

# THE KREMLIN'S



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAN GIGNOUX (LONDON), SALVATORE LAPORTA (SCARAMELLA),  
PETER MACDIARMID (ZAKAYEV), DENIS SINYAKOV (PUTIN), NATASJA WEITZ (LITVINENKO)

# LONG SHADOW

The sensational death of Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko, poisoned by polonium 210 in London last November, is still being investigated by Scotland Yard. Many suspect the Kremlin. But interviewing the victim's widow, fellow émigrés, and toxicologists, among others, BRYAN BURROUGH explores Litvinenko's history with two powerful antagonists—one his *bête noire*, President Vladimir Putin, and the other his benefactor, exiled billionaire Boris Berezovsky—in a world where friends may be as dangerous as enemies

## FROM RUSSIA WITHOUT LOVE

*From left:* Alexander Litvinenko at London's University College Hospital on November 20, 2006, three days before his death; Italian security consultant Mario Scaramella; Chechen activist Akhmed Zakayev; Russian president Vladimir Putin.

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n November 1, 2006, after leaving their modest beige brick town house in the North London neighborhood of Muswell Hill, a petite 44-year-old Russian émigrée named Marina Litvinenko took her husband, Alexander, nicknamed Sasha, and dropped him at the subway station. He had a pair of appointments in central London but promised to be home in time for dinner. It was a special night, the sixth anniversary of their escape from Russia, and to celebrate, Marina was making Sasha's favorite dinner: chicken and pancakes in herb sauce.

Marina spent the day attending a birthday party for a friend's 3-year-old, then retrieved her 12-year-old son, Anatoly, from school before starting to cook. Sasha, a handsome, strapping six-footer with feathery blond hair,

returned home at seven as promised, changed clothes, checked his computer, and sat down for dinner. Around 11 he rose to go to bed, saying he had an early meeting. When Marina went up later, she found him in the bathroom. He said he didn't feel well. Then he vomited. He remained sick through the night, throwing up almost every half-hour or so.

The next morning, leaving Sasha in bed, Marina dropped Anatoly at school and swung by a drugstore to purchase anti-nausea tablets. She returned home to find her husband hunched over the toilet again. He told her this was no normal sickness. The vomiting was too strong. Everything that came out looked gray. "It looks like someone has poisoned me," Sasha said.

There was no need to say more: this was the moment they had feared for six years. Back in Moscow, Sasha was known as the infamous K.G.B.-trained lieutenant colonel Alexander Litvinenko, who had publicly denounced Vladimir Putin's government for all manner of murders and corruption. Friends viewed Litvinenko as an American-style whistle-blower; enemies, and he had many, considered him a thug turned traitor. Now, Marina believed, Putin was having his revenge.

An ambulance was called, and Litvinenko was taken to a nearby hospital; 21 days later he was dead. On the day he died, what might have been written off as another obscure Russian dissident's strange death exploded into an international espionage scandal that threatened Russia's relations with the West, especially Britain, and sent hundreds of reporters

scrambling to solve a mystery that many have characterized as too bizarre for a John le Carré novel. Alexander Litvinenko, his doctors announced, had been poisoned with a radioactive element called polonium 210. He had, in all likelihood, been murdered.

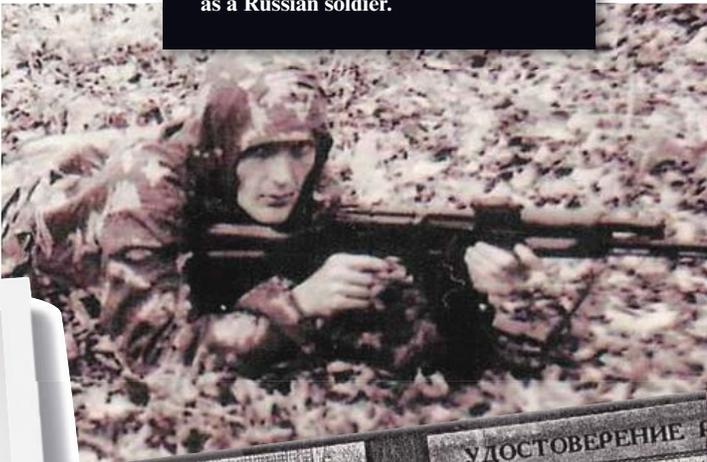
In his last years Litvinenko had grown obsessed with Putin, a man for whom he had worked in the Russian secret services, and whose hand he seemed to see in the world's every evil, from Middle Eastern terrorism to Afghan drug trafficking. From his deathbed Litvinenko issued a statement blaming his illness squarely on Putin's government. The British press erupted in an orgy of articles excoriating the Kremlin, stories that gained even more traction when it turned out Litvinenko had visited with two former K.G.B. men on the day he was probably poisoned. All through December most of Europe watched, rapt, as Scotland Yard detectives tracked telltale traces of polonium everywhere the two K.G.B. men had been: in London hotel suites and bars, in an ex-wife's home in Germany, and even on the jetliners on which the two had flown to London.

To this day, no one knows who poisoned Litvinenko; any examination of his death leads to one giant tangle of loose ends. The

### THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

*Opposite, Litvinenko's wife, Marina, after his funeral. Below, from left: Litvinenko in his post-F.S.B. days; celebrating the day he got his British citizenship; his F.S.B. identification card; as a Russian soldier.*

## LITVINENKO SAW HIMSELF AS "PUTIN'S ALTER EGO": LITVINENKO THE SYMBOL OF LIGHT, PROGRESS, AND LAW; PUTIN OF CHAOS AND DARKNESS AND VIOLENCE.



PHOTOGRAPHS: FAR LEFT, BY DAVID LEVENE;  
FAR RIGHT, BY BRUNO VINCENT





**HOT ON THE TRAIL**  
(1) Boris Berezovsky. (2) An official police label seals the door to a Hamburg home visited by Dmitri Kovtun. (3) Police and media outside Litvinenko's home. (4) Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitri Kovtun. (5) Alex Goldfarb. (6) Polonium 210 contamination in Haselau, Germany.



**“THIS IS PART OF A CLEAR PATTERN, AN ACCELERATING DYNAMIC,” LITVINENKO SAID. “THEY ARE ELIMINATING PEOPLE ON A LIST. THE STATE HAS BECOME A SERIAL MURDERER.”**

story, like most good spy yarns, is nowhere near as black-and-white as the tabloids would have you believe. Among the few things known for sure is that Litvinenko was neither the saint nor the famous dissident the press wanted him to be. He was a minor Russian celebrity years back, and while it's possible—even likely—that his old enemies in the spy services had him killed, at his death he was little more than a gadfly. “The tragedy of Litvinenko is that, throughout his life, people wouldn't listen to him,” says Andrei Nekrasov, a Russian filmmaker and friend. “To the end, he was frustrated. So frustrated. Because no one was listening. No one. Now they're listening.”

His death, in fact, has made Litvinenko what he always wanted to be, an international celebrity, while drawing unprecedented publicity to the thousands of virulently anti-Putin Russian émigrés centered in London. A cynic might even say Litvinenko's friends had more to gain from his death than his enemies.

