

Rogue Submarine Newsletter  
Volume 3  
1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2016

Rogue Readers,

Welcome to the third Rogue Submarine Newsletter! I appreciate your interest in the stories I write for you, and I hope to keep you entertained for many years.

In this volume:

1. Audio books update
2. Reviews of *Rogue Goliath*
3. "Improved" preview of *Rogue Hunter*
4. Exploring Submarine Detection Technology
5. Real world submarine technology update
6. Railguns
7. Fan ideas

### **1. Audio Books Update**

In my prior newsletter, I gave an update on my audio book progress. I'm stuck at "one" - Rogue Avenger is my only audio book, and for good reason. Audio books are great if you enjoy a story while driving. They suck if you're an author trying to fuel a profitable habit.

It costs about \$2,000 for a good voice artist read one of my books, and it costs even more for longer books since professional voice actors usually work per-hour. It's demanding work, and the per-hour rate is reasonable. But I make a pittance in royalties, and I imagine many other independent authors face the same challenge.

However, audio books lend credibility to the series, and they reach readers who demand multiple formats (i.e. those who jump from eBook to audio for the same novel). I also suspect that if I finish my series in audio format, listeners will be more willing to buy the first one.

So... I was considering being my own audio talent. Crazy? I thought so until I read an article by ACX, Amazon's ebook company, stating that self-read audio books are the trend. Apparently, an author's personal touch and enthusiasm make up for shortcomings in voice acting training. I'm not sure that it's as easy as ACX would have me believe, and I wonder if ACX is creating propaganda to boost its own revenues. If so, I can't blame them for trying. You be the judge: <https://www.acx.com/help/authors-as-narrators/200626860>

I bought my equipment, tried reading a few lines, and hated hearing voice. I tried training my voice and reading again, but no luck. If I'm going to do this, I'd need to train for months and

hope that I have enough talent to be worthy of the training. However, I'd rather use that time for other things, like writing books 8+. The future of my audio books remains uncertain.

## **2. Reviews of Rogue Goliath.**

Yes, I read every review on Amazon. Any author who doesn't is either 1) getting too many reviews to keep up 2) doing himself and his audience a disservice by missing possible valuable feedback or 3) lying. As of late December, I have 15 positive reviews and only one 1-star review. If you do the math, every 1-star review requires three 5-star reviews to restore the balance to 4-stars, which is an important filtering criteria on Amazon. Every author hates being told "you suck", but I'm fortunate to have developed thick skin after 20 years of writing. However, the real world filtering impact of a 1-star review concerns me, and a few of my books are still lingering below the 4-star threshold. Fortunately, their 4-star+ siblings help compensate by giving the lesser-rated books exposure.

Anyway, *Rogue Goliath's* 1-star review's comment is valid and interesting. It says "Very hard to keep up with the characters". Well, in *Rogue Goliath*, I made the conscious decision to omit the history of the characters. I figure by Book #7, readers either are familiar with the characters from the first six books, or they're willing to grade the book on a handicap for the omitted history. Obviously, this reader wasn't willing to spot me the handicap.

I've been thinking about drafting a character history to post on my website and/or stuff into my books as an appendix. Maybe now I should give it more thought. I may even break one of the cardinal rules of authorship and respond to the commenter and make him/her aware of the character history. Who knows? I may regain a reader, and what more could an author want?

## **3. Improved Preview of Rogue Hunter**

In my last newsletter, I mentioned that the setting for Book #8 would be the waters around Crimea, where Jake Slate will lead the gang in harassing the Russians, their Black Sea Fleet, and their lifelines to the former Ukrainian territory. Now that the manuscript is more than 50% drafted, I've added details here.

I'm taking a few risks with *Rogue Hunter*, and I have the usual mixed emotions about that. Without risks, the writing becomes the same story told in different setting. But with risks, I could deviate from the elements of the series that readers appreciate and expect.

Examples of successful risks include letting Renard and McDonald lose control of their plans in *Rogue Enforcer*, inventing slow-kill weapons in *Rogue Fortress*, and my favorites – inventing the *Goliath* and promoting Terry Cahill to a primary character in *Rogue Goliath* after introducing him the prior book. But not all risks work. Nobody liked when I withdrew Jake from the front line and distributed the heroism to other characters in *Rogue Defender*. Lesson learned – make the favorite characters drive the plot.

