

DEEP WATER

CHAPTER ONE

The boat lurched to starboard like a bee-stung pony. Jake Weaver lost his footing. Salt spray whipped his face, stung his eyes.

“What—” he started.

“Communist patrol boat,” said the skipper, spinning the wheel, shouting to be heard over the roar of the motors. “Gotta try an’ evade. They’re not supposed to fire on us but those bastards sometimes do . . . Yeoman, man your gun!”

“Aye aye, sir.” A sailor bolted over to the .50-caliber. Jake was impressed that he got to the gun mount so nimbly — this old PT boat was bucking like a rodeo bull.

Jake hung onto a cable spar for dear life, half standing, half crouching. He seldom got seasick but his gut churned with queasiness. Felt like an Osterizer was chewing up gobs of green gunk in his gut. Be damned embarrassing if he threw up in front of these men.

On this cold, eerie night on the Formosa Strait, he was bound for Taiwan. He hoped like hell he’d get there. He’d been in China on assignment from the International News Service, reporting on the civil war. Now planes and Navy craft were hauling Americans out of there — government people, missionaries, journalists — because the Reds, damn it, were winning.

In the distance he saw a searchlight pierce the inky blackness, a shaft of blue-white light beginning to slither over the waves. Had to be the commie boat, maybe a mile away. He wished it was twenty miles. Or a hundred.

Just another crazy night in my crazy life, Jake told himself. It brought back to memory the night he’d flown into Nazi Germany in a British bomber, a bomber that had been fired on by a German night fighter. He’d almost shit in his pants.

The patrol boat seemed to draw closer but maybe that was his imagination — hard to judge distances on this heaving sea. The U.S. being neutral, the Reds had no right to fire on them but it could be a case of shoot first and ask questions later, assuming this was one of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist boats.

Now the searchlight swung back and forth over the tossing ocean: Hunting, hunting, hunting. Fear gnawed at Jake as much as the harsh wind.