



WILHELM LANDIG

volume 1

IDOLS
AGAINST

THULLE

BERSERKER

BOOKS



In this book, authentic events both on and behind the scenes of the world stage, secret armaments technology and other contemporary events have been thawed into what at first glance appears to be a fantastic novel. It only seems so: some of the names of the protagonists have been changed if they are connected with certain events, and the main characters in the plot are also fictitious. The military events correspond to an actual course of events, as do the conditions and sayings in a British internment camp.

Anyone who reads carefully will recognise how life itself weaves the colourful curtain behind these changing images with their expansive scenery, the clash of symbols and the overlapping fronts in a battle on the most diverse levels of life.

The author

WILHELM LANDIG
IDOLS AGAINST
THULE

A novel full of realities

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FIRST BOOK

SECRET ORDER

The sky over Drontheim was grey and overcast. The Nidelven flowed lazily through its curved bed and Elvehavn, between Bratoren and Lademoen into the rippling fjord. The old town, the cradle of the Norwegian empire, showed little life and the trees in the park behind the Fruekirke and in the Kongsgaarden still pointed with bare branches against the dull cloud cover. Nevertheless, this post-winter Drontheim was beautiful. The town had an air of historical tradition about it and the old buildings bore witness to the expertise of old Nordic architecture. The shipyards and factories elsewhere testified to the industriousness and vitality of a settlement that repeatedly burned to the ground and yet always rose again undaunted. The harbour, otherwise a lively transshipment point for international merchant shipping and a popular landing place for travellers to Norway, was now deprived of its purpose in the fifth year of the Second World War. In Elvehavn and Ydrehavn, apart from a few Norwegian fishing vessels, there were now only a number of smaller units of the German navy. The muzzles of the guns pointed out into the open bay and the slender barrels of the quadruple anti-aircraft guns loomed ready to defend against the western half of the sky. The long steel fingers of the heavy anti-aircraft guns also loomed like a silent threat from the elevation of the Baklandet district, at the foot of which lay the old Norwegian artillery barracks

high. The locals had already become accustomed to military life in the town. They no longer showed any particular curiosity when German vehicles entered or left the harbour. But it was easy to see that they showed no particular love for the occupying power of their country, but they were quite polite and made no trouble at all, even showing that they were impressed by the correctness and discipline of the Germans.

For this reason, some of the locals immediately stepped aside politely when two German airmen in captain's rank came out of the theatre café on the corner of Prinsensgade and Erling Skakkesgade. The Germans gratefully put their hands on their caps and headed in the direction of the By Bridge.

"Actually, we still have some time, Günther," said one of them, glancing quickly at his wristwatch. "Captain Gutmann won't be here with the car for another hour!"

The man addressed, Captain Recke from Kassel, waved his hand slightly. "It's better if we get to the agreed meeting point earlier. Gutmann is able to drive to the airfield without us."

"You're right," the second officer, Captain Reimer, replied. "Gutmann is capable of anything. He's a good mate, but sometimes very strange."

They crossed the intersection of Munkegaden and, coming up from the cathedral church, saw a three

The army patrol, which saluted us firmly. This time the two officers also raised their hands in the German salute, as had been required by the regulations for about a year.

"Yes, we still have the stage firmly in our hands. But the news from the front, especially in the east, is not exactly encouraging," Recke said thoughtfully.

"Now it's probably no longer so much about bare boots, it's already damn hard on hard!"

Reimer, who came from Linz, nodded. "The sparrows are already whistling that from the rooftops, but it must make sense that we're still here in the north. Comparatively speaking, it's like it's five minutes to twelve now.

Will the High Command of the Wehrmacht wait until two or one to twelve to turn the situation around? ..."

"The way I see it, we're not supposed to get back to work until after twelve." Recke muffled his voice even more. "The official references to the Alpine fortress that is rapidly being built and the planned secret bases on Greenland suggest that certain things are not yet ready for deployment. That's the only way to explain the purpose of our being here."

"I wish you were right," Reimer interjected.

"Namely the fact that we still have a chance at all."

"You're that much of a pessimist already?"

"Yes and no. I still believe we can turn the whole world that is against us upside down. But for that we need enough ammunition and fuel and, above all, a political event. You can't win any more victories with bans and ammunition restrictions. And in this respect, it looks very windy."

"Why are you telling me something that the whole squadron already knows?"

"Because you're about to confuse my pessimism with defeatism." Reimer pursed his lips.

Recke grabbed his comrade's arm in sympathy.

"I know exactly what you mean, Reimer! Who could close their mind to facts? Still - I hope for a miracle ..."

"It seems like all we have left is hope. We don't have much else left to do anything with. It's just a flickering flame, but I still carry this little light in my heart."

Both were silent. They crossed the By Bridge and turned left towards the Rosenborg Basin. Walking between rows of houses again, they could still hear the screeching of the seagulls as they skimmed over the water of Elvehavn. Every now and then, a few white birds fluttered over the roofs of the neighbourhood.

They stopped in front of the Bakke church. "If Gutmann is on time, we won't have to wait much longer," said Reimer, taking up the interrupted

conversation again.

Recke nodded. "Gutmann is a stickler. If he's not delayed through no fault of his own, he'll come sooner rather than later." He fiddled with his fur collar to clear his neck. The cold had already eased considerably with the softening of winter.

They had only walked up and down twice in front of the church square when a German Wehrmacht bucket lorry turned out of Bakkegaden into Kirkegaden at high speed and stopped in front of them, braking abruptly.

"Ah, Gutmann!" The officers greeted casually. Captain Gutmann waved invitingly. "Just come in-hopped, gentlemen! There's still enough room to sit in the carriage, you'll just have to pull your legs up a bit. There are some nice boxes here that I don't want to throw out because of you."

Recke was the first in the wagon. He looked at the load, which consisted of a few small boxes with a few straws sticking out of them. "Don't fall - glass!" was painted in black stencilled lettering.

"Well, what's that?" Recke tried to sniff with his nose. The grimace made him laugh.

Gutmann's face, usually always closed, showed a mischievous smile. "I'll give you three guesses!"

"Rubbish," rumbled Recke. "It probably won't be raspberry juice ..."

"And no glasses to throw against the wall on the occasion of the Kaiser's birthday either," laughed Reimer in between. "Let

from your usual mysterious behaviour, dear Gutmann! What has your bucket loaded?"

"Three stars," hummed the captain at the handlebars.

Recke and Reimer gave him a dozy look.

"Yes, if you have a long line," Gutmann grinned and tapped his forehead with his right index finger, "then it stays dark in the upper room."

"I've got it!" Reimer gave Recke a gentle nudge in the ribs. "Cognac has been loaded by our stargazer."

"That's right! - Cognac with three stars. Genuine French!"

"I'm surprised that the purser handed over so much. Usually, the best things are hoarded until they finally fall into the enemy's hands," grunted Recke.

"Maybe there was a Führer decree about cognac," Reimer mocked the paymaster. "The catering stallions only give out something like that when they have a gun to their chest or are drunk themselves."

"The idea of a decree can't be right. Decrees usually end up in the latrines," philosophised Recke.

"Remember that God's ways are marvellous," Gutmann said jokingly. "Above all, it should be the last cognac of this famous variety."

"You're right, Gutmann," confirmed Recke. "From now on, the Americans under Eisenhower have probably taken over the subscription to this brand. Since the failure of the Battle of the Bulge, this source has been

probably be lost."

The captain in the front seat narrowed his eyes. Grumpily he said: "Leave the damn front out of it! They don't have time to think about drinking there now. Only we here, at the arse end of the world ..."

"Well, it's not that bad again," protested Reimer.

"A beautiful city in a marvellous fjord, what more could you want? Thousands of tourists dream of visiting this beautiful Norway with its rugged landscape in quiet times. And Drontheim ..."

"It's all right, Reimer," Gutmann placated. "Are you sitting properly yet? - Then let's go full throttle!"

While the officers who had boarded were still lolling about, the driver pressed the accelerator and drove off quickly. In a few minutes, the car had left the Baklandet neighbourhood behind, drove through Lademoen, past the Ledehammeren promontory and along the shore of the Stjördalsfjord towards the airfield in Vernäs.

A peaceful wind whistled towards the travellers. They pushed their peaked caps deep into their foreheads and turned up the fur collars of their long leather coats. While the driver, keeping an eye on the road, travelled at great speed towards the destination, the captains sitting in the back clamped their legs against the slightly rumbling crates to prevent the precious cargo from slipping.

A few times Reimer tried to have a chat with his neighbour.

to start a conversation. But as the wind tore the scraps of words from his mouth, he gave up his endeavour. From time to time, both officers ran the back of their hands over their faces as the sharp breeze made their eyes water. Only Gutmann was a little better off because he was protected from the wind immediately behind the protective windscreen.

After about three quarters of an hour's journey, they arrived in Vernäs. "Today we're coming as Father Christmases," joked Reimer as the car stopped at the airfield.

"What do you mean we?" said Gutmann. "I'm delivering my cognac alone. Make sure you get out of the car!" His face twisted into a broad laugh.

"Stargazer, stargazer!" shouted Reimer jokingly, waving an index finger in a gesture of equal significance.

He tapped his cap peak lightly with his right hand and jumped out of the bucket lorry with a spring in his step. Recke followed a little more sedately.

"See you later," Gutmann grunted. "Bye!" - He pulled up again and disappeared with the car into a barrack alley.

Reimer stretched his legs, which had become clammy from sitting so close together. "Now we have another few boring days ahead of us. Apart from one good cognac and a constant stream of bad radio news, we have nothing else here." His expression was one of displeasure.

A young officer came across the airfield towards the arrivals. He had a short, warm

He was wearing a flight jacket and the blue-grey boat with the silver piping sat boldly on the right side of his head.

"Is there any important news?" Recke called out to him.

"Of course," the lieutenant called back. "The Adju has sent word that the two Rs are to report to him as soon as they return from Drontheim!"

The two Rs were Recke and Reimer, who were jokingly given this name by the entire airbase because of their inseparability and the fact that their names began with the same letter.

"Hm, it's not that natural again," Reimer whined in between. "Of course it's just boredom."

Lieutenant Weiß had come very close to the two captains. "I think the boredom will be over in the next few days. Tonight a strange bird arrived at our airfield. There - right at the back!" His right hand pointed to the back of the field. The captains followed with their eyes the hand pointing the way.

"The two machines at the very back? -"

"It's a machine," the lieutenant emphasised. "It's a new design. A Do 635 with two fuselages. This twin construction is generally flown with two seats. The radio operator is on the right, the pilot on the left."