**The New Russia**

Since 9/11, Americans have lost sight of any number of international stories, few more important than the ominous goings-on in Vladimir Putin's new Russia. Every week brings another worrisome headline from Moscow. One day it's Putin threatening to cut off his neighbors' gas supplies. (Russia is now the world's larg-

est producer of natural gas.) The next it's another Russian journalist shot in the head, or a democracy advocate blown up in his car. Russia has been violent for so long that few in the West seem to realize that the kinds of deaths and murders in Moscow today are wholly different from those of the 1990s. Then the killings were products of the struggle to control Russia's newly privatized businesses and factories. Today the people who are dying are mostly “enemies of the state”—crusading journalists, whistle-blowers, overactive regulators, dissidents.

Putin was a K.G.B. man, and to a remarkable degree the renewal of official aggression since he took office at the end of 1999 has been accompanied by the K.G.B.-ization of all sources of influence. The vaunted billionaire oligarchs who emerged during the 1990s, the Boris Berezovskys and Mikhail Khodorovskys, have all been herded into exile or prison; the men who run Russia today are overwhelmingly veterans of the K.G.B. or its principal successor, the F.S.B. According to one recent study, three out of every four business executives and senior government officials in Russia once worked for either the K.G.B. or the F.S.B. Their presence gives new meaning to the term “police state.”

Alexander Litvinenko had been one of them, a lieutenant colonel in the F.S.B. Despite all the headlines, he was never a spy. The F.S.B. is not Russia's C.I.A. but more

like its F.B.I.; Litvinenko was the equivalent of an F.B.I. agent, and an obscure one at that. His specialty was organized crime, and his job involved investigations, stake-outs, and interrogations of Moscow mobsters. Gary Busch, a London-based transportation consultant who has worked with Russian security services, recalls encountering Litvinenko at an F.S.B. office during the 1990s. “He was a thug,” Busch remembers.

Litvinenko turned out to be much more than that. To understand his strange odyssey, I spoke at length with the half-dozen people closest to him, including his best friend and neighbor in London, Akhmed Zakayev, a onetime deputy prime minister of Chechnya. Litvinenko's widow, Marina, a charming woman with wide-set Slavic eyes, met me at a London Internet café, though at her new publisher's insistence—she is writing a book, due out in May—she was obliged to speak on background. So was her co-author, Alex Goldfarb, the man who brought the Litvinenkos to London, a wry émigré with a salt-and-pepper beard, who met me for breakfast at Claridge's. Other friends, fearing for their safety, asked to remain anonymous.

Litvinenko's past suggested his future as a dissident. He was born in the provincial city of Voronezh in 1962, of a long line of military officers. He entered the army at 18, then, after graduating from an officers' school in 1985, became a platoon commander. There, he has said, he became an informer for the K.G.B., a relationship that culminated in his joining the spy agency in 1988. Job titles aside, Litvinenko was a cop, investigating criminal gangs, mostly in Moscow, for the next several years, as the K.G.B. went through a series of name changes, its domestic branch eventually becoming the powerful F.S.B. He was an up-and-comer, energetic and curious, and Marina is certain he could have made general. Still, until he met Boris Bere-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HARRY BENSON (BEREZOVSKY), SERGEI CHIRIKOV (LUGOVOI AND KOVTUN), MARTIN GODWIN (LITVINENKO HOME), ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN (LABEL), KAY NIETFIELD (POLONIUM 210), HAMID RUKHSANA (GOLDFARB)

zovsky, in 1994, Litvinenko was nothing special. There were hundreds in the F.S.B. just like him.

Berezovsky, however, was special. A mathematician, he had become one of Russia's first successful entrepreneurs after the collapse of the Communist regime, much of his original fortune earned in software development and by selling Mercedes sedans to the country's new rich. He prospered as an early and vocal backer of Boris Yeltsin, branching into new businesses, acquiring old government factories, and transforming himself into the most visible of the "New Russian" oligarchs.

During Berezovsky's rise, in the early 1990s, the auctioning of government assets, known as privatization, turned violent, with murders and contract killings becoming commonplace. Still, an attempt on Berezovsky's life one rainy morning in April 1994 was eye-opening. Riding in the back of his chauffeured black Mercedes, he had just left the garage of his downtown-Moscow headquarters when a Volkswagen Golf, packed with dynamite, exploded. Dozens of bystanders were wounded. Berezovsky's bodyguard was maimed. His driver's head was blown off. But Berezovsky escaped unharmed. When he heard the news, Litvinenko realized he knew Berezovsky's name. He had overheard a Moscow thug talking about an attempt to extort him.

In the wake of the bombing, Litvinenko, in his role as a security agent, interviewed Berezovsky several times. A kind of friendship ensued. Berezovsky was looking for allies in the security services. Litvinenko, one suspects, was simply awed to grow so close to one of Russia's wealthiest men; their relationship would be akin to an F.B.I. agent's befriending Bill Gates. In his Russian-language memoir, *The Lubyanka Criminal Group*, published in 2002, Litvinenko indicates he didn't see much of Berezovsky after the fruitless investigation ran its course. Not until 1998, he wrote, did their paths cross again. By that point, Berezovsky had emerged as the kingmaker behind Yeltsin's re-election, and had led the negotiations that ended the first Chechen war, a truce that was said to have enraged Russian hard-liners.

At that point, in 1998, Litvinenko claimed, one of his F.S.B. superiors asked whether he could get close enough to Berezovsky to murder him. In his memoir Litvinenko portrayed this as a turning point in his life, a moment when he began seriously to question the pervasive official corruption in Russia. Litvinenko, who believed the request to kill Berezovsky emanated from a senior Russian general named Yevgeny Khokholkov, quoted him as saying it was time "we wasted that Kremlin

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## THE POWER OF POIRET

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or Andrew Bolton, co-curator with Harold Koda of "Poiret: King of Fashion," opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in May, the outré couturier Paul Poiret was "one of the most radically modern dressmakers in the history of the 20th century." Pope Pius X condemned the perverse Frenchman's harem-slave pantaloons, censors confiscated a movie of his ankle-exposing skirts, and at his fabled "1002nd Night" costume party, staged in 1911, he released his wife and muse, Denise, from a gilded cage and chased her around with a whip.

Among the sartorial treasures on display from Denise's private wardrobe is this fur-edged cloak—christened "La Perse" by its inventor—crafted from a cotton velvet designed by Fauvist painter Raoul Dufy, whose career the art-amassing Poiret helped launch. Last seen in New York 94 years ago, when Denise modeled it over a scanty white chemise, the coat has just been acquired for the museum's permanent collection.

The sensational reign of "Poiret le Magnifique" barely outlived his marriage, which dissolved in 1928. By that time such avant-garde clients as Josephine Baker, Helena Rubinstein, Colette, and Peggy Guggenheim had already migrated to newer *créateurs*, Chanel among them. In 1929 the house of Poiret closed its imposing doors, and the spendthrift master declared bankruptcy. "Perhaps," suggests art historian Kenneth E. Silver, "it was all too precious to last."

—AMY FINE COLLINS

to get wasted and have sex all the time, but there's a "higher" class who do what she does: "It is about flirting and touching and being sexy and moving your ass and getting your body into the right position and getting the eyes on you. But then it's a kick to all of a sudden send them away again. You have a kind of power, if you play your cards."

So she's never had sex in Ibiza?

"No, I did, with my own boyfriend. That's something different. I did have sex *here*, on the toilet in the bathroom back there. It was a quick, horrible, nasty little fuck, that was all it was. Hahahahaha!"

Now all eyes are on the M.C., Baby Marcelo, who calls himself "the queen of Spain." He announces that his father is gay, and so is the Pope, George Bush, Silvio Berlusconi, and everybody at Amnesia. Then he cries out, "Long live Ibiza!," and the place goes berserk.

