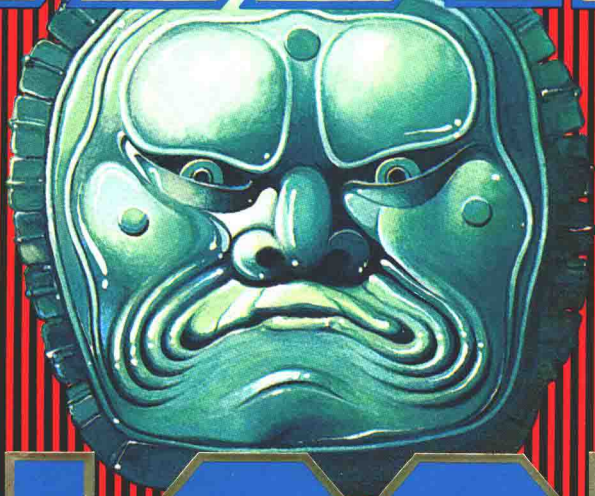


A DIRK PITT® NOVEL

CLIVE CUSSLER



FLOOD TIDE

BY THE AUTHOR OF SHOCK WAVE

CLIVE
CUSSLER

FLOOD TIDE

A NOVEL

SIMON & SCHUSTER



SIMON & SCHUSTER
Rockefeller Center
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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The author wishes to express his gratitude to the men and women of the Immigration and Naturalization Service for generously providing data and statistics on illegal immigration.

Thanks also to the Army Corps of Engineers for their help in describing the capricious natures of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers.

And to the dozens of people who kindly offered ideas and suggestions on obstacles for Dirk and Al to overcome.



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REQUIEM
FOR
A PRINCESS

Princess Dou Wan



December 10, 1948
Unknown Waters

THE WAVES TURNED VICIOUS and worsened with every rush of wind. The calm weather of the morning transformed from Dr. Jekyll into a vehement Mr. Hyde by late evening. Whitecaps on the crests of towering waves were lashed into sheets of spray. The violent water and black clouds merged under the onslaught of a driving snowstorm. It was impossible to tell where water ended and sky began. As the passenger liner *Princess Dou Wan* fought through waves that rose like mountains before spilling over the ship, the men on board were unaware of the imminent disaster that was only minutes away.

The crazed waters were driven by northeast and northwest gales that simultaneously caused ferocious currents to smash against the ship from two sides. Winds soon reached a hundred miles an hour with waves that crested at thirty feet or more. Caught in the maelstrom, the *Princess Dou Wan* had no place to hide. Her bow pitched and drove under waves that swept over her open decks and flowed aft and then forward when her stern rose, throwing her wildly spinning propellers free of the water. Struck from all directions, she rolled thirty degrees, her starboard rail along the promenade deck disappearing in a torrent of water. Slowly, too slowly, she sluggishly righted herself and plunged on, steaming through the worst storm in recent history.

Freezing and unable to see through the blinding snowstorm, Second Mate Li Po, who stood watch, ducked back inside the wheelhouse and slammed the door. In all his days of sailing the China Sea, he had never

seen swirling snow in the middle of a violent storm. Po did not think the gods were fair to hurl such devastating winds at the *Princess* after a voyage halfway around the world with less than two hundred miles to go before reaching port. In the past sixteen hours, she had only made forty miles.

Except for Captain Leigh Hunt and his chief engineer down below in the engine room, the entire crew were Nationalist Chinese. An old salt with twelve years in the Royal Navy and eighteen as an officer for three different shipping-company fleets, Hunt had served fifteen of those years as captain. As a boy he went fishing with his father out of Bridlington, a small city on the east coast of England, before shipping out as an ordinary seaman on a freighter to South Africa. A thin man with graying hair and sad, vacant eyes, he was deeply pessimistic about his ship's ability to weather the storm.

Two days earlier, one of the crewmen had called his attention to a crack in the starboard outer hull aft of the single smokestack. He would have given a month's pay to inspect the crack now that his ship was enduring incredible stress. He reluctantly brushed the thought aside. It would have been suicide to attempt an inspection under hundred-mile-an-hour winds and the raging water that spilled across the decks. He felt in his bones the *Princess* was in mortal danger, and accepted the fact that her fate was out of his hands.

Hunt stared into the blanket of snow that pelted the wheelhouse windows and spoke to his second mate without turning. "How bad is the ice, Mr. Po?"

"Building rapidly, Captain."

"Do you believe we're in danger of capsizing?"

Li Po shook his head slowly. "Not yet, sir, but by morning the load on the superstructure and decks could prove critical if we take on a heavy list."

Hunt thought for a moment, then spoke to the helmsman. "Stay on course, Mr. Tsung. Keep our bow into the wind and waves."

"Aye, sir," the Chinese helmsman replied, feet braced wide apart, hands tightly gripping the brass wheel.

Hunt's thoughts returned to the crack in the hull. He couldn't remember when the *Princess Dou Wan* had a proper marine inspection in dry dock. Strangely, the crew's uneasiness about leaks, badly rusted hull plates, and weakened and missing rivets was totally lacking. They appeared to ignore the corrosion and the constantly running bilge pumps that strained to carry off the heavy leakage during the voyage.