"That's really interesting," said Recke. "Let's take a closer look at this thing!"

"If I may remind you again - the Adju has already

urgently required!" the lieutenant interjected hesitantly.

"Well, let's go to the Adju first," Reimer decided without further ado.

Having become somewhat curious, they strode towards the staff building with sweeping steps. The lieutenant trotted along behind them.

Looking around on the way, Recke asked: "Didn't some planes take off? - The place looks a bit sparse."

"Three Me 109s have flown off with orders," replied Leutnant Weiß. "As has one aircraft from the weather squadron. Incidentally, the new Do 635 is also assigned to the weather squadron."

Directly in front of the staff building they came across a tall young lieutenant whom the captains did not yet know. He greeted them, but looked very dejected.

"Who's that?" Recke turned to Weiß again.

"Arrived tonight with the strange do and transferred to us. Has a worm on his heart. That's why he's walking around like a scalped pale face."

"Probably messed up somehow," Recke said lightly.

"The swallows chirp it differently," the lieutenant replied quietly. "I had a short chat with him this morning. He told me that he had previously been stationed in Denmark, where they probably flew up with their crates but were strictly forbidden to engage in aerial combat."

"It's a strange record that's being put on and played," grumbled Reimer.

The lieutenant continued: "He told me that he had taken off on a reconnaissance flight and had been attacked over the sea by two British Spitfire planes. He had shot down one of the two attackers - it had been his first kill - and had chased the second one into flight, damaged. When he rolled out in high spirits, signalling his aerial victory by wobbling as he landed, and reported to his commander, the latter made him wait in the anteroom for a full hour before receiving him. Instead of a commendation and praise, he was given a whistle that would have been quite something. The commander even had the temerity to threaten the poor chap with a court martial!"

"That's unbelievable!" Reimer was outraged.

"But it seems to be a fact," Weiß confirmed his story. "There was a row in which Lieutenant Mohr got the short end of the stick, as could not have been otherwise given the difference in rank. The end result was that he was transferred to us. Now the poor chap has a rage in his belly and no longer understands the world."

"Me neither," Reimer interjected again. "The whole place is already really messed up!"

"Tatata," said Recke. "Talk is silver, silence is golden! - We can't sweep a stable on our own."

"Unfortunately," whispered Weiß.

"Well, we fly on from our eyrie and

and shot if necessary." Recke wanted to end the conversation with this sentence. "We thank you, dear Weiß, you are our indispensable living newspaper. Now let's see what the Adju wants. Goodbye, for the time being!"

White also saluted and turned back.

A few minutes later, Recke and Reimer stood in front of the adjutant.

"It's a good thing you've just arrived," Captain v. Wendt greeted them in a slightly nasal voice. "I've just been ordered to report to the commander. I'll register you straight away, because the colonel has already asked for you several times!"

"Nothing bad, I hope?" asked Reimer, embarrassed.

"Nah, gentlemen. - But shh! - Secret commando business!"

"Hopefully something sensible," Recke grumbled.

v. Wendt furrowed his brows, giving his face an arrogant, dismissive look. "Everything here is reasonable, Captain!"

Recke acted as if he hadn't heard anything. "Shall we wait here in the duty room?"

"I think that will be best," said the adjutant. He left with a folder under his arm.

Recke sat down unceremoniously on the adjutant's simple table, while Reimer remained standing in front of the large map of Norway hanging on the wall to the side of the window. Marker pins and individual flags were stuck on the map.

"Looks very pretty," murmured Reimer, tilting his head.

"But that's all there is to it," added Recke dryly.

"It is also customary to chalk or mark lost items, simply because a point is a point and must be labelled according to the LDV."

"That is part of what is commonly called organisation."

"Yes, that too," said Recke slightly irritated and lifted a drawing from the table that was lying between pieces of business. "This war outline, which our O.I. always paints with dedication, is also part of the organisational work. But it's just an ordinary paper war that's only being waged for the sake of paper baskets. It sucks ..."

Reimer relented: "It doesn't suit me either, Recke! On the other hand, everything has an obligation within certain limits that you can't get away from. It's no different here than elsewhere in life; only too much is unhealthy. Let the O.I. scribble his lists. It's better if he draws a squadron overview that also shows the firepower instead of dozing and drawing naked girls on files."

"You have excuses for everything," laughed Recke good-naturedly. Then he picked up the outline he had found and looked at it more closely. "The group's planned target is there on paper, but our activities don't even correspond to those of a squadron."

"Who knows what tomorrow will bring?" Reimer pontificated precociously.

Recke was relieved of a further objection. The door opened and v. Wendt appeared. "The two R's to the commander," he said with a snarl. He let the two summoned men pass him and stayed behind.

"Break a leg," he called after them.

While Reimer walked on indifferently, Recke turned round in surprise: "Why, Wendelin?" He knew that v. Wendt couldn't stand this nickname and became slightly caustic on this occasion. So he added, softening the blow: "Bumblebee-bumblebee!" Because the adjutant was from Hamburg. Outside the commander's door, the two captains adjusted their coats and smoothed the flaps of their leather coats.

When they entered, the commander was leaning over his table and looking animatedly at a stack of Wehrmacht maps. A map lying on top, from whose paper surface a great deal of white shone towards the people entering - clearly an ice or snow landscape - seemed to have captured his interest.

"Captain Recke and Reimer back from Drontheim, Colonel." Both officers raised their arms at Recke's report.

Colonel Troll, the commander of the airbase, moved his head only slightly. "Wait a minute, gentlemen! Just a moment ..." He continued to search animatedly on the map until he had visibly found a point. Then he straightened up and looked penetratingly at the two officers. "I have an
a s s i g n m e n t ,

Gentlemen!" He waved his hand and lowered his voice slightly: "Have a look here!"

While those addressed complied with this request, the colonel continued: "Well, gentlemen, I have received a G.Kdos. from Berlin. I have appointed you to carry out the order connected with it. I need two officers I can rely on. Your order is secret and from now on you will be sworn to secrecy!"

Both captains took up their positions for a moment. "You can rely on us, Colonel!" said Recke firmly.

"I know, I know - come all the way over here!" The commander rummaged among the papers next to the pile of maps and delved once again into a document with the red label "Geheime Kommandosache" (secret command matter). "You are taking off in a new aircraft and conducting tests with a new type of navigation device on a long-haul flight. The aircraft you will be taking over has a range of seven thousand five hundred kilometres, but without weapons. As it is a new design, it must not fall into enemy hands under any circumstances. You understand me, gentlemen! I can't give you any fighter protection!"

The captains calmly withstood the commander's enquiring gaze. Not an eyelash twitched.

"All right then! - I've given orders that none of the staff here are allowed to take a closer look at the machine. That doesn't apply to you, of course! - Please turn

Now, later on, to Major Küpper, who flew the aircraft here together with a radio operator, and let him instruct you in more detail. Küpper will fly back the day after tomorrow morning with a crew, while a lieutenant who came with him will stay with us in the formation. Also prepare for a long flight and remember that you may be away from here for some time. A temporary stationing at a certain base may be necessary. So - and tomorrow at half past seven in the morning you will report to me, where you will receive your orders. I will also prepare maps for you personally. Everything else you need - tomorrow morning too!"

"Yes, Colonel!" The two captains folded up their hooks and saluted. Then they wanted to leave the room.

"Stop - one more thing!" The commander snapped the fingers of his right hand. "Tell Küpper to instruct you sufficiently and thoroughly about the shadow navigation device. Tell him so that nobody can overhear. Strictest secrecy is ordered." His voice became very insistent:

"I'm relying on you, gentlemen! - And now - please send v. Wendt to me, I'll draw up the order with him!"

He came out from behind his table and approached his officers, who were already standing in front of the door to his room. He held his right hand out to them. "Goodbye!"

As Reimer and Recke stood in front of the staff building, he pushed his cap back onto his forehead with his left hand and scratched the back of his head with an embarrassed gesture.

"I wouldn't have minded being bored this time. Pardauz! - It's probably like the blessed Wilhelm Busch said: Firstly, things turn out differently, secondly, than you think ..."

"I don't **m i n d**," explained Recke.

"As far as I'm concerned, we'll even explore the North Pole again for the umpteenth time. Judging by the white spots on the map ..."

"Aha - good that you reminded me. I almost didn't think about it. Now I'm really curious again, I'd give anything to be in Wendt's place right now. Whether this Major - well, what's his name ... ?"

"Küpper. - Probably won't know too much either. Probably brought the G.Kdos. - sealed, of course - but otherwise? ..."

"So let's go and see him!" urged Reimer.

"Let's go to him," Recke mimicked. "Where is he anyway?"

"I see - hm ..."

A window of the staff building was slightly open. Recke took a few steps towards it and called out: "Hello - Lieutenant: Berg! - Do you know where Major Küpper, who flew in, is?"

While a voice shouted out a few barely intelligible words, from the entrance of the building came a powerful

Voice in between: "Here's the bird that flew in, gentlemen!"

The two captains turned round and took up their positions. "Major ..."

"No trouble at all, if you please. You wish?"

"Referred to you by order of the colonel, Major - Captain Reimer and Captain Recke ..."

"Ah! - May I ask you to join me?"

"By your command, Major!"

The major, another young aviation officer with the Sturzkampfllieger badge, E.K.1 and the German Cross in gold on his pilot's blouse, stepped out of the house and walked towards the outbuilding at the side. "We want to be undisturbed," he said as he walked.

Recke and Reimer exchanged glances, they liked the major. The squadron officers' quarters were in the outbuilding they entered. The major had refused to move into better quarters in Drontheim and had requested field accommodation at the airfield. So the adjutant assigned him the room of a lieutenant who was on short leave.

In the practical and flush manner of old front-line officers, the major fetched two chairs from the neighbouring rooms with his own hands and grouped them around the small window table.

At a gesture from the major, the two captains took their seats with a curt nod. Without formality

he began to speak:

"I can assume, gentlemen, that the commander has already told you to carry out a special mission in strict compliance with all the rules of secrecy. You have his confidence and -

", the major smiled distantly, "also that of the Ic and the NSFO. You understand, even in the OKL ..." The speaker bit his lips as if he had already said too much.

Recke looked very serious. "We will fulfil every order to the best of our ability and with the utmost commitment, Major! - Incidentally, the commander has given us a basic flight order without naming the destination. We will receive the order tomorrow morning ..."

"Stop, Captain! - You must be mistaken; the order will only be handed to you in sealed form on departure. Do you mean the general instructions?"