On my last night in Ibiza I go to Bambudha Grove, a "MediterrAsian" restaurant with a gift shop that sells oils, vibrators, and books with titles such as *Paradise Orgies* and *Painful Pleasures*.

In a pagoda behind bamboo trees I find Claire Davies and Mike McKay. In 1994, Mike and his brother, Andy, co-founded Ibiza's notorious Manumission party, which is held every Monday night at Privilege. Claire, 31, is a striking redhead with a soft voice and a dreamy, languid air. Mike, 36, has a shaved head and a long goatee, and seems peaceful as he hands me a joint of hash.

The BBC has called them "probably the most famous couple on the island," and what they became most famous for was having sex onstage with each other. "It was very

well received," says Mike. "Then it became an essential part of the party."

The word "manumission" means freedom from slavery. "The idea is that everybody in everyday life is a slave somehow, but at Manumission you're free to do whatever you like," Mike says.

In 1998 they opened up the Manumission Motel at a pink roadside former bordello. Mike says that Kate Moss and Jade Jagger came to see the motel's Pink Pussy strip club, whose always naked M.C. had flames tattooed near her private region.

"Everything happened in that motel," says Mike.

"The kind of stories we can't repeat," says Claire.

"We were playing too close to the dark side," says Mike.

In the end the police intervened.

"Thank God they closed it down," says Claire.

These days the couple is hatching plans to open a club in Las Vegas that will export the Ibiza experience to Sin City. They are also behind "Ibiza Rocks," a concert series with major-label rock 'n' roll acts such as Babyshambles, fronted by Kate Moss's on-again, off-again boyfriend Pete Doherty.

When they're not working, Mike and Claire lead a simple life with their three kids in an old farmhouse in the country, but tonight they have to attend Jade Jagger's going-away party. Von, the godfather of their kids, is sitting across the room. With his dreadlocks and huge Dr. Seuss hat, Von looks like a Rastafarian on *Sesame Street*. He's sitting with three young ladies, two of whom resemble *Penthouse Pets*.

Von, 45, offers me more hash and tells

me he organizes the Funky Room at Pacha. "What more do you want?" he says. "Beautiful chicks. Beautiful restaurant. Beautiful *hat*. This is what Ibiza's all about to me at the end of the day. There's a shabby side but a great side to it. I like the stylish side of it. You have to appreciate that I *know* personally every V.I.P. and his *dog* in the world. I just *know* them."

He grew up outside London and went through a "radical black man" phase in Washington, D.C., where he trained to be a social worker, then did a teaching stint in New York City. "But it's all bullshit," he recalls. "You know, you can't change the world, so I'm like, Fuck it. Ibiza and Spain in general is the place for me, to be what you are. Here, there's no political correctness."

He moved here in 1983 and started out as a podium dancer in clubs. Back then, Von turned everyone on to cocaine and Ecstasy. "Everybody pretends that they've been into drugs their whole lives: bullshit. *I'm* the investigation of Ecstasy."

"Sympathy for the Devil" comes on. Von has "umpteen" stories to tell but doesn't want to share, "because everything here revolves around illegal substances and perversion, basically."

The next morning, I settle up with the Navila's warm but mysterious proprietress, Lady Pepita. "So we'll see you next year," she says, as if it were a foregone conclusion. I look at her and nod, half in horror.

Back in New York, I realize she was right: that magnetic energy from Es Vedrà is pulling me in. A return trip feels inevitable. If not this summer, then definitely sometime before Armageddon. □

## Litvinenko Poisoning



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 232 Jew." Rather than kill Berezovsky, however, Litvinenko went to the oligarch and told him everything—a move, Berezovsky has said, that saved his life.

Litvinenko always characterized his decision as an ethical choice; others have suggested he was cynically gravitating toward a new center of Russian power. Whatever

Litvinenko's motivation, Berezovsky took the allegation to Yeltsin himself, who used it as a reason to fire General Khokhlov and launch a housecleaning at the F.S.B.

The agency's new director turned out to be a little-known St. Petersburg bureaucrat named Vladimir Putin. By that point Litvinenko had compiled an extensive dossier on F.S.B. corruption, which included a list of generals he believed had ordered illegal assassinations. On Berezovsky's urging, he presented the dossier to Putin. The two men, however, did not hit it off. Putin, icy and controlled, seemed to regard Litvinenko at the very least as a loose cannon.

When Putin failed to act, Litvinenko went public. In November 1998 he and several other F.S.B. agents staged an unprecedented press conference in which they alleged that F.S.B. generals had taken bribes and ordered killings. The other agents wore ski masks or sunglasses; only Litvinenko identified him-

self. Afterward, many believed Berezovsky paid Litvinenko to hold the press conference, or at least put him up to it. Litvinenko always denied taking money. When I ask Berezovsky's London public-relations man, Lord Bell, whether Berezovsky arranged the press conference, he smiles and says, "Probably. It's quite possible."

The F.S.B.'s revenge was swift. In 1999, Litvinenko was arrested on unspecified charges and thrown into Moscow's Lefortovo Prison. Eight months later a judge ordered him released; he was placed on suspension and put under surveillance. Litvinenko blamed everything on Putin.

Berezovsky, at least initially, had the opposite reaction. In fact, he was one of the prime movers behind Putin's elevation to the Russian presidency the following year. Once in office, however, Putin summoned the country's most powerful oligarchs and warned them to stay out of politics. If they didn't, he suggested, it might be necessary for the Kremlin

# Litvinenko Poisoning

to investigate exactly how they had amassed their riches. It was the beginning of the end of the oligarch era. By mid-2000, Berezovsky and Putin were enemies, and it was clear to Berezovsky that he couldn't win a prolonged fight with the Kremlin. Instead he sold off most of his Russian holdings to a mogul more to Putin's tastes, Roman Abramovich, and fled to London. (Abramovich lives in London now, too.)

There Berezovsky set about establishing himself as the exile leader of the Russian opposition. At a time when other oligarchs were making peace with the Kremlin, he hired Lord Bell, a onetime adviser to Margaret Thatcher, to help him warn the world about Putin. He began funneling vast amounts of money to pro-democracy groups inside Russia and its neighbors. For the Kremlin, Berezovsky became Public Enemy Number One.

Berezovsky's exile left Litvinenko—now unemployed and anticipating his re-arrest—with no powerful allies. He himself began

to think of fleeing. But Marina wavered. The two had met when a friend brought Litvinenko to her 31st-birthday party; Marina, a dance teacher, joked that Litvinenko was her birthday present. The attraction was immediate. Marina even overlooked Litvinenko's horrible teeth, many of which had been removed without anesthetic when he was in the army. Unfortunately, Litvinenko was married, and though the marriage was troubled, he swore he wouldn't leave his wife and child. Just weeks later, however, his wife left him. Soon after, he and Marina married, and about a year later, Marina gave birth to Anatoly.

Marina didn't want to leave Russia. She had been outside the country exactly once, for a week's vacation in Paris, and spoke no English. One day in October 2000, Litvinenko told her he needed to visit their dacha, outside Moscow. Instead, eluding his F.S.B. tail, he made his way across the border into Ukraine. From there he telephoned Marina and told her they were taking an impromptu vacation to Spain. He bought her a ticket and said he would meet her

there. When Marina and six-year-old Anatoly arrived in Madrid, however, Litvinenko telephoned again. He said they could never go back. Marina, a friend says, continued to resist. Husband and wife argued for two full days, in fact, before Marina reluctantly agreed to meet Litvinenko in Turkey. Litvinenko, having secured a false passport, then boarded a freighter across the Black Sea. He eventually met Marina at a hotel in the southern resort town of Antalya.

