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## Taking Note

THE EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR'S BLOG



October 2, 2013, 1:58 pm [1 Comment](#)

# ‘Like a Tom Clancy Novel’

By [JULIET LAPIDOS](#)



David Burnett/G.P.

Putnam Sons, via Associated Press Tom Clancy in Huntingtown, Md., in 2010.

Tom Clancy, [who died on Tuesday](#), was so popular — 17 of his novels were No. 1 New York Times best sellers—that his name meant something even to people who had never read a word of his work, a rare achievement for a contemporary writer. His name was a byword signifying spies, military equipment and covert plots against the American government.

Which is probably why so many Times writers invoked Mr. Clancy over the years, without introduction, to give their stories a little color. He was handy in a simile.

A few examples:

Maureen Dowd, "[Liberties; West Wing Chaperone](#)" Oct. 8, 2000: "If Dick Cheney were in a Tom Clancy-style thriller, he'd be the White House official who blends into the woodwork in the first act, only to quietly usurp the president in the second — the bespectacled puppetmaster who blackmails uncooperative congressmen, fakes authorizations for C.I.A. covert operations and makes deals with cartels."

Joe Goldiamond, "[Meanwhile: A powerless pawn in Colombia's war](#)," Nov. 26, 2002: "Your name is

Juan Carlos Lecompte. And this is not the movie adaptation of a Tom Clancy novel; it is your life.”

David Ignatius, “[America’s Blessed Isolation Has Gone Up in Flames,](#)” Sept. 12, 2001: “New Yorkers were reported to be moving up the streets of Manhattan in fear of further attacks; Washingtonians were said to be gazing into the skies, watching for airplanes that might next attack the Capitol or the White House. It was like one of those improbable Tom Clancy novels come horribly to life.”

Nicholas D. Kristof, “[Why Didn’t We Stop 9/11?](#)” April 17, 2004: “Bush: What about the Tom Clancy novel where the pilot crashes a plane into the Capitol during a joint session of Congress? Could Big Beard be planning something like that?”

Maureen Dowd, “[We Need Chloe!](#)” June 24, 2006: “Lulled by our spy thrillers and Tom Clancy novels, we used to take for granted that our intelligence agencies were just as capable as heroes on the screen. Jack Ryan, either the Harrison Ford, the Alec Baldwin or even the Ben Affleck version, could have gotten Osama single-handedly in the two hours allotted.”

Tobin Harshaw, “[About Those Assassination Squads...](#)” July 17, 2009: “Hmmm, that last name alone is enough to set off a blogswarm, and combined with all the elements of a bad Tom Clancy book (Congress out of the loop, swooping global hit teams, shaky foreign allies) and everything everybody hates about Washington (bureaucratic inertia, legal hurdles, the triumph of vagueness) it garnered a lot of heated and relatively intelligent debate among the twittering classes.”

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"The Hunt for Red October" was published shortly after I left five years of work on submarine reactor and propulsion system construction at General Dynamics/Electric Boat division. My D.O.D. Secret Clearance gave me access to an enormous amount of detail about the program. When I read Red October, Clancy's first novel, I was convinced, as I am today, that he had help from the inside with classified data. Clancy, who was an insurance salesman, always claimed that he researched everything in the public library. I found, in the 650 or so pages, exactly one error in detail -- and I'm convinced that he was asked to put that error in the book because it was something that could have been catastrophic if our enemies knew the truth.

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