"The commander specifically said order! I was astonished, because I had the impression that I had to take over an aircraft without having flown in ..."

"Of course you have to fly in. You have two days, provided the flying weather stays the same. I'll ..." The major was interrupted by a heavy knock on the door. "Come in!"

An orderly stood in the doorway. "Major to the commanding officer at once!"

"Ah - I'm coming already! Keep your seats, gentlemen, I'll be right back ..." He quickly strode out of the room past the dispatcher, who opened the door behind him.

closed. The thudding of boot soles on the wooden floor faded away.

"Strange thing," grumbled Recke. "They're now whirling around the shop like they're wielding a revolutionary wonder weapon. From here..."

"Better something than nothing at all," Reimer replied, crossing his legs. "My school friend wrote to me that the V2 has already lost its first surprise effect and that people back home are already waiting impatiently for new and even more effective weapons. The constant allusions on the radio by the Reichspropogandascheich lead us to expect a tube that will simply cough away the entire eastern front. But he also writes that scepticism is already well advanced and that popular wit already speaks of a V6 consisting of one man simply throwing a stone and another saying 'boom' to it."

"Such poor bastards! They're probably the ones who feed hay instead of petrol to the tanks on the eastern front. Or the tanks are delivered directly to the Ivan by axle, where he can take them over ready for use - albeit without a delivery note or counter-note. It's a bit of a folk joke ..."

"Don't get angry. Remember the immortal words of the great Viennese Richard Genèe from *Die Fledermaus*: Happy is he who forgets what can no longer be changed ..."

"Rubbish!"

"You really shouldn't let yourself go, but

turn your thoughts to our 3 S K!"

"What kind of construction is that again?" Reimer laughed out loud. "Three-star cognac! ..."

"Don't look forward to it too soon! Our catering stallion will first have to let it brew for a really long time before a drop is served."

"There's a little remedy for that," chortled Reimer. "We'll invite the guy for a little flight and take him for a spin and spin around in the air until he's puked his envious black soul out of his body. In this state afterwards, such involuntary acrobats are always extremely sociable!"

"You'll never get him into a box. The best he'll do is look at the tail of the aeroplane."

After a while, the major can return. "Gentlemen, due to the circumstances, you will have another comrade as your third companion as originally planned."

"Well," said Reimer. "I thought the new machine was only a two-seater?"

"Who said that?" The Major's voice sounded metallic and sharp.

Reimer laid his ears back sharply and kept to himself. If he named Lieutenant Weiß, it might be unpleasant for him. Although he hardly revealed more than any guard knew.

"Major, my remark referred to a conjecture when I saw the machine in the background of the

field !"

"Like this?" The major looked suspiciously at the captain from Linz. "So - the third man you're getting from here is Captain Gutmann."

"Gutmann of all people? ..." Both captains looked at each other.

The major pointed. "Do you have something against your comrade?"

Recke swallowed. "Not in the slightest. A good mate, very reliable."

"But?" the major continued.

"Not really a but. He's just a bit of an oddball. Always out in front, though!"

"So nothing to complain about?"

"Nothing, Major!"

"Hm." A short pause.

Suddenly Recke asked: "Our commander told us before that he only needed two officers. Not everything is clear to me. If Mr Major ...?"

"The colonel is mistaken! But if you insist on an exact answer to your question, then it could be very unpleasant for one of your comrades from here. Because then it is quite clear, in the case of better knowledge, that someone somehow knows the new construction and is chatting despite the ban. But you're hardly likely to attach any importance to tracking down person X. Wouldn't you?"

Recke and Reimer fell silent, embarrassed.

"Treason and stupidity are absolutely separate concepts",

said the Major quietly, as if speaking to himself.

"You can't always be stubborn, as the rules of an old pigtail demand. We airmen also have to uphold camaraderie."

"You speak from the heart, Major!" Recke looked warmly at Küpper. The major grumbled a little. But before he could start speaking again, there was a knock: "Come in!"

The door opened and Captain Gutmann entered. He saluted and announced himself.

"Have the courtesy, Captain, to pull a chair over from next door!" Major Küpper smiled kindly. Gutmann immediately turned round and came straight back with a chair that seemed a little wobbly. At a hint, he took a seat next to Recke and waited for the rest of the speech.

"I'll be brief and get straight to the heart of the matter," Major Küpper began impersonally and matter-of-factly. "First of all, I want to make it clear that I intentionally referred to the new aircraft as a DO 635, a type that is still more or less unknown, but not the latest innovation ..." He broke off briefly and smiled lazily at the two captains who had arrived first. "By the way, it's easy to see that seemingly unintentional remarks fulfil their purpose perfectly. Don't you agree, gentlemen?"

Recke nodded stiffly like a puppet, while Reimer

coughed and grimaced.

The insinuating smile disappeared from Küpper's face again and his voice became hard. In the jargon of the frontline soldiers, he said briefly: "It's none of the world's business what kind of model is actually flown in here."

"... none of the world's business," Recke mimicked, following an old habit, as if in confirmation.

The major deliberately ignored the repetition.

"Since you are now subject to special secrecy, gentlemen, I will tell you that the aircraft intended for you is an improved and redesigned type by Junkers, which has been converted into a three-seater and has an even greater range, namely eight thousand kilometres."

"Very nice," murmured Reimer.

"Of the three-man crew, the radio operator is to be accommodated in the left-hand fuselage, i.e. behind the pilot, while the right-hand fuselage is normally intended for an on-board mechanic with a second control. In this particular case, we therefore have to agree on the allocation of seats and roles!" Küpper looked questioningly at the three captains in turn.

"If I could make a suggestion?" Gutmann interjected, leaning forward slightly.

"I asked for it," Küpper politely encouraged him.

"Well - I mean - since my mates Recke and Reimer are considered the lovebirds here -"

"- Offer yourself for the seat of the person sitting alone,

isn't it?"

"Yes, Major!"

"Very nice. Very comradely. That pleases me immensely," said Major Küpper appreciatively. "So that settles the personal matters. I will therefore begin immediately to familiarise you with the technical details of this construction in theory. Tomorrow morning we will then go to the machine to start the practical lessons to follow and start with the familiarisation. So far, the whole thing is not too remarkable. But now the main thing, gentlemen!" The Major paused for a moment and looked at three motionless faces, who nevertheless tension. "The purpose of your flight with the Do-Ju construction is above all above all besides the In addition to carrying out a military task, the main task is to test a new type of navigation device. This device - we can aptly call it a celestial compass - is a new invention of our technicians at home and must be tested for its usefulness in the polar zones. I take the liberty of confiding in you that these zones will gain increased strategic importance in the near future in the course of the present overall military situation. If the sky compass fulfils the expectations placed in it, then our air force the opponent technically again ahead of the enemy by the length of an elephant's trunk." Küpper smiled at his own comparison. "I will now try to help you with

to explain the principle of this navigation aid in a few words. If anything seems unclear to you during the explanation, please feel free to interrupt me with questions, gentlemen! Clear?!"

"Gladly - yes, Major!" came the reply.

"So I may continue: The advantage of the new device is that it can be used to determine the position of the sun at any time of day. The prerequisite, however, is that there must be a patch of blue sky somewhere. But it also works at dusk when the sun is just below the horizon. By determining the position of the sun, together with other measurements, you can always easily calculate the position of the aeroplane. As you know, the magnetic compass is an irritating thing in the polar zones. At certain times, therefore, this device would have enabled us to determine our position in the polar region without errors, which would appear to significantly increase flight safety. The construction principle itself is such that the sunlight hitting the earth during the day is partially polarised. This means that the electromagnetic oscillations are strongest in one plane. Since both the sun and the observer lie in this plane, it is possible to determine the position of the sun using an analyser. Measurements taken on the ground give an accuracy result of up to one degree. From an aeroplane there is a minimal increase in inaccuracy, but this is of little importance. This is understandably due to

the uneven movements of the machine. And to come back to the polar zones; the new celestial compass is of particular use for these areas because the twilight lasts a long time there - the certain times - and the magnetic compass, which has already been described as irritable, inevitably causes trouble and concern. Strangely enough, our celestial compass is even more accurate near the Earth's poles than elsewhere. This has to do with the actual calculations of the direction of flight based on the measurements. So much for a brief theoretical introduction, gentlemen! Tomorrow we will discuss the device in more detail, but the practical testing will then be entrusted to you. Be responsible and honour the trust placed in you!"

"Yes, Major!" said all three captains at the same time.

"Hm - and because of the additional responsibility, hm - the commander will explain this to you in more detail before the launch as instructed. I only have to teach you the technical part of your task. Prepare yourself for that and let's meet tomorrow morning, let's say at half past seven, at the aircraft. Let's leave it at that for today. Thank you, gentlemen!"

The three captains stood up. Küpper shook their hands as they took their leave with an official salute.

"How do you greet people here in Norway?" he asked.

Reimer grinned. "You can say God Aften at this time of night, Major!"

"God Aften? - Good evening, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right!"

"So ... !"

When Reimer, Recke and Gutmann were standing alone outside again, they looked at each other in bewilderment. Recke was the first to speak. "Don't you dare tell me that I'm not a prophet. Just over an hour ago, after we left, I told the commander that we would follow in the footsteps of Wegener, Nobile and Amundsen. About white spots at the North Pole and so on. Heavens, arse and twine, now we actually have to slide over the Northern Lights' hump!"

"Be glad that we're getting away from this dreary business here," Reimer interjected, "I imagine a flight like this would be eerily beautiful."

"- scary, scary," Recke mimicked again.

Reimer looked around to see if anyone from the ground staff was around, then he plucked his earlobes like a schoolboy and stuck out his tongue. "Ewww," he then said. "You cynical trudelgeist, I'm going to go down deep and photograph polar bears. But I won't even let you look at the pictures!"

"Not a fan of bad pictures anyway, haha!"

"Let's see who laughs last! By the way, shall we ask our dear Gutmann how he managed to be the third in the group?"

"Right," shouted Recke. "Come on, Gutmann, speak up! How did you turn that thing?"

Gutmann made a mischievous face that did not match his usual seriousness. "A little Christmas bell tinkled softly and told me something about a nice commission, then I went to Wendt and gave him a bit of a talking to until he put in a good word or a good recommendation for me with the colonel. Incidentally, Mr Wendt found a bottle of three-star cognac in his room, for which he has a particular weakness."

The other two laughed. Recke commented: "Where in the name of three devils did you get the cognac from?"

"Didn't we load some in Drontheim?" Gutmann asked with an innocent expression.

