RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Devil's Alternative

Frederick Forsyth

Contents

About the Book

‘Whichever option I choose, men are going to die.’

When the entire Soviet Union wheat crop is destroyed by a devastating string of failures, the population faces starvation. The USA is quick to offer assistance. They devise a plan to trade vital food resources with the Russians in exchange for sensitive political information. But the Politburo has other ideas: the invasion of Western Europe to commandeer the food for themselves…

As the paths of communication breakdown the president of the United States and leaders from around the world face an appalling choice: Should they allow the loss of thousands to save the lives of many more? This is the Devil’s Alternative and in this incomparable and gripping thriller the Cold War giants must fight a battle to the death.

About the Book

Former RAF pilot and investigative journalist, **Frederick Forsyth** defined the modern thriller when he wrote *The Day of The Jackal,* with its lightning-paced storytelling, effortlessly cool reality and unique insider information. Since then he has written eleven further bestselling novels. He lives in England.

ALSO BY FREDERICK FORSYTH

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

THE ODESSA FILE

THE DOGS OF WAR

THE FOURTH PROTOCOL

THE NEGOTIATOR

THE DECEIVER

THE FIST OF GOD

ICON

AVENGER

THE AFGHAN

THE COBRA

THE BIAFRA STORY

GREAT FLYING STORIES

NO COMEBACKS

THE VETERAN

THE SHEPHERD

THE PHANTOM OF MANHATTAN

THE DEVIL'S ALTERNATIVE

Frederick Forsyth

arrow books

For Frederick Stuart,
who does not know yet

Prologue

The castaway would have been dead before sundown but for the sharp eyes of an Italian seaman called Mario. Even when he was spotted he had lapsed into unconsciousness, the exposed parts of his near-naked body grilled to second-degree burns by the relentless sun, and those parts submerged in sea water soft and white between the salt-sores like the limbs of a rotting goose.

Mario Curcio was the cook/steward on the *Garibaldi*, an amiable old rust-bucket out of Brindisi, thumping her way eastward towards Cape Ince and on to Trabzon in the far eastern corner of the north shore of Turkey. She was on her way to pick up a cargo of almonds from Anatolia.

Just why Mario decided that morning in the last ten days of April 1982 to empty his bucket of potato peelings over the weather rail instead of through the rubbish chute at the poop he could never explain, nor was he ever asked to. But perhaps to take a breath of fresh Black Sea air and break the monotony of the steam-heat in the cramped galley, he stepped out on to deck, strolled to the starboard rail, and hurled his rubbish to an indifferent but patient ocean. He turned away and started to lumber back to his duties. After two steps he stopped, frowned, turned and walked back to the rail, puzzled and uncertain.

The ship was heading east-northeast to clear Cape Ince, so that as he shielded his eyes and gazed abaft the beam the noon sun was almost straight in his face. But he was sure he had seen something out there on the blue-green rolling swell between the ship and the coast of Turkey twenty miles to the south. Unable to see it again, he trotted

up the after deck, mounted the outside ladders to the wing of the bridge and peered again. Then he saw it, quite clearly, for half a second between the softly moving hills of water. He turned to the open door behind him, leading into the wheelhouse, and shouted, '*Capitano*.'

Captain Vittorio Ingrao took some persuading, for Mario was a simple lad, but he was enough of a sailor to know that if a man might be out there on the water he was duty-bound to turn his ship around and have a closer look, and his radar had indeed revealed an echo. It took the captain half an hour to bring the *Garibaldi* around and back to the spot Mario had pointed at, and then he too saw it.

The skiff was barely twelve feet long, and not very wide. A light craft, of the type that could have been a ship's jolly boat. Forward of amidships there was a single thwart across the boat with a hole in it for the stepping of a mast. But either there had never been a mast, or it had been ill-secured and had gone overboard. With the *Garibaldi* stopped and wallowing in the swell, Captain Ingrao leaned on the bridge wing rail and watched Mario and the bo'sun Paolo Longhi set off in the motor lifeboat to bring the skiff alongside. From his elevation he could look down into the skiff as it was towed closer.

The man in it was lying on his back in several inches of sea water. He was gaunt and emaciated, bearded and unconscious, his head to one side, breathing in short gasps. He moaned a few times as he was lifted aboard and the sailors' hands touched his flayed shoulders and chest.

