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Opening Extract from...

No Deals, Mr Bond

Written by John Gardner

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NO DEALS, MR BOND

John Gardner



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SEAHAWK

The navigation officer, like so many of his Royal Navy counterparts, was known affectionately as Vasco. In the red glow of the submarine's control room he now leaned over and touched the captain's arm.

'Coming up to rendezvous, sir.'

Lt Commander Alec Stewart nodded. 'Stop all. Planes midships.'

'All stopped,' came back from the watchkeeper.

'Planes midships,' answered the senior of the two planesmen, who sat in front of the yokes that operated the hydroplanes, controlling the submarine's depth.

'Sonar?' the captain asked quietly.

'Distant activity around Bornholm Island, usual heavy stuff in and out of Rostock, two targets that sound like small patrol boats distant, up the coast at around fifty miles, bearing zero-two-zero. No submarine signatures.'

Lt Commander Alec Stewart raised an eyebrow. He was not a happy man. For one thing, he did not like operating his Trafalgar Class nuclear submarine in forbidden waters. For another, he did not like 'funnies'.

He knew they were called 'funnies' only because he had seen the expression in a novel. He would have called them 'spooks', or maybe simply spies. Whatever they were, he did not like having them aboard, even though the leader held a naval rank. During war games, Stewart had performed facsimile covert ops, but the real thing, in peacetime, stuck in his throat.

When the 'funnies' had come aboard, he had thought the naval rank was simply a cover, but within a few hours he realised that Seahawk, as the leader was known, was very well informed about the sea – as were his two companions.

Nevertheless, this was all too cloak and dagger for his liking. It was also going to be far from easy for him. The orders, under the heading Operation Seahawk, had been precise but explicit:

> *You will afford Seahawk and his companions every assistance. You will run silent and submerged, making all possible speed, to the following RV.*

Coordinates were given which, after a quick glance at the charts, confirmed Stewart's worst fears. It was a point some fifty miles along the small strip of East German coast, sandwiched between West Germany and Poland, and around five miles offshore.

> *At the RV, you will stand by, remaining submerged, under the direct orders of Seahawk. On no account will you disclose your presence to any other shipping, especially DDR or Russian naval units operating out of nearby ports. On reaching the RV it is probable that Seahawk will wish to leave the boat, together with the two officers accompanying him. They will use the inflatable they have brought with them, and, after departure, you will submerge to periscope depth and await their return. Should they not return after three hours you will make your way back to base, still running silent and submerged. If Seahawk's mission is successful he will probably return with two extra people. You will afford them every possible comfort, returning to base as instructed above. Note: this operation is covered by the Official Secrets Act. You will impress upon all members of your crew that they will not talk about the operation – either among themselves, or to others. An Admiralty team will debrief you, personally, upon your return.*

'Damn Seahawk!' Stewart thought. And damn the operation. The submarine's destination was not the easiest place to reach undetected: under the North Sea, up the Skagerrak, down the

Kattegat, skirting the Danish and Swedish coasts, through the narrow straits – always a tricky navigational exercise – and out into the Baltic. The final fifty-odd miles would take them right into East German waters, crawling with Eastern Bloc shipping, not to mention Russian submarines from bases at Rostok and Stratsund.

'Periscope depth.' Stewart muttered the order, observing the hushed atmosphere of the silently operated boat.

The planesmen eased the submarine up slowly from its 250 feet below the surface.

'Periscope depth, sir.'

'Up periscope.'

The solid metal tube slid upwards and Stewart slammed the handles down. He flicked on the night vision switch and made one complete circuit. He could just pick up the coastline, bleak and flat. Nothing else. No lights or ships. Not even a fishing boat.

'Down periscope.'

He knocked the handles up, took two steps across to the radio bank and picked up the internal broadcast microphone. He switched it on with his thumb and spoke in the same low tone.

'Seahawk to control room please.'