From Turkey, Litvinenko telephoned Berezovsky in London, and Berezovsky reached out to Alex Goldfarb, whom he had hired to run his foundation, the New York-based International Foundation for Civil Liberties. "You remember Sasha Litvinenko?" Berezovsky asked.

"He's your basic K.G.B. guy," said Goldfarb, who had met Litvinenko while researching conditions in Russian prisons for his previous employer, the billionaire George Soros.

Goldfarb flew from New York to Turkey, then accompanied Litvinenko inland to the capital city of Ankara, where they visited the American Embassy. Litvinenko asked

## SKETCHBOOK: SHOOTING STARS BY MARK SUMMERS

### Peter Gunn

Peter Gunn, 1958-61

### Trigger

The Roy Rogers Show, 1951-57

### Yancy Derringer

Yancy Derringer, 1958-59

### Christopher Colt

Colt .45, 1957-60

### Frank Cannon

Cannon, 1971-76



for political asylum. A bureaucrat told him embassies don't grant asylum. If he wanted a refugee visa to enter America, he could fill out a form. Litvinenko left crestfallen. The Americans obviously had no idea who he was. Afterward he decided to try for London. Goldfarb arranged the tickets, and after sweating through an immigration check in Istanbul, they made it to Heathrow, where British officials harangued Goldfarb for bringing in unauthorized asylum seekers. Litvinenko didn't care. He was safe, for now.

#### Notes from the Underground

Litvinenko's "defection" was news for a few days in Russia; he made a headline or two in London with an assertion then making the rounds that the F.S.B. was secretly behind the 1999 bombings of suburban-Moscow apartment blocks that killed hundreds of innocent people. Putin, angrily blaming the incident on Chechen terrorists, had used the attack as a rationale to start the second Chechen war, which ended with Russia's retaking control of the breakaway Muslim republic.

The Kremlin filed papers to extradite Lit-

vinenko to Moscow, and the family, installed in an apartment by Berezovsky, lived in fear for six months, until Litvinenko's application for asylum in Britain was accepted; he later became a British citizen. Anatoly entered school, and he and Marina became fluent in English; Litvinenko never mastered the language. It took time, but as the months went by "Sasha began to say he felt safe here," a friend says. "He really didn't think the Russians would do anything to him as long as he remained in Britain."

In London, Litvinenko remained very much the willing tool of Berezovsky; without that relationship, he was just another unemployed immigrant. Through the International Foundation for Civil Liberties, Berezovsky gave him the money to buy the town house in Muswell Hill and a monthly stipend to live on. Litvinenko kept an office on the third floor, where he would disappear for hours surfing Russian Web sites; when Anatoly sneaked in to play games on his father's computer, Sasha playfully chided him. Through Berezovsky, Litvinenko met the smooth Chechen politician Akhmed Zakayev, 50, who was also living on a Bere-

zovsky stipend. Though they had once been on opposite sides in Russia, they became unlikely friends, and in time Zakayev accepted Litvinenko's entreaties to move into a town house across the street. There Litvinenko became a regular presence, playing with Zakayev's three grandchildren and taking them to the park and on errands. "He would come by anytime and say, 'I'm not here to see you, I'm here to see them,'" Zakayev says with a smile.

When Litvinenko told Goldfarb he wished to write a book, maybe about the apartment bombings, Goldfarb found a Russian émigré in Boston, Yuri Felshtinsky, who was finishing a similar manuscript and persuaded him to take Litvinenko as his co-author. "Alexander came in at a late stage. The truth is, he actually didn't know much about the bombings," says a person involved in the process.

Financed by Berezovsky, the book, *Blowing Up Russia: Terror from Within*, was a windy mishmash of conspiracy theories that charged the F.S.B. with blowing up the buildings to start the second Chechen war; while provocative, the text offered little in the way

**Tony Baretta**  
Baretta, 1975–78

**Inspector Luger**  
Barney Miller, 1975–82

**Thomas Magnum**  
Magnum, P.I., 1980–88

**Remington Steele**  
Remington Steele, 1982–87

**Charles Emerson Winchester III**  
M\*A\*S\*H, 1977–83

**Charles Gunn**  
Angel, 2000–04



# Litvinenko Poisoning

of evidence. It was first published in New York in 2002, and then in Latvia, where it was trucked across the border into Russia. Most of the copies, however, were seized by police. "It never got to Russian stores, but it probably got to the black market and a kiosk or two," says a Berezovsky aide. "The seizure of the books was a fairly big deal. That was great publicity." *Blowing Up Russia* was translated into English, Bulgarian, and Polish.

Even before the book was published, Litvinenko had forged a friendship with an émigré filmmaker and playwright named Andrei Nekrasov. "Alexander had been relatively well known in Russia because of the press conference, but after that, people started to forget about him," says Nekrasov, 48, a wild-haired man I found finishing a BBC documentary on Litvinenko in a West London studio. When Litvinenko resurfaced in London talking about the apartment bombings, Nekrasov was intrigued. He contacted Berezovsky, who put the two men in touch. "He was the kind of guy, after five minutes, you felt you'd grown up with him," Nekrasov recalls. "There were no formalities. He was very friendly, very open, very passionate about Russia."

The two began taking walks, Nekrasov listening as Litvinenko launched into soliloquies about Putin, with whom he remained obsessed. "They had been contemporaries, and he saw himself as Putin's alter ego," Nekrasov recalls. Nekrasov was fascinated with the idea of the two men as opposite sides of the Russian coin: Litvinenko the symbol of light, progress, and the rule of law, Putin of chaos and darkness and violence. He began to write a play called *Koenigsberg*, the story of a K.G.B. veteran who escaped to Western Europe and attempted to tell the world about the dangers of post-communist Russia. It was eventually staged in a Berlin theater, in 2002, and ran for nearly a year.

As their friendship deepened, Nekrasov began filming a new documentary, based on Litvinenko's book. Litvinenko functioned as the director's factotum, introducing him to many of the people who appeared in the film—former F.S.B. agents, women whose relatives had been killed in the bombings—though Litvinenko himself did not appear. The film, *Disbelief*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004 and attracted favorable reviews.

Its success, however, stood in sharp contrast to the project closest to Litvinenko's heart, his memoir. It was the book he had dreamed of writing for years. Alex Goldfarb hired a person to interview him for two months. Once the interviews were tran-

scribed, Goldfarb took Litvinenko on an extended tour of Spain and Italy, where he edited the manuscript with Litvinenko looking over his shoulder. It was the first time Litvinenko had left the safety of Britain, and Goldfarb noticed how nervous he was, constantly glancing around.

Once again Berezovsky paid to have the book published, in 2002. Like the first book, *The Lubyanka Criminal Group* was published in Latvia, trucked into Russia, and seized wholesale by Russian police. Unlike the first book, however, the second was never translated into English and today is almost impossible to find. "He was very frustrated by how the books did," says Nekrasov. "They weren't really read. They had no impact."

Failure did nothing to muzzle Litvinenko, however. He had become the consummate dissident exile, a passionate speaker who would expound for hours about Putin the "criminal," the F.S.B., the Chechens, the war against the oligarchs. He saw the Kremlin's hand in worrisome developments everywhere: al-Qaeda, Afghan drug trafficking, Iraq. "He was fanciful," a Berezovsky aide says with a sigh. "He exaggerated like mad. He saw conspiracies everywhere, in the simplest things. He was a Russian. You know?"