There was one permanently spare cabin in the *Garibaldi*, kept free as a sort of sick-bay, and the castaway was taken to it. Mario, at his own request, was given time off to tend the man, whom he soon came to regard as his personal property, as a boy will take especial care of a puppy he has personally rescued from death. Longhi, the bo'sun, gave the man a shot of morphine from the first-aid chest to spare

him the pain, and the pair of them set to work on the sunburn.

Being Calabrians they knew a bit about sunburn and prepared the best sunburn salve in the world. Mario brought from his galley a fifty-fifty mixture of fresh lemon juice and wine vinegar in a basin, a light cotton cloth torn from his pillow case and a bowl of ice cubes. Soaking the cloth in the mixture and wrapping it round a dozen ice cubes, he gently pressed the pad to the worst areas, where the ultra-violet rays had bitten through almost to the bone. Plumes of steam rose from the unconscious man as the freezing astringent drew the heat out of the scorched flesh. The man shuddered.

'Better a fever than death by burn-shock,' Mario told him in Italian. The man could not hear, and if he had he could not have understood.

Longhi joined his skipper on the after deck where the skiff had been stowed.

'Anything?' he asked.

Captain Ingrao shook his head.

'Nothing on the man either. No watch, no name tag. A pair of cheap underpants with no label. And his beard looks about ten days old.'

'There's nothing here either,' said Ingrao. 'No mast, no sail, no oars. No food and no water container. No name on the boat even. But it could have peeled off.'

'A tourist from a beach resort, blown out to sea?' asked Longhi.

Ingrao shrugged. 'Or a survivor from a small freighter,' he said. 'We'll be at Trabzon in two days. The Turkish authorities can solve that one when he wakes up and talks. Meanwhile let's get under way. Oh, and we must cable our agent there and tell him what's happened. We'll need an ambulance on the quay when we dock.'

Two days later the castaway, still barely conscious and unable to speak, was tucked up between white sheets in a

sick ward, in the small municipal hospital of Trabzon.

Mario the sailor had accompanied his castaway in the ambulance from the quay to the hospital, along with the ship's agent and the port's medical officer of health who had insisted on checking the delirious man for communicable diseases. After waiting an hour by the bedside, he had bade his unconscious friend farewell and returned to the *Garibaldi* to prepare the crew's lunch. That had been the previous day, and the old Italian tramp steamer had sailed during the evening.

Now another man stood by the bedside, accompanied by a police officer and the short-coated doctor. All three were Turkish, but the short, broad man in the civilian suit spoke passable English.

'He'll pull through,' said the doctor, 'but he's very sick for the moment. Heat-stroke, second-degree sunburns, exposure, and by the look of it he hasn't eaten for days. Generally weak.'

'What are these?' asked the civilian, gesturing at the drip-feed tubes that entered both the man's arms.

'Concentrated glucose drip for nourishment, saline drip to offset the shock,' said the doctor. 'The sailors probably saved his life by taking the heat out of the burns, but we've bathed him in calamine to help the healing process. Now it's between him and Allah.'

Umit Erdal, partner in the shipping and trading company of Erdal and Sermit, was the Lloyd's sub-agent for the port of Trabzon, and the *Garibaldi*'s agent had thankfully passed the matter of the castaway over to him. The sick man's eyelids fluttered in the nut-brown, bearded face. Mr Erdal cleared his throat, bent over the figure and spoke in his best English.

'What . . . is . . . you . . . name?' he asked slowly and clearly.

The man groaned and moved his head from side to side several times. The Lloyd's man bent his head closer to

listen. '*Zradzhenyi*,' the sick man murmured. '*Zradzhenyi*.'

Erdal straightened up. 'He's not Turkish,' he said with finality, 'but he seems to be called Zradzhenyi. What kind of country would that name come from?'

Both his companions shrugged. 'I'll inform Lloyd's in London,' said Erdal. 'Maybe they'll have news of a missing vessel somewhere in the Black Sea.'

The daily bible of the world's merchant marine fraternity is *Lloyd's List*, which is published Monday to Saturday and contains editorials, features and news on one topic only – shipping. Its partner in harness, *Lloyd's Shipping Index*, gives the movements of the world's 30,000 active merchant vessels: name of ship, owner, flag of registry, year of build, tonnage, where last reported coming from, and where bound.

Both organs are published out of a building complex at Sheepen Place, Colchester, in Essex. It was to this building that Umit Erdal telexed the shipping movements into and out of the port of Trabzon, and added a small extra for the attention of the Lloyd's Shipping Intelligence unit in the same building.