"How did you get that?" Rich was the questioner. "Very simply. I have a few bottles 'Breakage' reported."

"Haha, that's great. And where are the other bottles?"

"Reserved for the start to the polar bears!"

"Pounding!" laughed Recke in between. "And the catering stallion believed it?"

"Not really, but he had to. I laughed at him when he said he had to report it. He said that otherwise he would be told himself."

to blame."

"Of course! That's his guilty conscience. It's probably not the first time he's reported a 'breach' on his own initiative. When others do the same, it's not the same for him. According to the old recipe. Besides, if this sets a precedent, he's afraid that he'll get his tail handed to him from 'above'."

Recke squeaked happily. "So there would be plenty of internal warmth!"

Darkness slowly fell as the three officers walked round the airfield chatting. Gutmann, usually very reserved, was tidy and in good spirits this time. Reimer and Recke were pleased to get to know their comrade in a more open and human way. "Where are you from?" asked Reimer, looking at Gutmann. "We know so little about you. From the pronunciation, I suppose you're from Hesse?"

"I'm a Hessian myself," protested Recke.

"Gutmann speaks more in the Frankfurt key."

"You both guessed half right," Gutmann realised. "I'm from Runkel."

"Runkel? - Where is that?" Reimer shook his head. "I haven't heard of it yet."

"It's a small town in Nassau. On the Lahn, east of Limburg."

"So actually Hessian after all," Reimer defended his initial speculation.

"You could say that. Recke has made a fool of himself!"

"Oh, rubbish." Recke looked exasperated and groaned.

move a stone out of the way with the toe of your boot.

"Of course I know Runkel. I've been there before, but I can't remember all the dialectal subtleties."

Quietly, more like to himself, Gutmann said: "It's nice at home. And besides - my birthplace has a special meaning for me. But you won't understand that. Maybe later on."

"You're full of secrets, Gutmann! People never really know what's going on with you. Either you've got hold of something or it's got hold of you." Recke flicked his index finger at his temple.

Gutmann showed a forlorn smile. "Everyone lives his life as he must," he said. And glancing at his wristwatch, he concluded: "Let's get ready for dinner!"

When the three captains sat with their other comrades a while later, it was pretty quiet for the time being. The radio had only briefly repeated the last Wehrmacht report, which had not sounded very comforting. Lieutenant Mohr in particular, who had just been transferred to Vernäs and had arrived with Küpper, showed a dejected, almost despairing expression. He still felt like a stranger here and had so far only been able to talk to Lieutenant Weiß. Weiß was sitting next to him, but was preoccupied with his own gloomy thoughts.

Immediately after the meal, the commander stood up. "Don't get up, gentlemen, I've still got to go."

I have an urgent matter to attend to. v. Wendt, can you come with me right away?"

The adjutant immediately stood up and replied in the affirmative. Colonel Troll spoke a few quiet words to him. v. Wendt's eyes widened and he promptly replied: "Let's do it, Commandant, let's do it!" He hurried ahead of the colonel with long strides.

As soon as both officers had left the room, a broad-shouldered first lieutenant, who was seated next to the adjutant, made a gesture of repose. "Children, listen up!" he shouted. "The colonel whispered to the adjutant about a few bottles of wine. You can call me a monkey's arse if the adjutant isn't at the catering stall now and actually gets a few drops free at the commander's request!"

"Bravo, bravo! - A good idea from the old man! - Great!"

The mood was immediately lightened. It wasn't long before the catering stallion and his assistant appeared in person and put down a crate of wine bottles that had been dragged in pairs. Behind them came v. Wendt and laughed gleefully. "A greeting from the commander, comrades! - He's told you to fill up your tanks and not to sit there like that. It's like a funeral parlour here. - Goodbye and leave me another bottle!"

"That's all right, Adju! Hummel, hummel."

The bottles supplied were just enough to get the atmosphere going. Even Major Küpper didn't play coy in any way, but kept

unabashedly joined in the drink. With a beautiful tenor voice, he sang along to the airman's song "Bomben auf Engelland" and the other soldier's and country servant's tunes. When the last bottles were uncorked, it was he who asked the group: "Isn't there a petrol station here in Vernäs where you could get supplies?"

Lieutenant Zastrow, a brash Berliner, immediately crowed: "'türlich Major! There's a little Budicke at the entrance to the village where you can ..."

"That's enough," shouted Küpper. "Do you want to drive, lieutenant? - I'll donate fifty marks."

The major's donation turned into a considerable collection in no time at all. Zastrow took over the sum and asked Weiß to come with him. They left in a hurry.

While the lively conversation continued, Recke looked across the table at Mohr. The newcomer sat introverted in his chair and paid little attention to his surroundings.

His eyes were a little watery.

"Hey, Lieutenant, you're not going to give up yet, are you? Come over to me. Captain Reimer and I will entertain you until Weiß comes back. Come on!"

Mohr accepted the invitation without hesitation. He tipped his glass down and pressed it firmly against him as he swapped places. "I'm so free," he said politely.

Recke immediately topped him up. "To your health,

Lieutenant! May you settle in with us soon. We have marvellous comrades here."

"Yes," said the lieutenant mechanically. Again he drank hastily. His handsome boy's face was flushed.

Time passed and suddenly the two lieutenants were back. "We've brought rum," they shouted, "It makes a great grog!"

"The kitchen bull must come here!" shouted one. "Smutje, Smutje! ..."

When v. Wendt returned a little later, he found a noisy party, coarse fumes in the room and clouds of cigarette smoke. Mohr was in the process of changing his seat again and was already staggering back to Weiß and Zastrow, who had called him in.

"You're about to hit rock bottom," the adjutant said to him. Don't overdo it too much."

"Huck," chortled the lieutenant. "Huck - it's all one thing! Tri - drink while there's still wa - what there is. Then it's za - zappenduster anyway. Huck."

"Moor, you're a dashing chap. Don't give in now!"

"Schla - huck, go limp, that's what I've been ordered here - here. Huck, huck. - Spitfires shot down - shot down - nanu - huck - almost court-martialled. Bloody mess, Captain! Ko - funny war. Punishment for guts, haha! All treachery and shit ..."

v. Wendt patted him on the shoulder in sympathy.

"Don't take it tragically, Moor! We don't have anything like that. Cheer up!"

Mohr shook his head stubbornly. "Huck - it's all shit - shit - ..."

"- Apparently, you mean to say, don't you?" Recke, who had joined them, laughed uproariously.

Lieutenant Mohr dropped his empty glass on the floor, where it remained broken under the table, forming a semicircle. "Ni - not even shards," he whispered sadly. He staggered out of the room, seeking support from the row of chairs.

"It did," Weiß laughed over to Recke and Reimer.

Recke remained serious. "But it's not the alcohol that's to blame, it's the worm in my heart!"

"Actually, yes," nodded the lieutenant. "Just like I said at the airfield today."

Mohr's departure had not gone unnoticed. Most of the officers had already risen from their seats and were still chatting in groups before leaving. Almost all of them had small eyes.

It was Küpper who gave the final signal for the general departure. "Let's get into the flap!"

The moment the small swarm pushed out of the room, the bright crack of a gunshot whipped through the night. The chatter immediately stopped.

"Get out!" shouted Küpper. "Go and see what's going on ..." Completely disillusioned, the officers hurried outside. The

At first, the eyes, accustomed to the light, saw only deep blackness before them. Only slowly did they become accustomed to the darkness. A door also opened from the neighbouring staff building and a broad beam of light illuminated the surroundings. The massive figure of the commander stood in the doorway like a silhouette. "What's this mess?"

The figure of a guard emerged from the darkness of the night. The man approached the commander and reported: "Private Kohl on patrol, Colonel! The shot came from the officers' quarters."

"All right, Kohl. Go on your way! I'll go and see for myself ..."

Followed by his officers, the commander went to his quarters. When they entered the small building, everything was quiet. The corridor was empty.

"There can't be anyone here except Mohr," said Weiß shyly. "Otherwise we're all here together?"

"Where is Mohr staying?" asked Colonel Troll.

White pointed to the second nearest door. "Here, commander!" The colonel took a few steps forwards and pulled the door open. "Oh -"

The officers crowded behind him and looked into the room. The ceiling light was switched on and at first only showed the sparse furnishings. Gutmann was the first to point to a figure lying on the floor.

"Moor ..."

The young lieutenant lay stretched out on the floor and right in front of his open right hand lay

his pistol. His face was as white as a whitewashed wall and a small dark stain was slowly spreading across the wooden floor from a wound in his temple. The corners of the dead man's mouth were twisted bitterly.

The commander broke the icy silence first. "Where is the senior doctor?"

"Here, commander!" The man called pushed forward. Colonel Troll stepped aside and let him pass. He watched the doctor's actions with a fixed expression. The other officers also looked on in shock.

"Nothing can be done, Colonel! We humans have our limits ..."

"I know." He stepped quickly to the dead man and picked up the pistol.

He weighed it thoughtfully in his hand for a moment before quickly pocketing it with determination. Then he turned to his men. "Do your comrade a last labour of love by laying him on the bed!" White and Zastrow came the wish of the commander immediately.

"Come in, everyone, gentlemen. Move a little closer together, if you please. We all have room." The colonel looked at the officers in turn.

"Gentlemen, I know why Lieutenant Mohr was transferred to us. I think it will suffice for you if I explain that the man is a victim of his loyalty to duty and his courage." He continued in a raised voice:

"Mohr was fighting a losing battle, just like us here. He deserves the highest recognition and

Harvested meanness. It broke him. We want to be good comrades and also think of his relatives. - Lieutenant Mohr had a fatal accident on duty, gentlemen - understood!"

The officers tensed up and nodded silently. Most of them had a choke in their throats.

The colonel nodded. "Thank you, gentlemen!" Then in his usual tone: "I'll do the report myself and enter the lieutenant for E.K.1 afterwards. - Mr Chief Surgeon, take care of the rest."

With a petrified expression, the commander took another look at the pale face of the boy and quickly left the scene of the accident. The squadron officers followed distraught and went to their quarters.

Gutmann picked up Reimer and Recke the next morning. The three of them trudged across the airfield. A hazy morning mist lay over the fjord landscape and the damp, cold air made the officers shiver slightly. They had already been told by the adjutant that Major Küpper would tell them when they would receive their orders from the commander. The sad affair with the young lieutenant Mohr occupied their thoughts and made them silent and slightly bitter.

At the other end of the field, the contours of the strange twin apparatus bulged out of the all-important

the fog was disappearing. Just in front of the aircraft, a sentry collapsed and reported to Recke, who was one step ahead: "Captain, order from the commander - access to the aircraft only permitted when accompanied by Major Küpper!"