"He was a great source, but also a terrible, terrible bore," says James Heartfield, a London graduate student who, with his associate, Julia Svetlichnaja, interviewed Litvinenko at length for a paper they were researching about Chechens in Moscow. "He was lonely. He wanted to talk to Russians. He talked to us ad infinitum. I mean, it was clear he had nothing else to do. He had a singular viewpoint, a Cold War assessment, that all evil emanated from the Kremlin. It might be true, but lots of it was slightly barking. And it made every conversation a bit boring. I remember when we approached Berezovsky, who told us to talk to Sasha, he said, 'Take what he says with a pinch of salt.' The sense was: he's a bit extreme, a bit of a nutter."

Litvinenko wanted to be a writer, but his work consisted mostly of an endless stream of long-winded e-mails to friends. "Sasha was a very prolific writer," one notes. "He wrote an article a day, on average. Unfortunately, over 90 percent of it was never published. I still have 300 e-mails from him that, frankly, I've never read. He was like a blogger without a blog." What articles Litvinenko did manage to publish were almost all carried on a pro-Chechen Web site called Chechen Press. These were mostly anti-Putin screeds, including one in which Litvinenko wildly alleged that the Russian president was a pedophile. "I told him he should stop writing so much for Chechen Press," says the friend. "He was becoming

too much associated with that one issue. It did nothing for his credibility."

In his spare time, and he had too much, Litvinenko ran. Actually he sprinted, 10 kilometers at a time, through the streets of Muswell Hill, returning to his town house sweaty and exhausted. Marina told him to slow down and try jogging; she worried he might have a heart attack. Litvinenko said he couldn't. He knew only one speed: full out.

## Brave New World

By 2005, Litvinenko had reached a crossroads. Berezovsky's foundation cut his monthly stipend from about \$6,000 to \$1,500, barely enough to live on. The Berezovsky aide explains this as a routine matter brought on by the oligarch's erratic cash flow—his Swiss accounts are forever being frozen and freed up by Swiss authorities under pressure from Putin's government. But another friend says the reduction was made after Litvinenko's wife found work teaching dance, which brought in some meager income. Left unsaid was the fact that Litvinenko had little left to offer Berezovsky beyond his loyalty.

"Look, Litvinenko was small beer," the Berezovsky adviser says, "but he was useful for certain things, mainly interpreting what the F.S.B. was doing. Boris would call him to check on F.S.B. stories he heard."

Another man might have found work as a bodyguard. But Litvinenko wanted more. He saw other ex-K.G.B. émigrés consulting with or even starting their own private-security firms, taking home big paychecks for work Litvinenko felt he could do just as well. "He wanted a real job, you know, to analyze security issues," says a friend. James Heartfield adds, "He wanted to find work in intelligence. He didn't want to be a thug. To me, he seemed lost. He was tossing about like a cork on the sea of life."

In late 2005, Litvinenko contacted a one-time K.G.B. major named Yuri Shvets, an attorney who operates a security consulting company in the Washington, D.C., area. Shvets's main business is investigating Russian companies on behalf of Western corporations who want to work with them. His clients are typically considering major investments and want to know whether the people they will be dealing with are involved in anything nefarious—always a concern in Russian business. (This kind of review, routine in the corporate world, is known as due diligence.) Litvinenko offered to find Shvets new clients in London, for which Shvets agreed to pay him a 20 percent commission.

Not long after, Shvets says, Litvinenko brought him a client, believed to be Titan International, a London security firm. On behalf of its own, unnamed client, the firm agreed to pay Shvets \$100,000 to produce due-diligence reports on five Russian businessmen. For brokering the deal, Litvinenko

was to be paid \$20,000. A friend emphasizes that Litvinenko did no digging himself; he was simply paid for arranging the contract.

The deal that probably appeared most promising to Litvinenko—that could ensure his financial future, in fact—involved an old acquaintance, a 41-year-old former K.G.B. agent named Andrei Lugovoi, who had re-invented himself as a millionaire Moscow businessman. Lean and blond, with wide, owlish eyes, Lugovoi had served on Berezovsky's security detail. When Berezovsky purchased the ORT television station, Lugovoi had become its head of security. A Berezovsky aide says Lugovoi left the K.G.B. to work directly for Berezovsky.

When Berezovsky fled Russia, Lugovoi remained behind. In time he established himself in business, running a company that sells soft drinks. Though wealthy, he moonlighted in the security business and remained close to Berezovsky, traveling often to London. The Berezovsky aide says the oligarch employed Lugovoi off and on as a bodyguard, usually for his onetime business partner Badri Patarkatsishvili. The aide emphasizes that Lugovoi was hardly a member of Berezovsky's inner circle. "Lugovoi was a guy who could go to Berezovsky's office and see anyone, get soccer tickets, whatever—but see the Great Man himself. . . well, that would've been more difficult," says the aide. "He was a friend, but not entirely trusted. Because you never know if someone is a sleeper or a spy or whatever."

In the émigré community, in fact, the rap on Lugovoi was that he had done suspiciously well for himself while remaining behind in Moscow. Marina had the same concerns when Litvinenko introduced her to Lugovoi, at Berezovsky's birthday party in London in early 2006. "Sasha, I just don't understand," she told her husband afterward. "Lugovoi knows Berezovsky, but how is he so successful in Russia?" Russians use the word for roof, *krisha*, to imply protection. "Everyone has *krisha* in Russia," Marina says. "Who is Lugovoi's *krisha*?" She suspected it was the F.S.B.

If Litvinenko had doubts about Lugovoi, they appeared to be overcome by his need for money. After Litvinenko's death, Lugovoi told a Moscow radio station that their relationship was limited to the kind of deal Litvinenko had struck with Yuri Shvets, that is, a 20 percent commission on any contracts Litvinenko brought in. But two of Litvinenko's friends say that there was more to it, that Litvinenko claimed the two men spoke of establishing a London-based security company together. Whether this was real or a pipe dream, Litvinenko certainly hoped it would happen. Lugovoi told the Moscow radio station that he had met Litvinenko 12 or 13 times last year in London, a frequency

that would indicate a deeper involvement than he has suggested elsewhere.

Litvinenko's work with Lugovoi may also have been the reason for a rare foreign trip Litvinenko made last summer, when he flew to Tel Aviv to deliver an unsolicited presentation to Leonid Nevzlin, the former number two at the now defunct Russian oil colossus Yukos and the man who ranks second on the Kremlin's unofficial most-wanted list, after Berezovsky. Nevzlin fled to Israel in 2003, one step ahead of Russian prosecutors, who took control of Yukos and, following a show trial, sent its C.E.O., Nevzlin's partner Mikhail Khodorkovsky, to a Siberian prison. Nevzlin agreed to see Litvinenko; at their meeting, Nevzlin said in a statement following Litvinenko's death, Litvinenko presented him with a 17-page dossier that "contained important information that shed light on matters involving the Kremlin and the effort to destroy Yukos." An Israeli spokesman for Nevzlin, journalist Uri Dan, declines to say more about the dossier, except that it has been given to Scotland Yard.

But according to people who knew Litvinenko, the dossier contained information aimed at exonerating a former Yukos security chief, Alexei Pichugin, who has been convicted of murdering a banker and his wife in Russia; the dossier argued that an F.S.B. hit team committed the murders.