The SI unit checked their maritime casualty records to confirm that there were no recent reports of missing, sunk or simply overdue vessels in the Black Sea, and passed the paragraph over to the editorial desk of the list. Here a sub-editor gave it a mention as a news brief on the front page, including the name the castaway had given as his own. It appeared the following morning.

Most of those who read the *Lloyd's List* that day in late April flipped past the paragraph about the unidentified man in Trabzon.

But the piece caught and held the sharp eyes and the attention of a man in his early thirties who worked as

senior clerk and trusted employee in a firm of chartered shipbrokers situated in a small street called Crutched Friars in the centre of the City of London. His colleagues in the firm knew him as Andrew Drake.

Having absorbed the content of the paragraph, Drake left his desk and went to the company boardroom where he consulted a framed chart of the world which showed prevailing wind and ocean current circulation. The winds in the Black Sea during spring and summer are predominantly from the north, and the currents screw anti-clockwise round this small ocean from the southern coast of the Ukraine in the far northwest of the sea, down past the coasts of Romania and Bulgaria, then swing eastwards again into the shipping lanes between Istanbul and Cape Ince.

Drake did some calculations on a scratch pad. A small skiff, setting off from the marshes of the delta of the River Dniester just south of Odessa could make four to five knots with a following wind and favourable current, southwards past Romania and Bulgaria towards Turkey. But after three days it would tend to be carried eastwards, away from the Bosphorus towards the eastern end of the Black Sea.

The ‘Weather and Navigation’ section of *Lloyd’s List* confirmed there had been bad weather nine days earlier in that area. The sort, Drake mused, that could cause a skiff in the hands of an unskilled seaman to capsize, lose its mast and all its contents and leave its occupant, even if he could climb back into it again, at the mercy of the sun and the wind.

Two hours later Andrew Drake asked for a week of his owed holidays, and it was agreed that he could take it, but only starting the following Monday, 3rd May.

He was mildly excited as he waited out the week and bought himself from a nearby agency a return ticket from London to Istanbul. He decided to buy the connecting ticket from Istanbul to Trabzon for cash in Istanbul. He also

checked to confirm that a British passport holder needs no visa for Turkey, but after work he secured for himself the needed smallpox vaccination certificate at the British Airways medical centre at Victoria.

He was excited because he thought there just might be a chance that, after years of waiting, he had found the man he was looking for. Unlike the three men by the castaway's bedside two days earlier, he *did* know what country the word *zradzhenyi* came from. He also knew it was not the man's name. The man in the bed had been muttering the word 'betrayed' in his native tongue, and that language was Ukrainian. Which could mean that the man was a refugee Ukrainian partisan.

Andrew Drake, despite his anglicized name, was also a Ukrainian, and a fanatic.

Drake's first call after arriving in Trabzon was at the office of Mr Erdal, whose name he had obtained from a friend at Lloyd's on the grounds that he was taking a holiday on the Turkish coast and, speaking not a word of Turkish, might need some assistance. Umit Erdal, seeing the letter of introduction that Drake was able to produce, was happily unquestioning as to why his visitor should want to see the castaway in the local hospital. He wrote a personal letter of introduction to the hospital administrator, and shortly after lunch Drake was shown into the small one-bed ward where the man lay.

The local Lloyd's agent had already told him that the man, while conscious again, spent much of the time sleeping, and during his periods of wakefulness had so far said absolutely nothing. When Drake entered the room the invalid was lying on his back, eyes closed. Drake drew up a chair and sat by the bedside. For a time he stared at the man's haggard face. After several minutes the man's eyelids flickered, half opened and closed again. Whether he

had seen the visitor staring at him intently, Drake did not know. But he knew the man was on the fringe of wakefulness.

Slowly he leaned forward and said clearly in the sick man's ear: '*Shche ne vmerla Ukraina*.'

The words mean, literally, 'Ukraine is not dead', but a looser translation would be, 'Ukraine lives on'. They are the first words of the Ukrainian national anthem, banned by the Russian masters, and would be instantly recognizable by a nationally conscious Ukrainian.

The sick man's eyes flicked open and he regarded Drake intently. After several seconds he asked in Ukrainian, 'Who are you?'

'A Ukrainian, like yourself,' said Drake.

The other man's eyes clouded with suspicion. 'Quisling,' he said.

