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Sommario/riassunto	"The orders from the Admiralty to the Captain were explicit. He was to take his ship to the small island of Santu, which lay under threat of invasion from the Communist mainland of China, and evacuate the British colony there. The ship, however, was the flat-bottomed, antiquated River gunboat H. M. S. Wagtail, waiting in a Hong Kong harbor for the disgrace of the breaker's hammer to overtake her. Her captain, Justin Rolfe, embittered by the verdict of a court-martial, knew that the assignment offered more than escape from misery and humiliation--it was a reprieve for himself and his ship"--