



## Odessa Sea (Dirk Pitt Adventure)

By Clive Cussler

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**“Oceanography’s answer to Indiana Jones”\*, Dirk Pitt responds to a mysterious Mayday signal from a deserted ship that draws him toward a deadly Cold War secret in this novel in the #1 *New York Times*-bestselling series.**

Dirk Pitt, the director of the National Underwater and Marine Agency, is on the Black Sea, helping to locate a lost Ottoman shipwreck, when he responds to an urgent Mayday—“Under attack!”—from a nearby freighter. But when he and his colleague Al Giordino arrive, there is nobody there. Just dead bodies and a smell of sulfur in the air. As Pitt and Giordino explore, a blast from the stern scuttles the ship swiftly, almost taking them with it.

The more the two of them search for the secret of the death ship, the deeper they descend into an extraordinary series of discoveries. A desperate attempt in 1917 to preserve the wealth and power of the Romanov Empire. A Cold War bomber lost with a deadly cargo. A brilliant developer of advanced drone technology on an unknown mission. Modern-day nuclear smugglers, determined Ukrainian rebels, a beautiful anti-terrorism agent from Europol—all will combine to present Pitt with the most dangerous challenge of his career.

And not only Pitt. His two children, marine engineer Dirk and oceanographer Summer, are exploring a mysterious shipwreck of their own, when they are catapulted into his orbit. The three of them are used to perilous situations—but this time, they may have found their match.

Filled with breathtaking suspense and remarkable imagination, *Odessa Sea* is further proof that when it comes to adventure writing, nobody beats Clive Cussler.

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## Editorial Review

Review

### PRAISE FOR *ODESSA SEA*

“The pages whip by as the characters, at least the good guys, survive one deadly encounter after another, and the bad guys get their comeuppances. Readers will anxiously await Dirk’s next adventure.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Sketch out some exotic, ephemeral settings, make every villain as nasty as possible, and it's another of Cussler's cinematic-style entertainments spinning out at hold-on-to-your-hat speed.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

### PRAISE FOR THE DIRK PITT ADVENTURES

“Exotic locations, ruthless villains, and many narrow escapes and derring-do. Cussler’s fans come for swashbuckling [and] he delivers.”—\*Associated Press

“Another super Cussler fun read. Pitt and company are the stuff of heroic dreams.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Teems with violence, derring-do, and perilous situations. The action runs non-stop and wham-bam, with the authors finding clever ways to spare their good guys from bad ends.”—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

### About the Author

**Clive Cussler** is the author or coauthor of over fifty previous books in five bestselling series, including Dirk Pitt®, NUMA® Files, *Oregon*® Files, Isaac Bell, and Sam and Remi Fargo. His nonfiction works include *Built for Adventure: The Classic Automobiles of Clive Cussler and Dirk Pitt*, and *Built to Thrill: More Classic Automobiles from Clive Cussler and Dirk Pitt*, plus *The Sea Hunters* and *The Sea Hunters II*; these describe the true adventures of the real NUMA, which, led by Cussler, searches for lost ships of historic significance. With his crew of volunteers, Cussler has discovered more than sixty ships, including the long-lost Confederate ship *Hunley*. He lives in Colorado and Arizona.

**Dirk Cussler** is the coauthor with Clive Cussler of six previous Dirk Pitt® adventures: *Black Wind*, *Treasure of Khan*, *Arctic Drift*, *Crescent Dawn*, *Poseidon’s Arrow*, and *Havana Storm*. For the past several years, he has been an active participant and partner in his father’s NUMA expeditions and has served as president of the NUMA® advisory board of trustees. Cussler lives in Arizona.

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1

July 2017

### The Black Sea

A dull glow blanketed the southern horizon in a cottony glaze. Although Istanbul was more than fifty miles

away, the electric blaze from its fourteen million inhabitants lit the night sky like a sea of lanterns. Churning slowly toward the light, a weathered black freighter rolled in a choppy sea. The ship rode low, catching the sporadic rogue wave that sent a spray of seawater surging across its deck.

On the wide bridge, the helmsman nudged the wheel to port, fighting a stiff breeze.