Drake shook his head. 'No,' he said calmly. 'I am British by nationality, born and bred there, son of a Ukrainian father and an English mother. But in my heart I'm as Ukrainian as you are.'

The man in the bed stared stubbornly at the ceiling.

'I could show you my passport, issued in London, but that would prove nothing. A Chekisti could produce one if he wanted, to try and trick you.' Drake had used the slang term for a Soviet secret policeman and KGB member.

'But you are not in the Ukraine any more, and there are no Chekisti here,' Drake went on. 'You were not washed up on the shores of the Crimea, nor of South Russia or Georgia. You did not land in Romania or Bulgaria either. You were picked up by an Italian ship and landed here at Trabzon. You are in Turkey. You are in the West. You made it.'

The man's eyes were on his face now, alert, lucid, wanting to believe.

'Can you move?' asked Drake.

'I don't know,' said the man.

Drake nodded across the small room to the window, beyond which the sounds of traffic could be heard. ‘The KGB can dress up hospital staff to look like Turks,’ he said, ‘but they cannot change a whole city for one man whom they could torture for a confession if they wanted. Can you make the window?’

Helped by Drake, the castaway hobbled painfully to the window and looked out at the street scene.

‘The cars are Austins and Morrises, imported from England,’ said Drake. ‘Peugeots from France and Volkswagens from West Germany. The words on the billboards are in Turkish. That advertisement over there is for Coca-Cola.’

The man put the back of one hand against his mouth and chewed at the knuckles. He blinked rapidly several times.

‘I made it,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Drake, ‘by a miracle you made it.’

‘My name,’ said the castaway when he was back in bed, ‘is Miroslav Kaminsky. I come from Ternopol. I was the leader of a group of seven Ukrainian partisans.’

Over the next hour the story came out. Kaminsky and six others like him, all from the Ternopol area, once a hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism and where some of the embers still glow, had decided to strike back at the programme of ruthless Russification of their land that had intensified in the sixties and become a ‘final solution’ in the seventies and early eighties for the whole area of Ukrainian national art, poetry, literature, language and consciousness. In six months of operations they had ambushed and killed two low-level Party secretaries – Russians imposed by Moscow on Ternopol – and a plain-clothes KGB agent. Then had come the betrayal.

Whoever had talked, he too had died in the hail of fire as the green insignia of the KGB special troops had closed in on the country cottage where the group was meeting to plan its next operation. Only Kaminsky had escaped,

running like an animal through the undergrowth, hiding by day in barns and woodland, moving by night, heading south towards the coast with a vague idea of jumping a Western ship.

It had been impossible to get near the docks of Odessa. Living off potatoes and swedes from the fields, he had sought refuge in the swampy country of the Dniester estuary southwest of Odessa, towards the Romanian border. Finally, coming by night on a small fishing hamlet on a creek, he had stolen a skiff with a stepped mast and a small sail. He had never been in a sailing boat before, and knew nothing of the sea. Trying to manage the sail and the rudder, just holding on and praying, he had let the skiff run before the wind, southwards by the stars and the sun.

By pure luck he had avoided the patrol boats that cruise the offshore waters of the Soviet Union, and the fishing fleets. The tiny sliver of wood which contained him had slipped past the coastal radar sweeps until he was out of range. Then he was lost, somewhere between Romania and Crimea, heading south but far from the nearest shipping lanes, if he did but know where they were anyway. The storm caught him unawares. Not knowing how to shorten sail in time, he had capsized, spending the night using his last reserves of strength clinging to the upturned hull. By morning he had righted the skiff and crawled inside. His clothes, which he had taken off to let the night wind cool his skin, were gone. So also were his few raw potatoes, the open lemonade bottle of fresh water, the sail and the rudder. The pain came shortly after sunrise as the heat of the day increased. Oblivion came on the third day after the storm. When he regained consciousness he was in a bed, taking the pain of the burns in silence, listening to the voices he thought were Bulgarian. For six days he had kept his eyes closed and his mouth shut.

Andrew Drake heard him out with a song in his heart. He had found the man he had waited years for.

‘I’ll go and see the Swiss consul in Istanbul and try to obtain temporary travel documents for you from the Red Cross,’ he said when Kaminsky showed signs of tiring. ‘If I do, I can probably get you to England, at least on a temporary visa. Then we can try for asylum. I’ll return in a few days.’

By the door he paused.

