

Reject a Hit
By
Peter Smolens

I wrote this column years ago when Writer's Digest published a feature on the magazine's last page called "Reject a Hit." The feature's premise was a fake letter written by the editor of some publisher to famous authors rejecting their book-length manuscripts. The following was my entry for the feature – it didn't get published before they ended the feature.

July 4, 1984

Mr. Tom Clancy
Jack Ryan Enterprise
Baltimore, MD 12345-6789

Dear Mr. Clancy:

Recently, we received a copy of your manuscript, "Hunt for Red October," from an editor at the Naval Institute Press. After carefully reviewing the document, we have some questions that need answers.

Although the description on the publication page states that this is a work of fiction, we need to discuss your protagonist - Jack Ryan. How did you come to know super secret agent Jack Ryan? Even his name is classified top secret, Code-Word-Only. You've exposed one of our top field agents to unwanted publicity. Just typing his name in this letter brought internal security to my office. The boys over at the NSA take their eavesdropping very seriously.

By naming one of our most prized defectors from the former USSR, Capt. Marcos Aleksandrovich Ramius, who is now living a quiet life in Maine on the Penobscot River, the second-longest river in the U.S.A., you went too far. Who told you about this patriot? As one of our most famous recruits at the CIA, his defection to America provided information about how he trained many of their naval officers and his naval tactics.

According to our research, you never served on a nuclear submarine. According to your biography and other news reports, you ran a local insurance company office while writing your novel. Therefore, how can you provide such an accurate description of a nuclear submarine, especially the hydro-magneto drive? As the latest method of powering our submarines is so top-secret, when I discussed this with our nuclear engineers, they tried to arrest me for treason.

We have asked your publisher, U.S. Naval Institute Press, to halt publication. These are serious charges and need to be dealt with immediately. If you do not respond, we will arrest and detain you under Article 6699 of the Patriot Act of October 2001. We believe Article 6699 states we have the right to use any means to find out how an author can write these kinds of truths in a manuscript and call the work fiction. We're unsure precisely what Article 6699 of the Patriot Act says because it is so Top Secret. No one in our division has the clearance to read this "Article" of the bill.

Please get in touch with us immediately about the above items.

Yours Truly,

Mr. X
Department of Publication Review
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, DC 20069