“Speed?”

The question came from a bearded man hunched over a chart table. His gray eyes were glassy and bloodshot, and his voice offered a trace of a slur. His sweat-stained clothes hinted at priorities other than hygiene. As the crew expected, in the two days since the ship had left port the freighter’s captain had ventured well into his third bottle of vodka.

“Eight knots, sir,” the helmsman said.

The captain grunted, estimating the time it would take them to clear the Bosphorus Strait.

A bridge wing door opened and an armed man in brown fatigues entered. He approached the glassy-eyed captain with a mix of concern and disdain. “The sea is getting rough. There is water washing over the decks.”

The captain looked at the man and snickered. “You sure it is not just your vomit that is soiling my decks?”

Green at the gills, the armed man found no humor in the comment. “I am responsible for the cargo. Perhaps we should get closer to shore.”

The captain shook his head. He’d had an uneasy feeling when the ship’s owner phoned him minutes before they were to depart Sevastopol, instructing him to wait for a last-minute delivery. The small gang of armed men that arrived in a battered panel van only contributed to his suspicions as he watched them unload a large metal crate. He’d protested when they’d insisted on placing it in the engine room but muffled his complaints when he was handed a bag of uncirculated rubles. Now he glared at one of the two armed men who had accompanied the secret cargo.

“Get off my bridge, you stupid fool. These seas are for children. The *Crimean Star* can slice through waves five times larger and still deliver your precious cargo intact.”

The armed man steadied himself against a roll and leaned into the captain. “The shipment will go through as scheduled—or I will see that you will be scraping barnacles off an icebreaker in Murmansk.” The man moved off to the side bridge wing. He stood in defiance, the fresh breeze helping quell his seasickness.

The captain ignored him, studying his charts and tracking the ship’s progress.

The freighter rolled along quietly for another twenty minutes before the helmsman called out. “Sir, there’s a vessel approaching off our flank that appears to be mirroring our track.”

The captain raised himself from the table and stepped to the helm. He glanced at the radarscope, which showed the green blip of a vessel approaching from the stern. A faint smaller blip appeared briefly about a mile ahead of the ship. “Come right, steer a course two-three-zero.”

“Right rudder, to two-three-zero degrees.” The helmsman rotated the ship’s wheel.

The freighter eased onto the new heading. A few minutes later, the shadowing vessel was seen to follow.

The captain scowled. “Probably an inexperienced commander looking for a guide to lead them through the strait. Hold your course.”

A moment later, a deep thump sounded across the waves, followed by a slight vibration that shook the decks.

“What was that?” the gunman asked.

The captain stared out the bridge window, trying to focus on the source of the noise.

“Sir, it’s an explosion in the water.” The helmsman pointed off the bow. “Directly ahead of us.”

The captain found his focus and spotted the falling remnants of a large water spire a hundred meters ahead of the ship.

“Engine ahead one-third.” He reached for a pair of bin-oculars.

There was little to focus on, aside from a frothy boil of water in their path. He glanced out the rear bridge window and noticed the lights of the accompanying vessel had drawn closer.

An acrid odor enveloped the bridge, subtle, initially, then overpowering. The armed man near the doorway felt the effects first, choking and coughing, then dropping his weapon and falling to his knees. The helmsman followed, gagging and crumpling to the deck.

His senses numbed by alcohol, the captain was slower to feel the invisible assault. As his two companions on the bridge turned silent and stiff, his mind grasped to understand what was happening. Somewhere nearby he heard a gunshot, then he felt his throat constrict. His pulse raced as he struggled to breathe. Staggering to the helm, he grabbed the radio transmitter and rasped into it, “Mayday! Mayday! This is the *Crimean Star*. We are under attack. Please help us.”

Confusion and fear were consumed by an overpowering pain. He swayed for a second as the transmitter slipped from his hand and then he collapsed to the deck, dead.

2

Sir, there’s no response on the emergency channel.” The youthful third officer looked up from the communications station and gazed at a lean man studying the ship’s radarscope.

Dirk Pitt nodded in acknowledgment while keeping his eyes glued to the radar screen. “All right, Chavez. Let them know we’re on our way. Then you best go rouse the captain.”

