



The Chess Players, a Novel of the Cold War at Sea

Francis J. Partel

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The Chess Players is both a naval story and a love story and opens with an audacious, espionage mission, a Soviet submarine penetration of Stavanger, Norway, and closes with a thrilling, bizarre episode between a missile-equipped, Russian nuclear submarine and a US Navy destroyer escort in the Mediterranean Sea. Commander Pebbles, Operations Officer of anti-submarine carrier, Essex, on a career track for admiral, mentors the well-educated and competent, but inexperienced young Ensign Cannon. Based in part on untold, historical events typical of the Cold War at sea, their task group encounters several provocative incidents at the hands of the Russian Bear above the Arctic Circle and in the Mediterranean Sea prior to and after the 1967 Six Day Arab-Israeli War. The love story begins when beautiful Laetitia Martin, a Ph. D. candidate in art history, meets Ensign Cannon, both members of a wedding on Martha's Vineyard, shortly before Essex deploys for NATO exercises in the Eastern Atlantic. She is a consummate "belonger" with a growth motive and catches a whiff of the women's movement and begins to find her upper-class life stifling. Cannon doesn't flinch at women's liberation, but he has other anxiety-producing issues related to women. Her research into the turbulent life of the painter, Caravaggio, the novel's fourth character, if you will, will also take her to Europe in the summer of 1967 and provides the opportunity for their romance to bud and bloom in London and in Malta as she succeeds in explaining Caravaggio's self-destructive behavior in modern psychological terms.

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