‘You can’t go back, you know,’ he told Kaminsky. ‘But with your help, I can. It’s what I want. It’s what I’ve always wanted.’

Andrew Drake took longer than he had thought in Istanbul, and it was not until 16th May that he was able to fly back to Trabzon with travel papers for Kaminsky. He had extended his leave after a long telephone call to London and a row with the broking firm’s junior partner, but it was worth it. For through Kaminsky he was certain he could fulfil the single burning ambition of his life.

The tsarist and later Soviet empire, despite its monolithic appearance from outside, has two Achilles heels. One is the problem of feeding its 250 millions. The other is euphemistically called ‘the nationalities question’. In the fourteen republics ruled by the Russian Republic are several score identifiable non-Russian nations, and the biggest and perhaps the most nationally conscious is the Ukraine. By 1982 the Great Russian state numbered only 120 millions out of the 250; the next most populous and richest with 70 millions was Ukraine, which was one reason why under tsars and Politburo the Ukraine had always been singled out for special attention and particularly ruthless Russification.

The second reason lay in its history. Ukraine has always traditionally been divided into two, which has been its downfall: Western and Eastern Ukraine. Western Ukraine stretches from Kiev westwards to the Polish border. The

eastern part is more Russified, having dwelt under the tsars for centuries; during those same centuries Western Ukraine was part of the old Austro-Hungarian empire. Its spiritual and cultural orientation was and remains more western than the rest, except possibly the three Baltic states which are too small to resist. Ukrainians read and write with Roman letters, not Cyrillic script; they are overwhelmingly Uniate Catholics, not Russian Orthodox Christians. Their language, poetry, literature, arts and traditions pre-date the rise of the Rus conquerors who swept down from the north.

In 1918 with the break-up of Austro-Hungary, Western Ukrainians tried desperately for a separate republic out of the empire's ruins; unlike the Czechs, Slovaks and Magyars, they failed and were annexed in 1919 by Poland as the province of Galicia. When Hitler swept into western Poland in 1939, Stalin came in from the east with the Red Army and took Galicia. In 1941 the Germans took it. What followed was a violent and vicious confusion of hopes, fears and loyalties. Some hoped for concessions from Moscow if they fought the Germans; others mistakenly thought Free Ukraine lay through the defeat of Moscow by Berlin and joined the Ukrainian Division, which fought against the Red Army, in German uniform. Others, like Kaminsky's father, took to the Carpathian Mountains as guerrillas and fought first one invader then the next, then the first again. They all lost; Stalin won and pushed his empire westwards to the Bug River, the new border for Poland. West Ukraine came under the new tsars, the Politburo, but the old dreams lived on. Apart from one glimmer in the last days of Khrushchev, the programme to crush them once and for all had steadily intensified.

Stepan Drach, a student from Rovno, joined up with the Ukrainian Division. He was one of the lucky ones; he survived the war and was captured by the British in Austria in 1945. Sent to work as a farm labourer in Norfolk, he

would certainly have been sent back for execution by the NKVD in 1946 as the British Foreign Office and American State Department quietly conspired to return the two million ‘victims of Yalta’ to the mercies of Stalin. But he was lucky again. Behind a Norfolk haystack he tumbled a Land Army girl and she became pregnant. Marriage was the answer, and six months later, on compassionate grounds, he was excused repatriation and allowed to stay. Freed from farm labour, he used the knowledge he had gained as a radio operator to set up a small repair shop in Bradford, a centre for Britain’s 30,000 Ukrainians. The first baby died in infancy; a second son, christened Andriy, was born in 1950.

Andriy learned Ukrainian at his father’s knee, and that was not all. He learned too of his father’s land, of the great sweeping vistas of the Carpathians and Ruthenia. He imbibed his father’s loathing of Russians. But the father died in a road crash when the boy was twelve; his mother, tired of her husband’s endless evenings with fellow exiles round the sitting room fire, talking of the past in a language she could never understand, anglicized both their names to Drake, and Andriy’s given name to Andrew. It was as Andrew Drake that the boy went to grammar school and university; as Andrew Drake that he received his first passport.