The meeting with Nevzlin appears to have been a kind of test run for the business Litvinenko hoped to start with Lugovoi. "My understanding is Lugovoi and his partner funded that work—they were funding Litvinenko to go down to Israel and use this as a business pitch, you know, to get the account," says Gary Busch. "I'm not sure it worked out."

It didn't. But Litvinenko didn't give up. According to Lugovoi, Litvinenko had been attempting to broker a deal for him with a British security concern named Erinys. Founded in 2001 by a former British Army Guards officer, Erinys is known in security circles for a reportedly \$100 million contract to provide security for oil installations in Iraq. Its executives have declined comment on the case, but Lugovoi has said that Litvinenko took him at least once to Erinys's offices at 25 Grosvenor Street; the building, which also houses Titon International, happens to be owned by Berezovsky. Erinys declines to say what the meeting involved.

"Erinys is in the body-shop business, providing security personnel for difficult operations, like Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria—the tough places," says a London security consultant. "The kind of money a British ex-S.A.S. [Special Air Service, the special-forces unit of the British Army] person wants is shrinking in places like Iraq, [so] one of the things you look for is other [cheaper] sources. Rather than chaps from the S.A.S. you get 'Gur-

chas.' Russian Spetsnaz commandos are well trained, available, and cheap. I'd guess that was what was going on there."

Litvinenko grew so chummy with Lugovoi that, to Marina's consternation, he invited him to their town house. "It was incredibly naïve," says Akhmed Zakayev, who lives across the street. "But I understood it. He was so proud. He was proud of being a British citizen, of his home. He wanted to show Lugovoi how well he lives, that he has a garden. Only later did I realize that, by bringing him there, Sasha had brought Lugovoi close to me."

With that, Zakayev shudders.

Last July, in a vote little noticed outside the émigré community, the Russian legislature, called the Duma, passed a law making it legal for the Kremlin to murder enemies of the state outside the country.

"They will try to kill me," Litvinenko told Marina.

"Sasha, how can you tell me that?" Marina exclaimed. "I won't sleep!"

"Marusya," he said, using her pet name. "It's true."

Litvinenko took no special precautions, other than a home-security system he and Marina knew would never stop a determined assassin. But he began warning any number of friends to be careful. "Sasha was sure the F.S.B. was preparing to kill me," Zakayev says. "He would always talk about that, [saying], 'They will bring people close to you. They will use people who are old friends, people you knew in a different world, in a different life.'"

On October 7 a friend of Litvinenko's, a crusading journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, who'd spent years investigating the apartment bombings and other Chechen-related issues, was shot in the head and killed in the elevator of her Moscow building. A surveillance camera caught a chilling image of her unidentified assassin, a lone figure in a dark baseball cap. Litvinenko pledged to find the killer. A week later he joined a crowd of dissidents and human-rights activists in a memorial service for her at Westminster Abbey. Afterward he spoke with Andrei Nekrasov. As Nekrasov recalls it, Litvinenko said, "This is part of a clear pattern, an accelerating dynamic. They are eliminating people on a list. The state has become a serial murderer." Litvinenko predicted another killing at any time; for a moment, the two debated who it might be.

"Promise me you will not go back to Russia," Litvinenko said as they parted. "Otherwise you will be next."

### Russian Roulette

Two weeks after the memorial service Marina dropped off Litvinenko at their subway station. It's impossible to reconstruct accurately his movements that day, although before his death he detailed them for British detectives. Specialists at Scotland Yard have

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since spent hundreds of hours scanning video from every surveillance camera in the areas of Piccadilly and Mayfair through which he passed, looking for anything untoward.

Litvinenko had at least two appointments that day—of that police are sure. One was with an Italian named Mario Scaramella, a consultant to Italy's Mitrokhin commission, a parliamentary group that investigated K.G.B. infiltration of Italian politics. After Litvinenko's death Scaramella would come in for intense media scrutiny; for the longest time no one seemed able to figure out who he actually was. Not till January, in a long report carried in the *International Herald Tribune*, was it demonstrated that Scaramella was essentially a fraud, a self-created spy-industry gadfly who had once been arrested for impersonating a police inspector.

Litvinenko didn't know Scaramella well and thought he was a bit of a kook; he later told detectives he saw him that day, only after the Italian insisted. They met at a fast-food sushi restaurant named Itsu in Piccadilly. There Scaramella passed Litvinenko a copy of an e-mail he had received. It was in English, which Litvinenko had trouble reading. He started to push it into his bag, but Scaramella pressed him to read it. It was a warning—that both Litvinenko and Scaramella were on a hit list compiled by a shadowy Russian nationalist group, an organization of "retired" K.G.B. agents called Dignity and Honour. The memo asserted that Dignity and Honour had murdered Anna Politkovskaya and now planned to murder them, using a onetime Russian commando it named.

The memo was written by yet another mysterious Russian émigré, this one named Evgeni Limarev, who lives in the alpine village of Cluses, in the Haute-Savoie region of France. No one involved in the Litvinenko case seems certain of who Limarev was in Russia—some say a K.G.B. or F.S.B. agent, others the son of one—but at some point he emigrated to France, where he received a grant from Berezovsky's foundation to start an anti-Kremlin Web site. It achieved minor notoriety in Russia when a Moscow reporter went "undercover" there and came out claiming he had been told to "think up whatever you want" about Putin, "the most important thing is to make it as scary as possible." The Web site, Rusglobo, is currently off-line, and Limarev, after several days in hiding, told reporters he knows nothing about Litvinenko's death.

Litvinenko shrugged off the e-mail, saying he didn't take Limarev seriously. Afterward he made his way to Mayfair, where he had a 4:30 appointment with Lugovoi and his busi-

ness partner, another onetime K.G.B. man named Dmitri Kovtun, at the Millennium Hotel on Grosvenor Square, just across from the American Embassy. They took seats in the Pine Bar, off the lobby, a clubby room where people around them were taking tea. Kovtun was smoking a cigar and drinking gin. Litvinenko, who didn't smoke or drink alcohol, sipped green tea. They discussed the Erinys situation for about 25 minutes. As Litvinenko rose to leave, a third Russian, later identified as Vyacheslav Sokolenko, appeared and shook his hand. Then Litvinenko took the subway home to Marina, where they celebrated the sixth anniversary of their exile before he began vomiting.

## Radioactive Fallout

A day later an ambulance rushed Litvinenko to Barnet General Hospital. Doctors there hadn't a clue what was wrong with him. They checked for viruses, allergies, food poisoning, AIDS, and, on Litvinenko's insistence, evidence of chemical poisoning, but came up with nothing. He remained sick, unable to keep down food and complaining of muscle pain. Doctors noted with alarm that his white-blood-cell count had plummeted. After several days his hair began to fall out. His skin turned yellow. Doctors checked for evidence of radiation poisoning, but only of the gamma variety, a limited test. There was no sense that whatever ailed Litvinenko might be fatal.

For several days Litvinenko was convinced he had been poisoned by Scaramella. Only gradually did it dawn on him that Andrei Lugovoi made a better suspect. In Litvinenko's mind, Lugovoi was an ideal double agent, a man the Kremlin could have persuaded years before to remain close to both Litvinenko and Berezovsky. One night, sitting by his hospital bed, Ahkmed Zakayev reminded him of the lectures he had given him about letting old friends too close. "I said, 'Sasha, how could you?'" Zakayev recalls. "'How could you let him approach you?' He didn't really answer. But I knew he had been nostalgic. Every generation of émigrés goes through this. They want to talk to others like themselves. That feeling, it's a dangerous, dangerous feeling."