Pitt straightened his tall frame and turned toward the helmsman. “We’re well clear of the Bosphorus, so you can open her up. The *Crimean Star* looks to be about thirteen miles ahead of us. Steer a course of zero-five-five degrees and give me everything she’s got.”

As the helmsman acknowledged the order, Pitt called the engine room and had the chief engineer apply all available power to the vessel's twin screws. A low whine reverberated through the fifty-meter oceanographic research ship as its twin diesels wound to maximum revolutions. A few minutes later, the ship's captain, a large, sandy-haired man named Bill Stenseth, stepped onto the bridge. He was followed by Third Officer Chavez, who resumed his place at the communications station.

Stenseth suppressed a yawn. "We've got a Mayday?"

"A single distress call from a vessel named *Crimean Star*," Pitt said. "Listed as a Romanian-flagged bulk freighter. She appears to be on a direct inbound course about a dozen miles ahead of us."

Stenseth gazed at the radar screen, then noted his own ship's accelerating speed. "Do we know the nature of their emergency?"

"All we picked up was a single distress call. Chavez hailed them repeatedly, but there was no response." Pitt tapped a finger on the radar screen. "We look to be the closest ship in the area."

"The Turkish Coast Guard Command might have some fast-responding resources nearby." He turned to the third officer. "Let's give them a call, Chavez."

Pitt grabbed a handheld radio from a charging stand and stepped toward a bridge wing door. "Chavez, when you're done there, can you ring Al Giordino and have him meet me on the aft deck in ten minutes? I'll prep a Zodiac in case we're needed aboard. Call me when we're clear to launch."

"Will do," Chavez said.

As Pitt started to leave, Stenseth squinted at a bulkhead-mounted chronometer. It read two in the morning. "By the way, what were you doing on the bridge at this hour?"

"A loose davit was banging against my cabin bulkhead and woke me up. After securing it, I wandered up to see where we were."

"Sixth sense, I'd say."

Pitt smiled as he left the bridge. Over the years, he did seem to have a knack for finding trouble around him. Or perhaps it found him.

The Director of the National Underwater and Marine Agency climbed down two levels, then moved aft along the main deck of the oceanographic research ship. A roar from the engine room revealed that the *Macedonia* was pressing her rated top speed of seventeen knots, kicking up white foam along her turquoise sides. She was one of several dozen research vessels in the NUMA fleet tasked with studying the world's oceans.

On the *Macedonia*'s fantail, Pitt released the lines of a Zodiac, secured to a cradle, and pulled back its oilskin cover. He checked the fuel tank, then attached a lift cable. Satisfied as to its readiness, he stepped to the ship's rail and peered ahead for the distant lights of the *Crimean Star*.

He shouldn't even be here, Pitt thought. He had joined the *Macedonia* in Istanbul just the day before, after traveling from his headquarters office in Washington, D.C. A last-minute plea for assistance from the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture to help locate a lost Ottoman shipwreck had lured him halfway across the



globe.

Twenty minutes later, the NUMA research ship pulled alongside the black freighter, which drifted silently like an illuminated ghost ship. On the *Macedonia*'s bridge, Captain Stenseth scanned the merchant ship through night vision binoculars.

"Still no response from the vessel," Chavez said. "Turkish authorities report a cutter is en route, and a rescue helicopter is being scrambled from Istanbul, with an estimated arrival time of twenty-six minutes."

Stenseth nodded as he held the binoculars firm to his brow. There was no sign of life aboard the ship. He glanced at the radarscope. A small image a half mile distant was moving away from the freighter. Retraining the binoculars, he detected the faint outline of a vessel with no running lights. He picked up a handheld radio. "Bridge to Pitt."

"Pitt here."

"The freighter is still silent and adrift. I see no signs of a list or physical damage. Turkish Coast Guard resources are on the way, if you want to sit tight."

"Negative. There could be lives at risk. Al and I will attempt to board. Pitt out."

Pitt turned to a short, sleepy-eyed man standing next to the Zodiac. He had a broad, muscular frame that looked like it had been carved out of a block of granite.

"Let's get over the side," Pitt said.