The re-birth came in his late teens at university. There were other Ukrainians there, and he became fluent again in his father’s language. This was the late sixties, and the brief renaissance of Ukrainian literature and poetry back in the Ukraine had come and gone, its leading lights mostly by then doing slave labour in the camps of Gulag. So he absorbed these events with hindsight and knowledge of what had befallen the writers. He read everything he could get his hands on as the first years of the seventh decade dawned: the classics of Taras Shevchenko and those who wrote in the brief flowering under Lenin, suppressed and

liquidated under Stalin. But most of all he read the works of those called ‘the Sixtiers’, because they flourished for a brief few years until Brezhnev struck yet again to stamp out the national pride they called for. He read and grieved for Osdachy, Chornovil, Moroz and Dzyuba; and when he read the poems and secret diary of Pavel Symonenko, the young firebrand dead of cancer at twenty-eight, the cult figure of the Ukrainian students inside the USSR, his heart broke for a land he had never even seen.

With his love for this land of his dead father came a matching loathing of those he saw as its persecutors; avidly he devoured the underground pamphlets that came out, smuggled from the resistance movement inside: the *Ukrainian Herald*, with its accounts of what befell the hundreds of unknowns who did not receive the publicity accorded to the great Moscow trials of Daniel, Sinyavsky, Orlov, Scharansky, the miserable, forgotten ones. With each detail his hatred grew until for Andrew Drake, once Andriy Drach, the personification of all evil in the world was simply called KGB.

He had enough sense of reality to eschew the crude, raw nationalism of the older exiles, and their divisions between West and East Ukrainians. He rejected too their implanted anti-Semitism, preferring to accept the works of Gluzman, both a Zionist and a Ukrainian nationalist, as the words of a fellow-Ukrainian. He analysed the exile community in Britain and Europe and perceived there were four levels: the language nationalists for whom simply speaking and writing in the tongue of their fathers was enough; the debating nationalists who would talk for ever and a day, but do nothing; the slogan-daubers who irritated their adopted countrymen but left the Soviet behemoth untouched; and the activists who demonstrated before visiting Moscow dignitaries, were carefully photographed and filed by the Special Branch and achieved a passing publicity.

Drake rejected them all. He remained quiet, well-behaved and aloof. He came south to London and took a clerking job. There are many in such work who have one secret passion, unknown to all their colleagues, which absorbs all their savings, their spare time and their annual holidays. Drake was such a man. He quietly put together a small group of men who felt just as he did; he traced them, met them, befriended them, swore a common oath with them, and bade them be patient. For Andriy Drach had a secret dream and, as T. E. Lawrence said, he was dangerous because 'he dreamed with his eyes open'. His dream was that one day he would strike one single gigantic blow against the men of Moscow that would shake them as they had never been shaken before. He would penetrate the walls of their power and hurt them right inside the fortress.

His dream was alive and one step nearer fulfilment for the finding of Kaminsky, and he was a determined and excited man as his plane slipped once more out of a warm blue sky towards Trabzon.

Miroslav Kaminsky looked across at Drake with indecision on his face.

'I don't know, Andriy,' he said, 'I just don't know. Despite everything you have done, I just don't know if I can trust you that much. I'm sorry, it's the way I've had to live all my life.'

'Miroslav, you could know me for the next twenty years and not know more about me than you do already. Everything I've told you about me is the truth. If you cannot go back then let me go in your place. But I must have contacts there. If you know of any, anybody at all. . . .'

Kaminsky finally agreed.

'There are two men,' he said at last. 'They were not blown away when my group was destroyed, and no one

knew of them. I had met them only a few months earlier.'

'But they are Ukrainians, and partisans?' asked Drake eagerly.

'Yes, they are Ukrainians. But that is not their primary motivation. Their people too have suffered. Their fathers, like mine, have been for ten years in the labour camps, but for a different reason. They are Jews.'

'But do they hate Moscow?' asked Drake. 'Do they too want to strike against the Kremlin?'

'Yes, they hate Moscow,' replied Kaminsky. 'As much as you or I. Their inspiration seems to be a thing called the Jewish Defence League. They heard about it on the radio. It seems their philosophy, like ours, is to begin to strike back; not to take any more persecution lying down.'

'Then let me make contact with them,' urged Drake.

The following morning Drake flew back to London with the names and addresses in Lvov of the two young Jewish partisans. Within a fortnight he had subscribed to a package tour run by Intourist for early July, visiting Kiev, Ternopol and Lvov. He also quit his job and withdrew his life savings in cash.

Unnoticed by anyone, Andrew Drake, alias Andriy Drach, was going to his private war – against the Kremlin.