"I know," Recke replied gently. "The major called us here."

The man squirmed. "I have express orders, Captain!"

"Well, let's just wait a little while," said Reimer good-naturedly. "Küpper will be here soon."

The sentry loosened the strap of the carbine and resumed his walk as the three officers stood still. Küpper arrived ten minutes later. It was half past seven on the dot.

"Morning, gentlemen," he greeted casually as he approached, while the captains took up their positions. He quickly shook their hands and hurried on towards the machine.

"We want to climb into the box straight away and inspect the device. A little later we'll have glorious flying weather - if your weather squadron wasn't lying - and then we can start flying in straight away. So let's get down to business in no time!"

At ten o'clock it was time for Küpper to give the order:

"Have the tanks topped up, gentlemen!"

Gutmann shouted about the square. Men
from the ground crew signalled their
understanding and hurried to the

obey the order.

"The aircraft has two excellent DB 603 A engines," the Major continued.

"Take care when landing, gentlemen, as the main undercarriage has been reduced to two wheel units. Instead, the entire centre section has been freed up to accommodate fuel. The maximum speed of the aircraft is 725 kilometres per hour. As you can also see, the crew compartments are designed as pressurised compartments. Armament - none!

But you can have an M-Pi with you just in case - if you have to make an emergency landing, for example." Küpper went into some more technical details and then decided: "As you wish, Captain Gutmann will take the single seat on the right with the second controller, while you gentlemen -" he nodded at Reimer and Recke, "- will take the seats on the left together. See to it that you soon agree which of you will be the pilot and radio operator. So -" The major broke off as the men were just arriving to refuel the aircraft. "Good, good," he said. "Hey, you ground worms, get a move on!"

In the meantime, the four officers moved away from the machine. Küpper and Recke lit a cigarette.

After a short while, a sergeant approached the group. "Ready!" he reported.

"Thank you!" Then the Major turned to the captains: "So fly in the crate right away. Neck

and break a leg!" He casually glanced at his wristwatch. "Watch out for enemy aircraft. They have a mission and can't defend themselves! ..."

When the three officers crawled into their cabins ready to fly, it looked like three clumsy furry animals were climbing around. They pulled the cabin roof closed, checked the fit of the throat microphones and fiddled with the collars of their combinations.

The engines started up thunderously. Reimer had taken the pilot's seat and turned back to Recke. He merely nodded. As the Linzer looked back at the field, Küpper personally gave the go-ahead.

A fine vibration ran through the aircraft. Like a living creature, thought Reimer and let the aeroplane start to taxi. It lifted into the air with ease and, as it climbed, described a gentle arc that would take it out over the waters of the fjord. The lead-grey water of the inlet sparkled peacefully like a Central European Alpine lake. Only the mountains showed that Nordic austerity and vigour, lacking the green slopes.

Operating the control stick, Reimer said through the microphone: "The box is fine. It's a fine flyer."

"I think so too," came back from Recke. Gutmann also got in touch from next door: "Works without complaint!"

Reimer flew over the Aasenfjord, then over the

The ship turned round over the protruding peninsula with the towering peak at Frosten and headed towards Namsos. He made a loop over the Lingenfjord, turned over the Flattanger group and made a detour across the open sea. He tried out the elevator and rudder, lowered the aircraft a little, switched to gliding flight with the engines throttled back, slipped sideways and carefully checked the fittings.

Recke tried to determine the position, Gutmann did the same calculations and passed on the values he had determined through the microphone. Recke supplemented these with the values from the celestial compass and actually obtained perfect results.

Less than an hour later, they flew back to Vernäs and landed smoothly.

"Captains Gutmann, Reimer and Recke ordered to accept the order, Colonel!" reported Recke as the senior officer.

"Good, gentlemen! Major Küpper told me that you already feel at home with the new machine. So fly in God's name! - Before I hand you your orders, I have a few more useful and necessary explanations to give you." The commander once again scrutinised the three officers standing in front of him before continuing: "We are well aware of the war situation. At home, our own soil is already being defended on both fronts. The Promi - Reich Ministry of Propaganda - has already issued the statement that the Wehrmacht will be involved in the

The colonel said that he would withdraw to the Alpine fortress currently under construction in order to end the war victoriously from there with the help of new weapons and conditions." An ironic, bitter smile played furtively around the colonel's mouth.

"In the race against time, as well as for strategic reasons, the High Command has decided to establish a secret base on Greenland, which on the one hand would be the starting point of a pincer movement to regain lost homeland soil and would also provide an excellent and dangerous base of operations against America. In order not to jeopardise the construction and equipment of this base, the utmost caution and secrecy is ordered. The exact position of this location is indicated in the order, which you will only have to open after take-off from our northern airbase in the Porsangerfjord. For the time being, we will call this place X-Point. As Major Küpper has informed me, X-Punkt even has a small field airfield, and we are already working on expanding it as much as possible. You yourselves, gentlemen, will remain there for an indefinite period of time and will publicise and utilise the experience you have gained on your flight with the new navigation device. It is possible that the entire weather squadron will be transferred from here to there. As far as the whole group here is concerned, I don't know anything yet. Mr Wendt has already prepared sufficient map material, and I have taken care of your provisions myself, so that you will not have to worry about your physical well-being.

need to be. Remember that by fulfilling your task you have made an important contribution to the plan of the OKL or OKW. In order to think of everything, I have decided, at Major Küpper's suggestion, that all three of you will be equipped with M-Pi's. Yesterday I ordered the weapons from the garrison in Drontheim and had them picked up. They are already in the aircraft. I am fully aware of the gravity of your mission, and as you may also be exposed to dangers of an extraordinary nature, I do not want to have missed anything. Would you like to make another request?"

The three men in the thick combinations looked at each other. "No thanks, Colonel!" replied Recke for all of them.

"Good - by the way, radio communication is only desirable in extreme emergencies. Please also take this into account as an instruction from the OKL. So, that's all in a few words. I would have liked to have been one of you myself. As it is, I must confine myself to giving you my best wishes on your way!" The commander came out from behind his table and shook his men's hands firmly. "Take care!"

"We're doing our duty!" Recke assured him simply.

"I know that. Otherwise I wouldn't have selected and proposed you for this endeavour as part of the 'Ultima Thule' campaign. Make sure you get to your machine now!"

In the commander's anteroom, the captains bumped into Major Küpper, who was talking quietly with the adjutant.

"Ha, so here come our polar animals," joked the Major. "I'm going right along!"

v. Wendt regretted not being able to join him. He had to remain at the commanding officer's disposal.

"Nevertheless - see you soon!"

"You're in the picture?" asked Küpper on the way to the machine.

"Restless, Major!"

"Which one of you has the order?"

"I did," replied Recke. "The commander gave it to me when he said goodbye."

"I have to go back to my desk in Berlin. To the planning staff in the OKL. I hope we don't have any rotten fish there like everywhere else."

Küpper sighed with resignation. "I'm still flying back today."

The men walked across the tarmac towards the aircraft, which was standing off to the side. For the nearby comrades and ground staff, it no longer seemed like a short test or service flight.

They climbed back into the twin machine. Küpper gave them a friendly helping hand before stepping back to authorise the take-off.

The canopies closed, Reimer pushed the stick forwards, the engines sang their roaring song, the aircraft t a x i e d and lifted off the ground,

floated, flew.

One more lap of honour around the course to say goodbye and then a steep turn out into the fjord. Three men flew with secret orders towards a fate unknown to them.

The hum of the engines sounded monotonous. Wisps of cloud sailed past low below the engine, the ridges and slopes of the Norwegian mountains loomed darkly from the depths. Vernäs and therefore Drontheim were already far to the south.

Recke, who, like Gutmann on the other side, was looking through the window panes at the airspace and the ground landscape, shouted through the microphone:

"We've probably been relieved of the boredom. But still - it was nice in Drontheim."

"Yes, it was nice." It was Gutmann who spoke.

"It was, because I hardly think we'll ever see this place again."

"Oho," said Recke. "Pessimist?"

"Not at all," came back from the second cubicle.

"Only convinced that fate will not lead us back!"

Reimer held course along the coast. From Namsos onwards, he held towards Mo. At the island of Vägen, they sighted two transports steaming southwards, accompanied by a destroyer. The Linzer flew lower so that the people below could easily take out the German Luftwaffe's beam cross. Behind the ships, a white, sprayy trail was moving.

To the west of the Sandhorn peninsula, off Bodö at the entrance to the large Vestfjord, the careful lookout sounded the alarm. "Enemy aircraft to the side in front of us!"

Reimer immediately followed the direction indicated by Recke's outstretched hand.

"Enemy scout," the Linzer stated. "Who fears whom now?" His light laugh sounded like the cooing of a bird through the microphone. He wrenched the control stick round and chased towards the alien aircraft.

"Are you mad?" barked Recke. His right hand clawed Reimer's shoulder. "Remember our mission"

"That's why!" Reimer showed a mischievous face in a matter of seconds. He flew thunderously towards the enemy. The British emblem shone from its fuselage and tail.

The enemy must also have noticed the strange-looking aircraft with the two fuselages. He immediately changed his original direction and tried to escape towards a seaward cloud bank.

"Into the laundry room with him!" shouted Reimer exuberantly. He increased his flying speed to frighten his opponent even more.

The enemy aircraft fell for the bluff. It could not have known that the strange construction of the Germans was a harmless, unarmed machine. It visibly endeavoured to reach the protective clouds. But as soon as it was in the white-grey bank

disappeared, Reimer turned off and headed inland. Gutmann's voice became audible: "That was a bung and easy! Better than pinching and having the other guy on your back."

Reimer crossed the mouth of the Ofotenfjord, flew over Tjällö, leaving Narvik on his right, and turned into the Solbergfjord. He had already flown this route a few months ago and knew that he would now reach ONO, the airfield at the southern end of the Porsangerfjord.

Colonel Troll had not said too much when he explained that he had taken care of the catering personally or through v. Wendt. They were sufficiently and excellently provided with everything they needed for a long flight, including reserves in case they had to stop en route due to a breakdown - if this seemed possible. As no enemy contact was to be expected on this route from Narvik, the pilots enjoyed a good snack.

When they later landed at the northernmost airfield of the German air force in Europe, everything was already ready to fill the fuel tanks. Colonel Troll had notified them by radio.

The first impression they received after landing was not particularly encouraging. There was already talk of abandoning the airfield and destroying it as far as possible. Due to a lack of fuel, the mission flights against the Strait of Murmansk had already had to be abandoned.