Up in the fore-ends, surrounded by red-marked safety equipment and just behind a set of torpedo tubes, in the only space available, Seahawk and his two companions lay on makeshift bunks, four feet above the deck. They were already wearing black rubber diving suits with waterproof holsters attached to their belts. The cumbersome inflatable had been unstowed and lay within reach.

Hearing the captain's order, Seahawk swung his feet on to the metal deck and made his way unhurriedly abaft to the control room.

Only those belonging to the confined inner circle that is the global intelligence community would have recognised Seahawk as Commander James Bond. His companions were members of

the élite Naval Special Boat Squadron – officers known for their discretion and often used by Bond's Service. Stewart looked up as Bond stooped to enter the control room.

'We've got you here on time.' His manner showed no particular deference, merely polite formality.

Bond nodded. 'Good. In fact we're about an hour early, which gives us a little leeway.' He glanced at the stainless steel Rolex on his left wrist. 'Can you let us go in about twenty minutes?'

'Certainly. How long will it take you?'

'I presume you'll surface only partially, so we need just enough time to get the inflatable blown and paddle out of your down draught. Ten, fifteen, minutes?'

'And we use the radio signals only as instructed?'

'Three Bravos from you for danger. Two Deltas from us when we want you to resurface and take us aboard again. We'll use the exit hatch forward of the sail, as arranged; no problem there, I trust?'

'It'll be slippery on the casing, particularly on return. I'll have a couple of ratings out to assist.'

'And a rope. A ladder for preference. As far as I know, our guests haven't had any experience of boarding submarines at night.'

'Whenever you're ready.' Stewart felt even more unhappy about the 'guests' that were to be foisted upon him.

'Right, we'll get shipshape, then.'

Bond made his way back to the Special Boat Squadron officers, Captain Dave Andrews, Royal Marines, and Lieutenant Joe Preedy, Royal Marines. They went over the drill again quickly, each repeating his part in the contingency plan were anything to go wrong. They lugged the inflatable, its paddles, and the small light-weight engine to the metal ladder that led to the forward hatch and from there to the casing and the cold of the Baltic. Two ratings in oilskins were waiting for them at the foot of the ladder, one ready to scramble up as soon as the order came.

In the control room, Lt Commander Stewart took another quick look around through the periscope and as it was lowered he gave the order to surface to casing and 'black light'. As the second command was obeyed the inside of the boat became completely dark but for the glow of instruments in the control room and the occasional flicker of a heavily shaded red torch. One of these was carried by the rating at the foot of the ladder. He moved quickly up the rungs as the soft voice came from the speakers:

'Casing surfaced!'

The rating turned the wheel with a slight clang to unlock the forward hatch. Fresh, cold air poured in from the small circle above. Joe Preedy was first up the ladder, assisted by the dim red glow of the torch held by the rating. Halfway up the ladder, Dave Andrews took one end of the inflatable from Bond, hauling it up to Preedy and together the two men heaved the bulky rubber lozenge on to the casing. Bond followed them, the rating passing up to him the paddles and the light-weight engine, the latter among the most heavily classified equipment of the Special Boat Squadron. Easy to handle, with small propeller blades, the IPI can run effectively and almost silently on a fuel supply from a self-sealing tank at the rear of the inflatable.

Finally, Bond ran the air tube up to Preedy and by the time he reached the slippery metal casing the inflatable had taken shape, a long, slim, low cutter fitted with bucket seats and hand grabs.

Bond checked that the two-way radio was firmly attached to his wet suit and balanced himself on the casing while the two SBS men launched the inflatable. The rating held a line from the shallow rounded bow until the paddles and IPI, were transferred. Bond then slid from the casing, taking his place in the stern. The rating let go of the line forward, and the inflatable was jerked away from the submarine.

