ramius' fellow defectors express doubts to the handling of their mission. The commander must also devise a plan to safely evacuate his crew before reaching American soil.

As Ramius, Sean Connery radiates authority, delivering his lines with an unbreachable confidence. The marketable Scottish actor, who reportedly earned \$4 million for this picture, carries *The Hunt for Red October* far beyond the built-in audience for Clancy's novels.

Connery succeeds in uncovering the rationale behind Ramius' quest. In one revealing scene, Ramius expresses remorse for his absence during his wife's death. This scene highlights the humane characteristics of the Soviet commander, carrying him

above the traditional machine-like Communist role.

Connery's cool portrayal of Ramius unites a weighty cast without overshadowing the abundance of respectable performances. Alec Baldwin burns as CIA agent Ryan; his determination to find and assist Ramius leads him to abandon his fear of flying and even his common sense. During a fumbling attempt to lower himself from a hovering helicopter to the surfacing USS *Dallas*, Ryan releases himself from the safety of the helicopter's harness and plunges into the freezing Icelandic water.

Even the lesser roles are delivered with undisputable talent. As Ramius' second in command, Sam Neill demands sympathy as he yearns for "the good life" in the U.S. James Earl Jones challenges the lack of depth given to his character, a CIA director of naval intelligence. Courtney B. Vance captures the essence of his character, Jonesy, a sonar operator aboard the *Dallas* who disregards a multi-million-dollar computer system and devises his own method for tracking the *October*.

Although this superb cast succeeds in establishing credible characterizations, several critical roles disappear. In Clancy's text, one-legged consultant Skip Tyler played a prominent role in analyzing the *October's* potential. Screenwriters Larry Ferguson and Donald Stewart strip this character of depth and drastically reduce his contributions to the film's plot.

Director John McTiernan fails only in condensing the information found in *Red October's* screenplay. A plot of this magnitude cannot be simplified to a degree which can be sufficiently covered in the timeframe of a regular motion picture.

The material presented, however, is used to the fullest. Once the primary characters and events are identified, *The Hunt for Red October* races to a breakneck climax without ever slowing down.

Billy Joel offers a predictable performance

by Rob Prindle

"God can save you, and Def Leppard too!"

A whole bunch of years ago that was what some bible-thumpers were screaming at the crowd that exited a Def Leppard concert at the Erie Civic Center. I don't remember much about that concert except that the ticket was only \$8 and the concert was loud, lewd, and a whole lotta' fun.

A few days ago Billy Joel's *Storm Front* tour pulled into the Richfield Coliseum. About three months ago I braved the cold 5 am December winds to wait for the privilege of paying \$26 for the way-too-far-in-the-future concert. I walked away with a handful of 40th row floor seats and a cold.

A lot of enthusiasm can drain in three months, but as the concert neared and I studied for it by listening to Joel's tapes and renting concert videos, I did get pretty excited.

And the beginning of the concert was exciting. The lights dimmed, then finally went totally dark. Thunder boomed through the venue over 35 massive hanging speakers and as the soupy green and red stormy lights slowly raised the coliseum was full of fog. With the strange chalky colored lights it did look like it was raining and the effect was awe-inspiring. I thought that I might be in for a great ride.

The booming thunder led straight into "Storm Front." From there Joel headed into a fine, lead-pipe-banging rendition of "Allentown," followed by perfect reproductions of "New York State of Mind" and "Angry Young Man."

In fact, everything Joel played

sounded like it came straight off of an album. And, with the exception of "Big Man on Mulberry Street" and "Down'easter Alexa," (perhaps, and hopefully, his next single) everything he played was a hit. And that was the problem.

I'm not sure if trying to play everyone's favorite song and playing it exactly the way they want to hear it is the best way for such an established musician to plan a concert.

I wanted more. I wanted a reworked song or two and I wanted to hear some of his favorite non-releases. The stuff that was more Joel than commercial. Perhaps Joel does release his favorite stuff. He certainly is a big enough name to get his own way, but the songs he played sounded old because of their continued airplay.

Yes, "Piano Man" is a classic and a fine way to end a concert, but it was all too expected.

I guess I was looking for something new. Maybe a song he was still writing, or a cover that he had never done before, or even a change of the lighting (the fog effect got a little tired after the third song).

Billy seemed a bit aloof the entire concert, only mumbling a few words which were awfully tough to hear clearly. He never really got the body of the crowd going. And do you know what really worried me? The twelve-year-old girls sitting three rows in front of me seemed to be enjoying the concert the most. I wondered if Christie had zapped all of Billy's angry young man energy and turned him into a happy suburbanite history buff.

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