1

A gently warming sun shone down on Washington that middle of May, bringing the first shirtsleeves to the streets and the first rich, red roses to the garden outside the french windows of the Oval Office in the White House. But though the windows were open and the fresh smells of grass and flowers wafted into the private sanctum of the most powerful ruler in the world, the attention of the four men present was focused upon other plants in a far and foreign country.

President William Matthews sat where American presidents have always sat: back to the south wall of the room, facing northward across a wide antique desk towards the classical marble fireplace that dominates the north wall. His chair, unlike that of most of his predecessors who had favoured personalized, made-to-measure seating, was a factory-made, high-backed swivel chair of the kind any senior corporate executive might have. For ‘Bill’ Matthews, as he insisted his publicity posters call him, had always through his successive and successful election campaigns stressed his ordinary, old-folks-at-home personal tastes in clothing, food and creature comforts. The chair, therefore, which could be seen by the scores of delegates he liked to welcome personally into the Oval Office, was not luxurious. The fine antique desk, he was at pains to point out, he had inherited and it had become part of the precious tradition of the White House. That went down well.

But there Bill Matthews drew the line. When he was in conclave with his senior advisers, the ‘Bill’ which his humblest constituent could call him to his face was out of

court. He also dropped the nice-guy tones of voice and the rumpled bird-dog grin that had originally gulled the voters into putting the boy next door into the White House. He was not the boy next door, and his advisers knew it; he was the man at the top.

Seated in upright armchairs across the desk from the President were the three men who had asked to see him alone that morning. Closest to him in personal terms was the chairman of the National Security Council, his own adviser on security matters and confidant on foreign affairs. Variously referred to in the environs of the West Wing and the Executive Office Building as ‘the doc’ or ‘that damned Polack’, the sharp-faced Stanislav Poklewski was sometimes disliked but never underestimated.

They made a strange pair, to be so close; the blond, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant from the deep South, and the dark, taciturn devout Roman Catholic who had come over from Cracow as a small boy. But what Bill Matthews lacked in understanding of the tortuous psychologies of Europeans in general and Slavs in particular could be made up by the Jesuit-educated calculating machine who always had his ear. There were two other reasons why Poklewski appealed to him: he was ferociously loyal and had no political ambitions outside the shadow of Bill Matthews. But there was one reservation: Matthews always had to balance the doctor’s suspicious dislike of the men of Moscow with the more urbane assessments of his Bostonian secretary of state.

The secretary was not present that morning at the meeting asked for personally by Poklewski. The other two men on the chairs in front of the desk were Robert Benson, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Carl Taylor.

It has frequently been written that America’s National Security Agency is the body responsible for all electronic espionage. It is a popular idea but not true. The NSA is responsible for that portion of electronic surveillance and

espionage conducted outside the United States on her behalf that has to do with listening: wire-tapping, radio-monitoring and above all the plucking out of the ether of literally billions of words a day in hundreds of dialects and languages, for recording, de-coding, translating and analysing. But not spy satellites. The *visual* surveillance of the globe by cameras mounted in aeroplanes and, more importantly, in space satellites has always been the preserve of the National Reconnaissance Office, a joint US Air Force/CIA operation. Carl Taylor was its director and he was a two-star general of Air Force Intelligence.

The President shuffled together the pile of high-definition photographs on his desk and handed them back to Taylor, who rose to accept them and placed them back in his briefcase.

'All right, gentlemen,' he said slowly, 'so you have shown me that the wheat crop in a small portion of the Soviet Union, maybe even only in the few acres shown in these pictures, is coming up defective. What does it prove?'

Poklewski glanced across at Taylor and nodded. Taylor cleared his throat.

'Mr President, I've taken the liberty of setting up a screening of what is coming in right now from one of our Condor satellites. Would you care to see it?'

Matthews nodded and watched Taylor cross to one of the bank of television sets placed in the curving west wall below the bookcases, which had been specially shortened to accept the console of TV sets. When civilian deputations were in the room, the new row of TV screens was covered by sliding teak doors. Taylor turned on the extreme left-hand set and returned to the President's desk. He detached one of the six telephones from its cradle, dialled a number and said simply, 'Screen it.'

President Matthews knew about the Condor range of satellites. Flying higher than anything before, using cameras of a sophistication that could show close-up a

human fingernail from two hundred miles, through fog, rain, hail, snow, cloud and night, the Condors were the latest and the best.