In *Rogue Hunter*, I'll try a few new things. I'll dedicate 20% of the story to the voyage from the 'bat cave' to the area of conflict. Since the *Goliath* can show up anywhere on the planet with a

*Scorpène* class submarine on its back, I decided that I owed my readers a demonstration of how the heroes cover thousands of miles of ocean and overcome obstacles along their way. The team will attempt the use of a new camouflage scheme to support their journey, and the camouflage will help them execute their mission.

Also, Jake will bring a Catholic priest on the mission, generating discomfort for his crew but offering an empowered voice distinct from that of Henri Lanier, who has become Jake's de facto battlefield therapist, to call him out before he would unleash an anger-fueled rampage. I'm not sure how important the priest will be yet. He may be window dressing, or he may influence a critical decision. To be determined...

Finally, since Renard's gang is taking on the Russians, their adversary will prove anything but helpless, and they will have the entire Black Sea Fleet at their disposal, presenting the greatest overall threat to our heroes' survival. We'll see the Russians using five *Kilo* class submarines, a cruiser, two destroyers, two frigates, more than a dozen corvettes and missile boats, and any air asset they could want. They'll even use trained dolphins to take down Jake and the gang before they can escape the tight confines of the Black Sea.

#### **4. Exploring Submarine Detection Technology**

In *Rogue Defender*, I posited that the Taiwanese could lay hydrophone arrays on the sea floor to create an impregnable barrier to any submarine that wished to remain undetected. I think people were willing to accept this based upon the American (SOSUS) SOund SURveillance System that blanketed the mid-Atlantic Ocean during the Cold War. In *Rogue Hunter*, I had intended to tinker with the modern world's latest technologies in reducing a submarine's ability to hide underwater, but then I changed my mind.

I was going to explore new detection technologies from low-frequency sonar to flashing LEDs — plus the big data computing power to enhance the faint signals they pick up — that some people have suggested will make submarines much easier to detect. Then I realized that this technology is either speculative or beyond my security clearance level (i.e. none).

As I wrote the first half of the story, I realized that dolphins are more interesting to explore anyway. I now know more about them than I ever thought I'd know, such as that they sleep with one eye open — literally. They rest half their brains at a time while keeping the other half (and the other eye) alert to threats. And they come with natural sonar systems. The trick is making them to act and communicate as their handlers would want. I'll explore this in *Rogue Hunter* — but don't expect 'Flipper' to become a point of view character.

Could you picture the inner monologue:

*I've echo-located a big mechanical whale. I need to chase it down and lay an explosive on it. Wait! Is that a school of mackerel? That's a school of mackerel, isn't it? They look so tasty...*

## **5. Real world submarine technology update**

In my prior newsletter, I reviewed China's nuclear submarines. Let's look at Russia's status.

The Russian Navy's operational tempo has gone from life support in the 90s to improved but still weak and running on old hardware in the last ten years. Other than submarines, there's nothing in their order battle I see that I wasn't teaching about in the mid-90s.

They're at least making new submarines. Their latest nuclear attack submarine was old news when I mentioned it in *Rogue Avenger* ten years ago, but their first "fifth generation" submarine, the ballistic-missile-carrying *Borei*, will be ready in two years.

The bulk of Russia's submarine production is the advanced *Kilo* class, known as Project 636 *Varshavyanka*. But what's going on with the new *Lada* class? From Wikipedia:

The *Kilo* class was to have been succeeded by the *Lada* class. In November 2011, the Russian Navy announced that the *Lada* class will not enter service because trials with the lead boat of the new class, *Sankt Peterburg* (B-585) had shown major deficiencies. Construction of two further boats was suspended. On 27 July 2012, the Russian Navy... announced that construction of the *Lada*-class submarines will resume, having undergone design changes.

The *Kilo* is a capable submarine, and its future appears strong. The export business looks promising, and Russia itself will send more to the Black Sea, which is relevant to *Rogue Hunter*.

## **6. Railguns**

I added railguns to Team Renard in *Rogue Goliath*, and since they pack a 100+ mile punch, they'll be relevant for many novels to come. They'll be available on the American *Zumwalt* class destroyer in real life. For a look at this awesome weapon, take a look at BAE's technology.

<http://www.baesystems.com/en-us/product/electromagnetic--em--railgun>

## **7. Fan Ideas**

Several fans have offered good ideas for future plots for Jake and the gang. While I may not respond to every idea, I thank you for the ideas and ask you to keep them coming. As the *Rogue Submarine* series unfolds, opportunities may arise for incorporating your thoughts into the stories. Be patient, please.

That's enough for one newsletter. Thank you for reading!

John