The first troop reports had already brought news of Soviet and Finnish troops moving into the northernmost zone. Apparently, the Norwegian bastion was to be rolled up from the north.

Grumbling, swearing and dejected, the members of this flying unit carried out their necessary duties. "We can't even get home with our planes," the people whined during refuelling.

"What do you want," Gutmann interjected on the side, "soon there will be no more enemy-free airfields in the homeland!"

"What a mess!" the people grumbled.

They stayed overnight, which was already strangely bright, and only took off the next morning to continue their flight. Here, too, they received the best wishes of their comrades for the unknown flight.

"We'll keep north-west," Reimer had explained and looked at Recke. "Then you can open the order!"

When the airfield was behind them, Recke complied with the order. The order was:

"... Flight over the geographic and magnetic North Pole, then approach to point X (see position according to enclosed map sketch). Temporary stay at the new base."

"Where is this strange point X?" Reimer asked the mate sitting behind him.

"Here in north-east Greenland!" Recke slid the sketch map over Reimer's shoulder.

"I'd also like an explanation!" Gutmann intervened from his cabin.

Recke honoured his wish.

"Let's use the big map to determine the basic course!" said Reimer. "Watch out for the Spitzbergen!"

"I know, I know," replied Recke. His eyes shone. The excitement of this great and dangerous mission had gripped him. Now he understood why Major Küpper had attached so much importance to the warm equipment.

After a while, Gutmann spoke over the microphone: "Everything will happen as it is intended and planned!"

"What do you mean, stargazer?" Reimer asked back.

But Gutmann preferred to remain silent.

THE BRIGHT NIGHT

**"Is it mere dazzle that I see? Is it the
twilight of the gods?
Begrabne riding!
You spur the horses with sharp irons!
Or is homecoming granted to the
heroes?"**

(Edda: Helgi's return)

The northland sky arched over the dark, lead-coloured surface of the sea, dusky and grey. The sun stood veiled behind the eastern horizon, matt-coloured, almost whitish opalescent. The loneliness was oppressive.

Reimer headed for the passage between the Spitsbergen Islands and Franz Josef Land. Southeast of East Spitsbergen, a dark dot passed through the water. A Russian transport. The wake was just a thin grey-white line.

The German engine descended deeper. Suddenly, thick smoke billowed out of the smokestack and the steamer picked up speed. It had already sighted and recognised the enemy and was zigzagging to avoid an expected bomb attack.

"A big lump!" Recke realised, looking intently into the depths. "It's zipping around like crazy. Probably never dreamed he'd come across a German plane in this area. There - " Recke

was busy with his radio, "the guy is already radioing the green harbour in Kohlenbai!"

"That doesn't matter," said Reimer. "Why shouldn't people have an air raid warning?"

"I feel like a toothless wolf. No bombs, no on-board weapons! ..." The captain from Kassel cursed. Reimer pulled up the rudder again. Leaving the ship with its curved wake behind them, they continued on their course. They flew over the White Island. From the left, the bright glacier glistened from the north-east of the Spitsbergen group. "We've already flown over the eightieth parallel!" said the Linzer.

More and more frequently, the drift ice patches interrupted the monotonous surface of the sea. Partly dirty white, partly crystalline, the floes and icebergs floated lazily along.

"When I look down there, I get cold. Despite our heated combination!" Reimer shook himself like a dog pulled out of the water.

"Let's have a hot drink!" suggested Recke. He reached for the thermos flask and poured hot tea with rum. He carefully handed the mug to Reimer first. "Unfortunately, I can't serve Gutmann," he said regretfully.

"I opened my thermos beforehand," Gutmann replied from next door. "I was already cold with this sky colour!"

After drinking, Recke took the cards again

before. He measured the distances of the planned route to the X-point on Greenland. "Golly - we've got to stay damn sharp on course and beware of damage! We've only got one five in a hundred more fuel in the tanks than we're necessarily going to use."

"I already know that," said Reimer calmly. "Above all, it's the magnetic pole that's so far away that it forces us to make a big turn. I've only known since we took off that this spot is already on the Canadian mainland."

"Yes, on the Boothia Peninsula, north of the Franklin Isthmus. I would never have dreamed of suddenly coming to America from one day to the next."

The drift ice increased. Through the glass panes it was already possible to make out huge and bizarre shapes. The positions were constantly being determined as ordered, with the new navigation device proving to be extremely useful, while the normal compass needle vibrated uneasily.

Ice, water and more ice. The surfaces became ever whiter and larger. The blocks became more massive and grandiose. Floes heaved together to form barriers. Flakes streaked through the air.

The engines sang evenly. Reimer was heading straight for the geographic pole. In a straight line, he headed for the first destination, now himself highly impressed by the adventurous nature of the undertaking.

The floor picture changed. The surfaces of the dark

Water melted into gullies and rivulets, the white-grey of the icy landscape spread out more and more. After a quarter of an hour's flight, we seemed to have reached the inner Arctic.

Gutmann commented: "Atmospheric disturbances."

"I've noticed that too," confirmed Reimer.

"But don't disturb us in the course."

"Can you land at the pole?" asked Gutmann.

"You must already have polar fever!" hissed Recke.

"Surely you're at least allowed to ask?" Gutmann felt insulted.

Reimer was more complaisant. "Of course I assume you can land. As far as I know, everything is flat there. We'll soon be able to see for ourselves. However, I'm not thinking of making a landing myself. If we sustain undercarriage damage, we can make a cross!"

He looked over at Gutmann, who was pressing his face against the windows of his cabin and looking over. His left hand pointed downwards. "How much longer?" came his question.

"About half an hour," Reimer replied.

"I've done the maths too. It will be a festive moment!"

"Solemnly," Recke repeated as usual. "What do you do on such occasions?"

"Tilt half a cup!"

"What is it, Gutmann?"

"3 S K!"

"Are you trying to tease us?"

"Not at all. Have a look behind the second seat next to you," Gutmann called over evenly.

Recke immediately did as instructed. "Eureka!" he exclaimed.

"The stargazer actually stowed away the stolen bottles with us."

"Didn't I promise that? - A hearty sip is allowed. I've already got mine with me as a precaution."

"Children, compare your measurements!" demanded Reimer.

"It's almost time now. We want to fly exactly over the pole."

The captains immediately complied with the request. After a few minutes, Recke bent over Reimer's shoulder to read the speedometer. Then he looked at the last position and the map. "Ten minutes to go - by golly again!"

Reimer flew lower. Three pairs of eyes stared spellbound at the flat white surface, which spread out like an immense white sheet. A seemingly endless white desert. An iridescent pale light lay over the area and cast a magical spell.

The men's tension grew. Five minutes - three

...

"Here!"

Circling. - Checking the position - The Pole!

"Cheers! - Great cognac! - A memorable thing! - 1945,

- Germans at the Pole! - Cheers again!"

"Just three laps of honour!" said Reimer. Unfortunately, we have to continue straight away and fly to the magnetic brother. Otherwise we won't have enough fuel. Unfortunately ..."

All three men felt excited and agitated. Having just flown over the pole was an experience. Favour of fate?

After the last turn, the aircraft flew equatorwards again, towards the Canadian side. Even further away from home.

Suddenly Gutmann shouted from next to him: "Listen, Recke, don't you want to see if the radio works?"

"Why is that?" The man from Kassel was astonished.

"An experiment," Gutmann asked urgently. "Why don't you try sending the letters ZYX?"

"What if we give ourselves away?"

"Hardly," Gutmann said. "Why don't you try it?"

"Out of the question. Where do you think you're going? - We're flying with a secret order!"

Gutmann turned his face away and looked through the panes on the other side. He was disgruntled. During a later position test, he only gave short, factual answers.

"Strange fellow, Gutmann," Recke said to Reimer. He knew that Gutmann was listening in. "What good would it do him if I followed his crazy idea?"

Gutmann did not react to the conversation between the two friends in the Führer's cockpit. Reimer just shrugged his

shoulders and continued to gaze intently at the white land. The polar magic took possession of him. The two other captains also silently succumbed to the strange mood.

Still an infinite polar expanse. Emerging elevations on the ground cast grey shadows away from the light source. Sharp ridges jagged in the contrast between the pale white and the shadowy darkness.

Tiredness wanted to come over the airmen, but the excitement of the great experience was stronger. They continued to stare unwaveringly. The aircraft flew quite low.

"Will we see polar bears at sea?" Reimer asked quietly, speaking more to himself. It was a great wish he had in his heart, like a child longing for a certain toy. He sat in his seat, leaning forward slightly.

"Shall I relieve you?" asked Recke.

"Thank you," Reimer replied. "It would be an awkward climb. We'd end up smashing a windscreen. Something like that in this cold weather outside. - brrr! ..."

"I only meant it like that!" weakened Recke.

"But here - do you want Pervitin?"

"Not at the moment. I would like to wait with the stimulant. You shouldn't get used to it too much."

Quarter hour after quarter hour passed. The sky became paler and dimmer. Greenish lights

twitched across the firmament. Again it was Recke who broke the long silence. "I wonder if all this has been ice since time immemorial?" This time Reimer turned round in astonishment. And both instinctively sensed that Gutmann was also looking over eagerly. A simultaneous glance to the pulpit on the right confirmed the feeling. "There are only hypotheses about that." Reimer answered slowly. "But somehow I think it's possible that it must not always have been like this."

"Do you have any reasons for this assumption?"

"Of course, Recke! Just think of Spitsbergen; the coal seams there are proof of an earlier flora. I also believe that Greenland must once have been a fertile green island. A rapid and progressive glaciation later covered this land with a deadly layer of ice. It is possible that the alleged Atlantis catastrophe is related to this. But it is also possible that the large island was easier to colonise in the early Viking Age. By the way - I once heard that cornflowers are even starting to grow again on Greenland. In the course of the general glacial retreat, it may well be that at least the southern part of the formerly green land will become cultivable again."

"I can tell you even more about it," Gutmann spoke up. "I also know what Reimer has just said and can add to his knowledge. Because in civilian life I have also

I was engaged in the study of Iranian writings and was able to learn from them that the Vendidad in the Avesta tells of a catastrophe that befell a primeval race living in the formerly warm Arctic regions, which was driven out and partly destroyed by the sudden onset of the ice age winter. In the aforementioned Vendidad, Ahura Mazda, the White Lord, speaks to Zarathustra, among others: - Only once a year do the stars, moon and sun set there. And the inhabitants hold for a day what is a year. - I have memorised this passage in the book well, because it captivated me then just as much as the dreamlike reality among us does today. This reference, which also refers to the course of the stars, is, in my opinion, proof. This knowledge could only come from an earlier knowledge of the place and could never be a hypothesis, since the astronomy of ancient civilisations was based on careful observation. I myself am convinced that the pole was even the primeval paradise!"