Al Giordino yawned. "This better be a real distress. I was cozy in my bunk, dreaming I was in a Turkish harem and the veils were about to come off."

Pitt smiled. "The girls in the harem will thank me."

They lowered the Zodiac over the side, climbed down, and released its lift cable. Pitt started the outboard and spun the throttle, shooting the inflatable boat across the choppy water to the freighter's side. Running down the ship's length, he spotted a lowered accommodations ladder near the stern and ran toward it.

"Nice of them to leave the welcome mat out." Giordino hopped onto the base of the ladder and tied off the Zodiac. He sniffed the air and frowned. "Smells like the Easter Bunny left us a basket of rotten eggs."

"Something in her cargo, perhaps," Pitt said. But the smell didn't seem to originate from the ship.

The two ran up the steps and boarded the ship, finding the foul odor gradually diminished. Under the stark illumination of the deck lights, the passageways appeared empty as they moved forward toward the accommodations block. The deck hatches were secured and the ship appeared undamaged, just as Stenseth had reported.

Approaching a companionway to the bridge, they hesitated. A body blocked the doorway, that of a young man in dark fatigues whose hair was sheared in a short buzz cut. In its frozen state of death, his face expressed a mixture of confusion and agony, his open blue eyes searching for reason. His stiff hands cradled an AK-47.

“He was fighting off somebody.” Pitt toed the deck near a handful of spent shell casings.

Giordino played a flashlight on the body. “No visible cause of death.”

They stepped over the body and into the companionway, which they climbed to the bridge on the fifth level. There they found another macabre scene. An armed man in fatigues sprawled beside a crewman near the helm. An older, bearded man, likely the captain, had collapsed near a chart table. Giordino checked for signs of life, but bulging eyes, blue skin, and contorted mouths signified a quick but painful end.

“No external wounds, just like the guy downstairs,” Giordino said.

Pitt noticed a smell of sulfur and opened a bridge window. “Possible gas leak. Why don’t you check the crew’s quarters for survivors? I’ll let the *Macedonia* know what we’ve found, then see about getting this floating coffin under way.”

Giordino moved down to the companionway to the living quarters beneath the bridge. Pitt relayed a report to Stenseth, then engaged the freighter’s engines and turned on a course toward Istanbul, accompanied by the *Macedonia*.

The freighter slowly gathered speed, plowing through an endless line of high swells as it angled south. Pitt was checking for approaching traffic when a small explosion reverberated from the stern. He turned to see a fountain of white water erupt outboard of the port flank. The freighter shuddered as red lights flashed on the helm console.

“What was that?” Giordino’s voice crackled over the handheld radio.

“Explosion on the stern.”

“Somebody trying to scuttle her?”

“Could be.”

Pitt studied a navigation monitor. The nearest land was eight miles. He altered course, hopeful he might run the ship aground if necessary. Additional red lights on the console told him they wouldn’t make it. Some papers slid off a corner workstation, confirming the growing list he felt beneath his feet.

“The ship is flooding,” he radioed to Giordino. “How are you making out?”

“Two crewmen dead in their bunks. I think there’s another suite of cabins to check in the deck below.”

Pitt detected something out of the corner of his eye. To his side, a closed-circuit video monitor displayed live feeds from the bow, stern, and engine room. He had seen some sort of movement in the engine room. Looking closer, he could just distinguish a prone figure at the rear of the image.

“Al, finish up and meet me on deck in five minutes. I’m going to check the engine room.”

The helm console was ablaze with flashing lights as the flooding crept through the freighter’s lower recesses. The bow had already begun rising toward the sky as the stern sank lower. Pitt glanced at the distant lights onshore, then ran from the bridge. He reached the main deck and descended a companionway to the engine

room.

Pitt found the floor of the engine bay awash, but the power plants continued to churn with a deafening roar. Through flickering lights, he spotted a figure stretched out on a gray case behind a generator. Pitt waded over to find a young crewman in oil-stained coveralls, his feet dangling in the rising water. His face had a bluish tint as he stared at Pitt through listless eyes, then blinked.

“Hang on,” Pitt said. “I’ll get you out of here.”

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