Litvinenko had been lying quietly at Barnet for nearly two weeks when Alex Goldfarb arrived from New York. News of Litvinenko's illness had been carried on Chechen Press, then picked up by the "free" Russian media. British reporters, however, were ignoring the story. Goldfarb believed Litvinenko had been poisoned and had no doubt who was responsible. This was not only an international scandal, Goldfarb sensed, but a massive public-relations bonanza for Berezovsky. Working with Lord Bell, Goldfarb began throwing out calls to British reporters, at *The Sunday Times*, at Channel 4, and elsewhere.

To a man, they passed on the story. Without concrete evidence of poisoning, however, the whole thing sounded like some kind of bizarre propaganda ploy.

On Thursday, November 16, Goldfarb spoke with a garrulous London toxicologist named John Henry, who had been brought into the developing story by a Russian film crew. Based on the symptoms, Henry speculated that Litvinenko had been poisoned with radioactive thallium. Goldfarb relayed the tip to doctors, and the next day, Goldfarb says, they agreed. By Friday night both Goldfarb and Henry had given interviews to the British press. The Saturday papers made it official: Litvinenko had been poisoned with thallium.

"That was my fault," Henry says, sighing. "I spent all day Saturday on-camera giving interviews. Thallium, thallium, thallium. Saturday evening I got in to see the man. I told Goldfarb he should be transferred to a private hospital. Goldfarb said there was no need. The doctors were saying he'd have muscle pain for months, but that he'd live." Later the doctors backtracked and transferred Litvinenko to University College Hospital, a facility better suited to treat him.

On Monday the story exploded onto newspaper front pages around the world, dominating coverage in Britain for days. At the white-hot center of it all was Goldfarb, who emerged from the hospital every few hours to deliver updates to a growing throng of reporters. It was Goldfarb, working with Lord Bell, who snapped the photograph of the wan, hairless Litvinenko that ran around the world. "Oh, that Goldfarb!" exclaims a man who was allowed to see Litvinenko that week. "What a wheeler-dealer! He just engineered everything, the whole scenario, releasing that photograph, all that publicity. It was unbelievable. I have just massive admiration for the guy's skills."

On Tuesday, as if his newfound celebrity had bolstered his health, Litvinenko seemed to rally. "He was talking, smiling, he seemed very upbeat," says John Henry, who saw him that day. "I said, 'Have you got any muscle weakness at all?' He said no. I tested his feet. He could stand on his toes like a ballet dancer. The things he complained of on Saturday were gone. Then I spoke to the doctors, the hematologists, who said his white-cell count was simply gone. Something was wrong. I knew it. I wasn't impressed by his chances." Henry knew what reporters didn't: radioactive poison hits the gut first, then the hair follicles, then the liver. Litvinenko's liver had all but shut down. If Henry was right, the poison would next strike the heart.

On Wednesday, Litvinenko's condition worsened. "He was deteriorating, over the course of a day," says Nekrasov, who visited. "You could see it. He was falling apart before

your eyes.” Near evening Marina, who had stayed at his side for days, rose to take Anatoly home for the evening. Litvinenko was weak. “Marina,” he rasped, “I love you so much.” Later that night Marina got the call. Litvinenko had suffered cardiac arrest and fallen into a coma.

The next afternoon officials of the British health ministry held a press conference in a Westminster auditorium. As cameras flashed, they announced that tests had determined that Litvinenko had been poisoned not by thallium but by a little-known radioactive element called polonium 210.

An hour later Alexander Litvinenko was dead. On his deathbed, Zakayev swore, his friend had converted to Islam, a contention that irks Alex Goldfarb, who feels it is bad publicity. The following week Litvinenko was buried as a Muslim in a coffin lined with lead.

### Spy vs. Spy

The Russian spy services have a long and vivid history of devising creative ways to kill the Kremlin’s political opponents. Whether it meant plunging an ice pick into Leon Trotsky’s skull (Mexico, 1940), poking the Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov with a poison-tipped umbrella (London, 1978), or using a missile to home in on a rebel warlord’s cell phone (Chechnya, 2006), the K.G.B. and its successors always seem to get their man.

In the days following Litvinenko’s death, it was widely assumed they had done so again. Tony Blair promised to bring up the matter with Putin. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel said she found the matter troubling. From Moscow, Putin issued statements denying that the Kremlin had had anything to do with the case.

Litvinenko’s was a unique death; he is the first person in history—that we know of—to die from polonium poisoning. A number of Russian businessmen have died under mysterious circumstances in recent years, some seemingly poisoned. Russian medicine being what it is, it’s entirely possible polonium has been employed before. It is a little-used isotope, the Rodney Dangerfield of radioactivity, used sparingly over the years in spark plugs, nuclear-warhead triggers, and rocket engines. Locked in a baggie, it is perfectly safe; taken orally, as seems likely in Litvinenko’s case, it kills. Polonium is available in minute amounts for as little as \$49 over the

Internet. Litvinenko, however, died from a dose perhaps 100 times larger than those publicly available. Only one nuclear laboratory in Russia produces polonium. Its officials have denied misplacing any.

The early news coverage was dominated by speculation that Litvinenko had been poisoned by Mario Scaramella. However, that theory quickly fell away as information emerged about Lugovoi and Kovtun. Both had retreated to Moscow, and in those first days both, clearly caught unawares by the mushrooming scandal, gave interviews about Litvinenko. They even appeared at the British Embassy in Moscow to give sworn statements. Lugovoi was eventually forced to hold a televised press conference, where he said he had gone to London merely to attend a soccer match between Arsenal and CSKA Moscow. Lugovoi, who had brought his family on the



### OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Litvinenko in London, 2002. “The tragedy is that, throughout his life, people wouldn’t listen to him,” says Andrei Nekrasov. “Now they’re listening.”

trip, insisted he was being framed. “Someone is trying to set me up,” he complained, “but I can’t understand who. Or why.”

Lugovoi’s denials, however, grew increasingly hollow once Scotland Yard detectives and national-health inspectors hauled out Geiger counters. Traces of polonium were quickly found at the Pine Bar, where Litvinenko and the Russians had met; at Itsu, where he saw Scaramella; at the Litvinenko town house; at the offices of both security companies Litvinenko had approached, Eriny’s and Titon International; and at Berezovsky’s headquarters, tucked down a Mayfair alley. Worse, at least for Lugovoi and Kovtun, polonium traces were found in place after place where the two had been but Litvinenko hadn’t—in an eighth-floor

room at a Sheraton hotel where the two had stayed in mid-October; in a car and a home outside Hamburg, where Kovtun had visited his ex-wife before coming to London; even on the two British Airways Boeing 767s on which they had traveled to and from Britain. By Christmas, polonium had been found at 30 sites.

Two weeks after Litvinenko’s death, a reporter for the German magazine *Der Spiegel* was allowed to visit Lugovoi and Kovtun at a dacha outside Moscow. The interview was held, bizarrely, in an adjacent sauna; the reporter spied blue tape on the dacha’s door handles, suggesting the building had been cordoned off. Lugovoi appeared healthy, though he said doctors had found traces of polonium in his system. He insisted someone else must have poisoned Litvinenko, who had then exposed *him* to the polonium already in his body.

Dmitri Kovtun, however, was another story.