"Nope -" grumbled Recke. "Now you're starting to lay it on thick!"

"You don't have to believe it," came over the microphone. "But I want to tell you more, which even Reimer will hardly know; the well-known researcher Dacqué will hardly be a stranger to you and is undoubtedly a recognised scientific authority. He also refers to ancient traditions that green forests once grew in the Arctic.

Even grapevines. Furthermore, geological researchers have unearthed fossilised plant remains from underneath strata and deposits, confirming the presence of the above-mentioned plants and creatures. The investigations revealed that it was very warm in this area during the Tertiary period and that a lush flora flourished. Science confirms old legends. So I say again: the pole is the former paradise of the Golden Age. Somewhere in these vast, lonely spaces lies the mysterious island of the Hyperboreans and if a new era of the human race dawns in the future, this will be connected with the old polar myth, just as all cultural fertilisation has come from the north up to now. The legendary Atlantean culture was also Nordic in origin. And I would like to add to Reimer's correct references that finds were also made on the Greenland he mentions, which provided evidence of ancient Nordic culture. Danes, including Rasmussen, as well as a Canadian researcher, found valuable material under the present glacial ice, which became known as the 'Thule culture'.

Recke puffed. "I can't imagine how you can even dig in these areas."

"Not here, of course. But at the ice edge. The archaeologists will not have had an easy time of it."

"How do you explain the fact that no traces of the Atlantis culture were found in more easily accessible places?" Recke's interest began to grow.

"According to speculation, Atlantis consisted of several very large islands which, according to Hanns Hörbiger's theory, sank from the moon - our current satellite - before it orbited the earth. According to Hörbiger, a great catastrophe occurred at that time and a huge tidal wave circled the globe in the direction of the equator. In the traditions of mankind, this cosmically influenced event was referred to as the Flood. However, offshoots of this ancient culture have been identified. The well-known Africanist Leo Frobenius convincingly linked his finds in Jorubaland to this, as they had no negroid elements. Strangely enough, the German geologist and strandline researcher Edmund Kiß also found an oversized stone head in the Bolivian Altiplano near Tiahuanaco that had purely Nordic features. Incidentally, Kiß confirmed the accuracy of the Hörbiger theory on the basis of his research results in the Andean highlands. The latest speculations also point to the Dogger Bank area around Heligoland, which was still called Heiligland in the annals and old maps until the seventeenth century."

"Then you also believe in the Plato report?" asked Renner, without taking his eyes off the direction of flight. Despite listening in, he was attentively engaged in guiding the aircraft and paying attention to the course.

"Yes," Gutmann replied simply. "If only because Plato couldn't afford to be ignored by those around him."

to be misunderstood or regarded as a fraud and a liar. In addition, the literary genre of a historical or fantastic novel did not yet exist at that time, as can be proven from similar or earlier writings. If Plato had nevertheless invented this story, he would undoubtedly have made it up even better for his own purposes."

The captain from Kassel also observed the landscape and the airspace. Nevertheless, he said tensely: "It's strange that we've been stuck in Drontheim, far removed from world history, for a lifetime and don't know how to kill the boredom. Now, of all times, we were actually getting to know each other. We could have spent a lot of time talking about these things in more detail."

"We would have had time. But whether there would be interest is questionable. Everything has its time. You often have to take the circumstances into account!" lectured Gutmann.

"Which one?"

As Gutmann remained silent, Recke continued: "The Flood in connection with the Atlantic catastrophe is actually more realistic than the saga form in the Bible."

"I can also offer a little bit of knowledge here," Reimer interjected. "The biblical saga form is not a direct transcription, but has been taken from older sources and partly copied and partly changed as required. The ancient Indian book Vana-Parva of the Mahabharata, the book

Siva Purana and one of the oldest, the Hari Purana, all tell of the great flood in epic form. For anyone familiar with the biblical version, Jehovah's decision to punish humanity is a repetition of the much older Brahma version in the Hari Purana. The flood is also treated in a similar way in the original Gilgamesh epic.

"Oh blimey!" Gutmann shouted. "I know that too, but I thought it was a bit too high for you."

"Do we look that stupid?" asked Recke, offended. The Linzer grinned.

"I can tell you something else strange," Gutmann said again in a tidy voice. "Since Reimer was already talking about the Bible, the creation of the world in the first book of Genesis came about in the same way. The original Hebrew text of the Massorah describes Jehovah as the creator of the world in exactly the same way as Vishnu, the All-Pervading One, is described in the Canti Parva, which is thousands of years older. If you open the first chapter of the Indian law book Manus, you will find the beginning of Genesis almost word for word. The most curious thing, however, is the fact that an ancient myth of the Quechua Indians in the Andes also recounts the creation of the world almost word for word. For me personally, this provides evidence that allows us to draw conclusions about cultural links from the Atlantean period, as Kiß did when he uncovered the Nordic head in the Altiplano."

"Then the Bible would be a copy of older works." The

Kasseler could not hide his surprise.

"Yes," said Reimer and Gutmann almost simultaneously. The latter added: "But that also has its good side, because in this way the oldest myths of mankind of our earth period are popularised - by plagiarists - even if the origin is concealed."

"Why are we thinking of all this right now?" Recke was almost excited.

There was silence for a moment. Then it came softly from the right: "We are under the spell of the Pole!" Reimer looked at the restless Konipass needle. "It's all very interesting," he said after a while. "But now - please give us a navigation test!"

Soldierly sobriety returned to the men. The new readings taken with the celestial compass were fine. The technical part of their mission had been completed perfectly and satisfactorily on the basis of all the results so far. Soon they would have circumnavigated the magnetic pole.

Recke compared the maps with the landscape. White paper and white-grey areas, that was correct. Most of the heights, chasms and barriers were unmeasured and more fictitious than actual. Estimating the distance from the geographic pole to the magnetic pole on the overall map, he came to the surprising conclusion that this distance was just as great as the distance from the Porsangerfjord to the pole overflown.

The route changed again. The dark patches and gullies of the Arctic Ocean reappeared, growing bigger and bigger. Gigantic icebergs of grandiose appearance enlivened the show. They had reached the end of the polar centre, this time on the opposite side.

"We're flying into Canada now!" shouted Reimer. "I must ask you to keep a very close eye on the airspace. An encounter with Canadian aircraft, especially those of enemy weather squadrons, is a distinct possibility."

"Land between drift ice in sight!" reported Gutmann.

"Already seen it!" Reimer added: "According to the map, it's Axel-Heiberg-Land."

"We could have reached the magnetic pole in about two and a half hours," Recke said again.

"That would be good, because there must be something wrong with me here," Gutmann was heard speaking into the microphone. Reimer immediately jumped up. "Jeez, don't spoil our flight! What's going on?"

"I don't know that myself. I'm worried about some noises. We should have landed earlier. Maybe we would have noticed something."

"Why didn't you talk about it straight away?" Reimer's tone clearly sounded reproachful. "See to it that you find out immediately where a mistake is supposed to be!"

"That's easy to say," Gutmann replied. "We

will probably not be able to avoid a landing."

"Tube druff!" Recke urged the Linzer to fly fast. "Make us whizz around the magnetic pole at a monkey-like speed of one hundred and seventy-five antelopes per second. Maybe we'll be faster than the disaster Gutmann suspected!"

Reimer immediately followed Recke's advice. The song of the engines sounded brighter, the machine shot forwards and the murky land at their feet slid back as if pulled away.

"This monkey ride will break us even faster!" Gutmann howled from the right. "Something's going on with me, if only I knew ..."

"I don't understand," Reimer replied excitedly.

"We checked the aircraft thoroughly before take-off in Vernäs. Flying in also went without a hitch!" Nevertheless, he reduced the speed again. Full utilisation of the machine was more dangerous when it came to gaining time.

"Funny bloke, the Gutmann!" grumbled Recke.

"Finds that something is going on and doesn't know what. If he gets shot in the head, he scratches his knee first!"

"You sit over here!" Gutmann shouted angrily, as he could hear every conversation through the headphones. "Then you'll think you're walking on a mine."

"Don't make a fuss," Reimer placated.

"If there really is something wrong at Gutmann, then

The situation is far too serious for us to be at loggerheads. If there's no other way, then we'll have to land. Because if Gutmann can't find a fault in the cabin - surely it won't indicate a material fault? -"

"I couldn't explain it any other way," came from the right. "Hopefully we'll find a favourable landing site somewhere," continued Linz. He turned round with a worried expression. "According to the maps, we'll be able to land near the magnetic pole. They show enough areas. We'll have to hurry if we don't want to freeze up."

The man from Kassel grumbled: "We'll have blue noses! Our Christmas at home in winter will be a midsummer night's dream."

The aircraft continued southwards. One of the eastern Parry Islands appeared between the ice and water, soon followed by the narrow western spur of Devon Island. Then drift ice again until Franklin Island came into view.

"Now we're already in Canada!" Reimer said it matter-of-factly. Nevertheless, he had that strange feeling of awe that strikes everyone who sees another continent for the first time. For all three of them, it seemed to be the great adventure of their lives to suddenly be able to get to know the end of the world and the new continent without any inner preparation. They had no way of knowing that they had just drawn a card from a pack that fate had in store for them. Since Gutmann's alarm, Reimer paid double attention to the

noises from the engines and the functioning of the equipment. Everything he checked was in order. The man from Kassel took it upon himself to scrutinise the airspace, which was now becoming dangerous, with increased attention and to determine new positions. Another waterway. The Barrowstreet. And still ice in between. Despite the heated combinations and cabins, the planes felt the cold. Then even further southwards. Sommerset Island rose as the coast rose. The plateau of the island was tundra. As was the northern half of Axel Heiberg Land, which we had already flown over.

"If we maintain our leisurely four hundred kilometres per hour, so to speak, we'll be across the island in half an hour. Then only the narrow Bellotstrasse will separate us," explained the man from Linz.

It was a majestic but oppressive country. Despite the monotony and the seemingly endless expanses, the men in the aeroplane never tired of observing everything. Although they were already in the zone of the polar Eskimos, they noticed no trace of human presence. Then, all of a sudden, on the icy southern shore of the island, dark dots on the move! - The machine swooped down like a bird of prey. Reimer was the first to shout: "There - seals - off - no, walruses - it's walruses!"