They allowed the little craft to drift clear and Bond took a quick reading from the luminous compass he carried round his neck. He called the reading to the SBS officers, then placed the compass on the plastic well in front of him and using his paddle as a rudder, gave the order to make way. They paddled with long, steady strokes, achieving a respectable speed through the inky blackness. After two minutes, Bond checked their course, and as he did so he heard the hiss of water as the submarine submerged. Around them the night merged with the sea, and it took almost half an hour of hard paddling and constant checking of the compass before they could distinguish the East German coastline. It was going to be a long pull to the shore. If all went well, they would be able to use the engine for a quick sprint back to the submarine.

Over an hour later they were within striking distance of the coast, heading right on course for the safe inlet, its tiny spit of sand showing light against the surrounding darkness. They allowed the craft to drift in, alert and ready, for they were now at their most vulnerable. Andrews, in the stern, raised his unshaded torch and flashed two fast Morse code Vs towards the small stretch of sand. The answer, four long flashes, was returned immediately.

'They're here,' Bond murmured.

'I only hope they're on their bloody own,' muttered Preedy.

As the inflatable drifted on to the beach, Andrews leapt into the water and held the bow rope to steady the craft. Two dark figures came running to the water's edge.

'Meine Ruh' ist hin.' Bond felt a little absurd quoting Goethe – a poet of whom he knew little – in the middle of the night on a deserted East German beach: 'My peace is gone'.

'Mein Herz ist schwer,' the answer came back from one of the figures on the beach, completing the couplet: 'My heart is heavy'.

The three men helped the pair on board and quickly had them

seated amidships. Andrews hauled on the forward rope to bring the inflatable around as Bond set the reciprocal course on the compass. Within seconds they were paddling out again. In thirty minutes they would start the engine and give the first signal to the waiting submarine.

Back in the control room, the sonar operator had been monitoring their progress by means of a short-distance signalling device installed in the inflatable. At the same time he swept the surrounding area, while his partner did the same on a wider scale.

'Looks as though they're coming back, sir,' said the senior sonar operator.

'Let me know when they start their engine.' Stewart sounded tense. He had no idea what the funny business was about, and he did not really want to know. All he hoped for was the safe return of his passengers and whoever they brought with them, followed by an untroubled run home to base.

'Aye-aye, sir. I think . . . Oh, Christ . . .' The sonar operator stopped short as the signal came loud into his headphones and the blip appeared on his screen. 'They've got company.' He resumed his commentary. 'Bearing zero-seven-four. He's coming from behind the headland on their starboard side. Fast and light. I think it's a Pchela.'

Stewart swore aloud, something he rarely did in front of his crew. A Pchela was a Russian-built patrol hydrofoil. Though now elderly, carrying two pairs of 13mm machine guns and the old Pot Drum search radar, these craft were fast and formidable in both shallow water and choppy seas.

'It's a Pchela signature, sir, and he's locked on to them, closing rapidly,' said the sonar operator.

In the inflatable they heard the heavy drumming of the patrol boat's engines almost as they left the shore, pulling away with the paddles.

'Shall we use the engine? Make a run for it?' Dave Andrews shouted back to Bond.

'We'll never make it.'

Bond knew what would have to be done, and he didn't like to contemplate the consequences. He was spared making any decision by Andrews who leaned back and shouted,

'Let him come abreast and be ready for the bang. Don't wait up for me. I'll make my way back overland providing the limpet doesn't get me!' He was quickly over the side, disappearing into the sea.

Bond knew that Andrews carried two small limpet charges that, placed properly, would blow holes directly into the fuel tanks of the hydrofoil. He also knew they would probably blow the SBS man to pieces.

At that moment the searchlight hit them and the patrol craft dropped speed, sinking from the long, ski-like foils which ran under the hull and settling on her bows. A command in German came over the loudhailer, across the closing gap of water.

'Halt! Halt! We are taking you on board so that you can state your business. This is a military order. If you do not stop we will open fire on you. Heave to!'

'Raise your arms above your head,' Bond told Preedy. 'Show you're unarmed, and do as you're told. There will be an explosion. When it happens, drop your heads between your knees . . .'

'And kiss your arse goodbye,' Preedy muttered.