As he sat beside Lugovoi in the sauna, it was clear that Kovtun had lost his hair. In what surely seems one of the lamest explanations in espionage history, he said he had burned his head in a tanning bed. Asked about the November 1 meeting, Kovtun said, “I can’t remember that clearly today. He came into the bar 10 minutes after us, we’d already had some alcohol, and I paid more attention to my cigar.” Kovtun said they had spoken about Eriny’s and the soccer game, then agreed to meet again the next morning, a meeting Litvinenko ended up

canceling when he got sick. Five days after the interview Kovtun was admitted to a Moscow hospital.

Scotland Yard has kept its investigation under tight wraps. A promised “background briefing” produces a very pleasant woman who offers little more than a smile and a fistful of press releases. What is known is that in mid-December a group of nine British detectives visited Moscow, where they submitted lists of written questions to Russian detectives and listened as their counterparts used them to interview Lugovoi and Kovtun. According to one version, Kovtun’s head was swathed in bandages. What was said remains confidential.

One possibility Scotland Yard is thought to be investigating is that Litvinenko was actually poisoned *twice*. Most accounts assume he was poisoned, perhaps by grains of polonium slipped into his tea, during his 4:30 meeting at the Millennium Hotel, where seven workers later tested possible for polonium. This theory gained credence in February when British in-

# Litvinenko Poisoning

investigators discovered off-the-charts levels of polonium in the teapot Litvinenko had used. But it fails to explain how traces made their way to Itsu, the sushi place where Litvinenko had lunched a full hour *before* meeting Lugovoi and Kovtun. It's possible Litvinenko had met the two Russians earlier that same day. It's also possible he had been poisoned during the visit they made to London two weeks earlier, on October 16. Maybe the first attempt didn't take. Maybe his murderer returned to finish the job.

Whatever the case, the press has all but convicted Lugovoi, and by association Kovtun, despite their denials. Perhaps surprisingly, a number of those in Berezovsky's circle aren't so sure Lugovoi was consciously involved. "I still believe that Andrei—and I've met him 10 times in my life—I still believe he did not know what they were doing," says one. "He may have made the introduction, but I doubt Lugovoi killed him. A killer is a specific thing in the K.G.B. Andrei Lugovoi is not a killer. He is a bodyguard. I would guess that Lugovoi was part of an operation, maybe without even knowing it, but maybe he thought it was an arrangement to entrap Sasha, to surveil Sasha. Who knows? I'm sure Lugovoi was a part of it. I do not think he was the hit man."

Who would have wanted Litvinenko dead? Just about everyone in London believes it was the Russian government, or perhaps onetime K.G.B. agents emboldened by the Kremlin's new aggressive ways. One of the few people mentioned by name has been the head of Dignity and Honour, Valentin Velichko. Velichko has denied any involvement and has kept a low profile, although, in a single interview he gave the German newspaper *Die Welt*, he re-

fers to the Litvinenko murder as a "dispute among criminals." "Professionals," Velichko sniffed, "don't use polonium."

Another theory involves both of Litvinenko's known business associates, Lugovoi and Yuri Shvets. In mid-December, Shvets came forward and gave an interview to Tom Mangold of BBC Radio in which he said he believed Litvinenko's death was linked to the due-diligence work they had done on the five Russian "businessmen." According to Shvets, he had compiled an eight-page dossier on one of the men, a senior Kremlin official; the dossier portrayed the man as a criminal mastermind involved in murder and official corruption. Shvets says he delivered the dossier to Litvinenko on September 20, on the understanding that Litvinenko would hand it to their client. At some point, Shvets says, Litvinenko showed the dossier to Lugovoi, apparently to demonstrate how a professional due-diligence report should appear. Shvets's theory is that Lugovoi alerted the subject of the report, and that this man ordered Litvinenko's death.

Yet another theory was advanced by Julia Svetlichnaja, the graduate student who spent hours interviewing Litvinenko before his poisoning. In a column she wrote for London's *Observer* in December 2006, Svetlichnaja said Litvinenko had spoken of compiling a dossier he might use to blackmail unnamed exiled oligarchs. Svetlichnaja, who didn't return e-mails seeking comment for this article, repeated the accusation in January on *60 Minutes*, referring to a single oligarch. In that interview, she would not identify the man in question but said he had a "connection with the Kremlin, a connection with Putin."

Some in London, however, believe big anti-Kremlin oligarchs like Berezovsky have reaped gains from the publicity surrounding Litvinenko's death. "This would have been a

non-event if not for Berezovsky," says a senior private-security consultant in London, a man who knows Berezovsky well. "It would have been a curiosity that would have been talked about by people like me. But Berezovsky, aided by his mouthpiece Lord Bell, turned it into a media sensation. They did a terrific job. Frankly, I'm embarrassed by the British press, because their coverage of it, of what Berezovsky was feeding them, was so incredibly uncritical. It was one of those stories that was too good to check. I mean, if you look at who gained most, it was Boris Berezovsky." Berezovsky dismisses such talk as Kremlin propaganda.

In the absence of hard, new information, however, propaganda clogs the vacuum. Today, four months after Litvinenko's death, Scotland Yard's investigation seems likely to lead to charges against Lugovoi. If so, there is little likelihood the Kremlin would allow Lugovoi and Kovtun to be extradited, unless the British agree to hand over Berezovsky in return, which is unlikely. Mario Scaramella, meanwhile, has been arrested in Italy, charged with a byzantine plot involving an illegal arms shipment designed to somehow establish his bona fides.

Marina and Anatoly have moved into an apartment in a different section of London. For the moment, Berezovsky is supporting them. Marina has no idea what she will do next. Back in Muswell Hill, their old town house is locked and roped off, a neon-blue tarpaulin across the door. Across the street, Ahkmed Zakayev has yet to explain Litvinenko's death to his grandchildren. "They are still waiting for him to come over," he says. "Every time the doorbell rings, they run to it, [yelling], 'Sasha! Sasha! Sasha!' My grandson is two and a half years old. I don't know how to explain to him that he is never coming back." □

# All the Presidents' Men



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 218 were also in the room during that fateful meeting, and both men firmly argued against a sudden air strike. Bobby called it "Pearl Harbor in reverse." He insisted that a sneak attack was not in our tradition, and that we should not

lose sight of "our heritage and our ideals."

Their most vocal opponent was the stiff-collared and mustachioed Acheson, who didn't even have an official role in the Kennedy White House but whose wisdom and years of service to Truman made him a trusted adviser on issues of foreign affairs—a *presidency* man, perhaps, loyal as much to the office as to its occupant. Acheson derided Bobby's comments as overly emotional pleas lacking "the trained lawyer's analysis." But if J.F.K. had listened to Acheson, it would still have fallen to McNamara to give the order that in his eyes would have been potentially cataclysmic—that or resign, the way Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan did, rather than join in Woodrow Wilson's decision to send American forces to fight in World War I.

Similarly, Nixon's attorney general El-

liot Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, quit rather than go through with Nixon's order to fire Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. And Jimmy Carter's secretary of state Cyrus Vance did the same over the ill-fated 1980 attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran. Yet, more commonly, there comes a point when the presumed truth teller simply swallows his pride and becomes a loyal staffer. One can only wonder how many of these exist in the present-day White House.

If there was not as much squabbling among the nation's first Cabinet secretaries, it would only be because there were not as many of them. Thomas Jefferson's Cabinet was composed of just six officers—an attorney general, a postmaster general, and secretaries of state, war, navy, and Treasury. But