Back in the 1970s photographic surveillance though good had been slow, mainly because each cartridge of exposed film had to be ejected from the satellite at specific positions, freefall to Earth in protective coverings, be retrieved with the aid of bleepers and tracing devices, air-freighted to the NRO's central laboratories, developed and screened. Only when the satellite was within that arc of flight which permitted a direct line from it to the USA or one of the American-controlled tracking stations, could simultaneous TV transmissions take place. But when the satellite passed close over the Soviet Union the curve of the Earth's surface baffled direct reception, so the watchers had to wait until it came round again.

Then in the summer of 1978 the scientists cracked the problem with the 'Parabola Game'. Their computers devised a cat's cradle of infinite complexity for the flight tracks of half a dozen space cameras around the globe's surface to this end: whichever spy-in-the-sky the White House wanted to tap into could be ordered by signal to begin transmitting what it was seeing, and throw the images in a low parabola arc to another satellite which was not out of vision. The second bird would throw the image on again, to a third satellite, and so on, like basketball players tossing the ball from fingertip to fingertip while they ran. When the needed images were fielded by a satellite over the USA they could be beamed back down to the NRO headquarters, and from there by patch-through to the Oval Office.

The satellites were travelling at over 40,000 land miles per hour; the globe was spinning with the hours, tilting with the seasons. The computations and permutations were astronomical, but the computers solved them. By 1980 the US President had twenty-four-hour access to every square

inch of the world's surface at the touch of a button by simultaneous transmission. Sometimes it bothered him. It never bothered Poklewski: he had been brought up to the idea of the exposition of all private thoughts and actions in the confessional. The Condors were like confessionals, with himself as the priest he had once nearly become.

As the screen flickered into life, General Taylor spread a map of the Soviet Union on the President's desk and pointed with a forefinger.

'What you are seeing, Mr President, is coming to you from Condor Five, tracking here, northeast, between Saratov and Perm, across the Virgin Lands and the Black Earth country.'

Matthews raised his gaze to the screen. Great tracts of land were unrolling slowly down the screen from top to bottom, a swathe about twenty miles broad. The land looked bare, as in autumn after the harvest. Taylor muttered a few instructions into the telephone. Seconds later the view concentrated, closing to a band barely five miles wide. A small group of peasant shacks, wooden plank *izbas* no doubt, lost in the infinity of the steppe, drifted past on the left of the screen. The line of a road entered the picture, stayed centre for a few uncertain moments, then drifted off screen. Taylor muttered again; the picture closed to a track a hundred yards wide. Definition was better. A man leading a horse across the vast expanse of steppe came and went.

'Slow it down,' instructed Taylor into the telephone. The ground beneath the cameras passed less quickly. High in space the satellite Condor was still on track at the same height and speed; inside the NRO's laboratories the images were being narrowed and slowed. The picture came closer, slower. Against the bole of a lone tree a Russian peasant slowly unbuttoned his fly. President Matthews was not a technical man and never ceased to be amazed. He was, he reminded himself, sitting in a warm office on an early

summer morning in Washington, watching a man urinate somewhere in the shadow of the Urals mountain range. The peasant passed slowly out of vision towards the bottom of the screen. The image coming up was of a wheat field many hundreds of acres broad.

'And freeze,' instructed Taylor into the telephone. The picture slowly stopped moving and held.

'Close up,' said Taylor.

The picture came closer and closer until the entire square-yard screen was filled with twenty separate stalks of young wheat. Each looked frail, listless, bedraggled. Matthews had seen them like this in the dustbowls of the Middle West he had known in his boyhood fifty years before.

'Stan,' said the President. Poklewski, who had asked for the meeting and the screening, chose his words carefully.

'Mr President, the Soviet Union has a total grain target this year of two hundred and forty million metric tons. Now this breaks down into goal targets of one hundred and twenty million tons of wheat, sixty million of barley, and fourteen of oats, fourteen of maize or corn, twelve of rye and the remaining twenty of a mixture of rice, millet, buckwheat and leguminous grains. The giants of the crop are wheat and barley.'

He rose and came round the desk to where the map of the Soviet Union was still spread. Taylor flicked off the television and resumed his seat.

'About forty per cent of the annual Soviet grain crop or approximately one hundred million tons comes from here in the Ukraine and the Kuban area of southern Russian Republic,' Poklewski continued, indicating the areas on the map. 'And it is all winter wheat. That is, it's planted in September and October. It has reached the stage of young shoots by November when the first snows come. The snows cover the shoots and protect them from the bitter frosts of December and January.'