'. . . and cover your heads with your arms.'

The patrol boat was low in the water now, engines idle as she drifted in towards the inflatable, the searchlight unwavering. The gap had closed to almost fifty yards before the bows of the patrol boat disappeared in a blinding white flame turning to crimson. A second after the flash they heard the ripping of the explosion, followed by a deeper roar.

Bond raised his head and saw that Andrews had set the mines perfectly. He would, Bond thought. Any good SBS man would know the exact position for maximum effect on all Eastern Bloc craft, and Andrews had executed the task faultlessly. The boat was on fire her entire length and her bows with their distinctive

foils were lifting high out of the water. She went down in less than a minute.

The inflatable had been blown sideways by the blast and was skidding out of control over the water. Bond reached for the light-weight engine. He lifted it over the stern, pushed it well down in position in the water and pressed the ignition button. The little IPI buzzed into life, the propeller blades whirling. Holding its grab handle, Bond could both steer the inflatable and control its speed.

Bond was alarmed at their vulnerability, for the whole area was illuminated by the flames from the doomed patrol boat. Half a dozen queries went through his mind – had the patrol already alerted other vessels along this closely guarded stretch of coast? Was the inflatable now coming up on a land-based or fast ship's radar system? Had Dave Andrews got clear after setting the limpets? Doubtful. Would the submarine have gone deep, preparing to crawl out to avoid detection? That was certainly a possibility, for a nuclear sub was more precious to its captain than Operation Seahawk. He thought on these things as Preedy took up the navigation, using his own compass to guide them.

'Starboard two points. Port a point. No. Port. Keep turning port. Midships. Hold it there . . .'

Bond struggled to control the inflatable's progress by heaving on the engine, his hand trailing behind them in the water, desperately holding on – for the engine seemed to be trying to pull itself free from his grip. It took all his strength to keep the little craft moving on course, with constant demands from Preedy to alter to port, then starboard, as they bounced heavily on the water.

He felt spray and wind in his face, and in the dying light of the patrol boat's last seconds he saw their two passengers, hunched in their anoraks and tight woollen caps. It was clear from the set of their shoulders that they were terrified. Then, as suddenly

as the hydrofoil had lit the deep black waters, the darkness descended again.

'Half a mile. Cut the engine!' Preedy shouted from the bow.

Now, they would know. Any minute they would discover if their mother ship had deserted them or not.

Stewart had seen the destruction of the hydrofoil on radar, and he wondered if Seahawk and his companions had perished in the explosion. He would give them four minutes. If sonar did not pick them up by then, he would have to go deep and silent, preparing to edge his way out of the forbidden waters. Three minutes and twenty seconds later, the sonar operator said he had them.

'Heading back, sir. Going fast. Using their engine.'

'Prepare to surface low. Receiving party to forward hatch.'

The order was acknowledged. Then the sonar operator said, 'Half a mile, sir.'

Stewart wondered at his own folly. All his instincts told him to get out while they remained undetected. Damn Seahawk, he thought. Seahawk? Bloody silly. Wasn't it an old Errol Flynn movie?

The radio operator heard the two Morse code Ds clear in his headphones just as Bond transmitted them from the almost stationary inflatable. 'Two Deltas, sir.'

'Two Deltas,' replied Stewart with little enthusiasm. 'Surface to casing. Black light. Recovery party clear forward hatch.'

The Seahawk party were pulled on board and slithered down the ladder. Preedy came last, having ripped the sides of the inflatable and set the charge that would destroy the craft underwater, leaving no trace. Stewart gave the order to submerge immediately, going deep and changing course. Only then did he move towards the fore-ends to speak to the Seahawk party. He raised his eyebrows at Bond when he saw they were one short.

Bond did not have to be asked the question. 'He won't be coming back.'

Then Lt Commander Stewart caught sight of the two new members of the Seahawk team. Women, he thought. Women! Bad luck having women aboard. Submarine drivers are a superstitious breed.