"Yes, walruses!" Gutmann echoed, while Recke stretched his neck forwards. "The first animals. We didn't see any polar bears and not even any spouting whales."

Reimer did not miss the opportunity to take an extended

loop around the animals. The aeroplane roared low over the dark, shiny bodies. The animals could be seen waddling excitedly across the beach; their open maws looked like dark red dots from which the terrible tusks gleamed white. Some animals hurriedly slipped into the splashing water and dived. And as if moved by a magical hand, flocks of brown-feathered birds suddenly took to the air, which had hitherto perched contemplatively on the slopes. And then - a little further to the side - animals again.

Slipping to the right, the men saw some alxies. With their beaks raised steeply, they eyed the giant bird that seemed so strange to them, making such a tremendous noise. Their wings fluttered.

Reimer pulled the control stick and climbed higher again. A glance at the instruments showed him that the magnetic needle in the compass was dancing like crazy. He said to his comrades: "We're now over the Bellot Strait. Straight ahead of us is the northernmost point of the Canadian mainland. The Boothia Peninsula. In half an hour we'll have reached the magnetic pole!"

"The new navigation system has proven itself one hundred per cent!" Recke replied. "This means that we have satisfactorily completed three of our four individual orders. That only leaves us with number four - X-point!"

The new peninsula of the continent also showed a snowy tundra landscape. Reimer now flew at a higher altitude again to protect himself against surprises from the air.

to be secured. The distance to the next larger airfields of the enemy was only about five to six flying hours. At higher flight speeds, it was even less. The men's senses, sharpened by previous enemy flights, were on the alert.

There - finally - the furthest destination of their order! The geographical position of the magnetic pole in the north had been reached. The point, almost at the edge of the Arctic Circle, which, like a symbolic boundary marker, pointed the way to the civilisation of the other, now hostile hemisphere. The new navigation device showed the exact position and the aircraft descended.

Loneliness all around. The Arctic Ocean beat lazily against the coast around Cape Adelaide, where the magnetic pole lay. The twilight remained unchanged in the sky.

Recke was the first to speak. "I believe we are the first German soldiers of this war who will set foot on the American continent not as prisoners, but as enemies!"

"That's true," Reimer admitted. "Strange - the war against America isn't really that popular here. After all, there are many people of German descent living here who today bear arms against the people of their ancestors. Against a country in whose struggle for freedom and whose culture we played a significant part!"

Recke agreed. "Of course; we have nothing against America and America hardly has anything against us. However - with their merciless and unsoldierly air raid

My sister lost her life against Dresden. The murder of hundreds of thousands of women and children was despicable! Look - we fight as soldiers against soldiers - but they destroyed the culture and murdered mercilessly where German hearts beat ..."

"You didn't tell us about that - because of your sister," Gutmann called over. "Nevertheless - believe me, it's not hatred, but incitement!"

"That's right! - But the clique of haters leads the masses of the agitated and continues to stir them up! You can believe the celebrity in one thing: it is the Morgenthau people who laid the foundations for the chaos that is soon to come in Casablanca! - Because I no longer believe in a turnaround - I no longer believe in a turnaround myself. We are undoubtedly too late with our war-turning weapons." Recke said it calmly, like a man who has come to terms with the facts.

Reimer pushed the stick to get close to the ground. "You're right, Günther - I don't really believe in a turnaround anymore either. We've already squandered too many chances. But that means that we'll be here as soldiers today, but as prisoners tomorrow. From Greenland ..." He angled the plane eastwards. "So - now let's first see where we can land briefly. Somewhere here ..."

Three pairs of eyes scrutinised the area below them. The men realised that a bad landing with a crash would mean the end of their mission. And therefore no return home.

It was the Linzer himself who found a spot in sight of the Boothia Gulf. "Keep your fingers crossed, kids!"

"If only that goes well ..." sighed Recke. "It's all still full of snow."

Never before in his life had Reimer landed with so much care and caution. Snow dust and shreds of snow flew high towards the rear. The throttled engines hummed dully. The aircraft swayed as it taxied out.

Reimer had paid close attention to the surface and had to make a slight turn to avoid a small dip. Then he had managed the feat of bringing the machine entrusted to him to a halt without breaking.

Gutmann was the first to impatiently throw back the cabin roof. "Bloody hell, it's still really cold in there!" Stiff-legged, he tried to climb out of the machine.

The second canopy flew back. The sudden rush of fresh air stung the faces of the two occupants almost painfully. They also began to climb out. Their legs were stiff and clammy. They didn't really want to obey. Reimer switched off the engines before jumping off the ground. Afterwards he said:

"Hopefully they'll start up again later. In the cold ... But I have to save every drop of fuel. Otherwise you'll find lonely icy men on Greenland later."

The men flapped their arms to stimulate blood circulation in the cold and stretched their legs. "Don't you notice anything?" asked Recke, after rubbing his nose.

"What?" Reimer was still stomping like an Indian dance.

"Well - we've been travelling for almost fifteen hours and hardly notice any difference between day and night."

"Here, half a year is night and half a year is day," Gutmann explained with a subtle smile. "We explained this repeatedly in Vernäs, where we were also close to the Arctic Circle!"

"It's really nice when we have light nights. It makes flying easier. But still - I suddenly feel really tired now!" Reimer yawned provocatively.

"Careful - lockjaw!" warned Recke with a smile.

"However - I'm tired too. Will take Pervitin after all!"

"I've already taken it," Gutmann claimed.

"Strangely enough, I can't complain about being tired. I'll take Reimer's place!"

The man from Linz was not averse to the idea. "If you want to?

..." They made their way to the right-hand fuselage, where Gutmann had been sitting. Reimer was the first to climb up and thoroughly examined the second control unit, the connections and cables, but couldn't find anything. Together with Recke, he slapped the thick gloves

against the metal parts of the fuselage and the wing. Everything was solid. Not a crack, not a loosening.

Meanwhile, Gutmann had crawled into the left-hand cabin on the other side. Recke followed him with a sour look. "What's that stargazer doing here, hey?"

"Leave him alone," said Reimer inattentively. He was busy looking for a mistake. Shaking his head, he said after a while: "I'm in favour of starting again. Maybe Gutmann was overexcited ..." He broke off when Recke abruptly grabbed his arm.

"But now it's too colourful for me!" rumbled the man from Kassel.

"The stargazer has been tampering with my place the whole time. Come over here, Herbert!"

They trudged awkwardly around the chassis. When they got to the other side, all they could see at first was the bent back of their companion. Recke swung himself up first. Carefully and slowly, as if he wanted to go out to catch animals. He saw Gutmann completely engrossed in handling the radio. Now Recke climbed all the way up. His face was red with anger and only his cold nose was pale blue. "You damn carrion, you crazy boy - you must have a polar sting!"

Gutmann looked up, startled. Unlike Recke, he was suddenly pale. He wanted to say something back, but his lips only twitched.

"Gutmann has sparked!" shouted Reimer from Kassel, who appeared next to him. "Just want to know - what and why? ..."

The Linzer pushed **himself** up to the cabin opening and

slid into his seat. "Is that really true, Gutmann?"

"Yes - it's true! I had to do it. But I can't tell you yet ..."

Above all, Reimer tried to restart the engines. Several times in vain. The cold cooled quickly. Then - Reimer already looked worried - a few times: tack - tack - a slight tremor and the propellers began to circle again. "Wow - we've been lucky again! - Because of your imagination, stargazer, we almost froze at the pole. Teixl-" he added in his dialect. When he turned round, Recke had just drawn his pistol. "What did you spark?"

Now Reimer started: "You stupid bastards! Do you want to wage private war?" He slapped Recke's hand up, which let go of the cold steel grip of the gun. The pistol clattered to the floor of the seat at Reimer's feet. "Put the glove back on, Günther! - And you Gutmann - come out with the truth! - Quick, quick - there's no time to lose if we want to make do with the petrol; so -"

At that moment - Gutmann had the receiver round his neck - he raised his hand and commanded silence. Recke also jumped into his seat and squeezed in next to Gutmann. Curious, he pressed his left ear to the outer half of the receiver.

-tü-tü-Z-Y-X-Z-Y-X-stop - await you - stop - position -
- -" A crashing and rattling noise interrupted. "- new - -
ordw - - zig degrees - - ad brei - - tü-tü -.

"Damn it!" Gutmann raged angrily. "What's going on?" He fiddled angrily. Now - repeat: "Z - Y - X ... are waiting for you ..."

Recke made a face like Dummerjahn. He had heard the call sign that Gutmann had asked him to send some time ago. And ZYX had got in touch! - They were expected. Who was ZYX?"

The engines were still running at full throttle. Reimer, probably very curious himself, waved them off. "Go on, Gutmann, get back to your cabin! - We have to get going ..."

"I promised to relieve you! - I'm still fresh. You hurry over -"

"No, that's not possible, Gutmann. If I leave you behind with Recke, you'll be at loggerheads again. All it takes is for one of you to have a tantrum, then adjüs ... So hurry up - march, march! ..."

Gutmann hesitated. Then Recke gave him a push. "Go on, go on ..."

It took him a while to get into his pulpit. The roofs were closed again, the windows slightly frosted. "We have to wait for some internal heat," Reimer called out. "Gutmann, make sure you keep a close eye on the runway ahead. So we don't catch any holes!"

This time it was Recke, who was now receiving new signals into the device. "Great radio," he said, "there's a whole sky concert going through the air!"

"Our good man has woken up the whole world," claimed Reimer. "Hey, stargazer - why don't you explain

quickly?

what it all means! -"

"Not now - there's not enough time - just one thing: you have to fly according to my instructions! I've taken a map over to the cabin. Or more simply - I'm flying with my controls. Reimer can doze a bit and you, Recke, keep an eye on the ground and the airspace. We can manage with the fuel because the new route is shorter."

"That can only be treason!" Recke said tonelessly. His strong body trembled with excitement.

"Treason? - No!" Gutmann shouted passionately. "No and again - no!"

"Do you have a second order that neither of us should know about yet?"

"Order?" A short pause. - Then: "Order? - Yes! ..." The man from Linz ran his gloved hands over the edges of the discs, which were still showing coating.

"That's an unfortunate action when a team is played off against each other. First they say: Secret order, Recke, take your place as the most senior ... - Then, Captain Gutmann, another order! - Who is supposed to understand that? - Gutmann, I almost think you're playing an irresponsible game that we don't understand!"

"I will try to explain to you during the flight. Let's just get out of here first!" He saw Reimer merely nod in agreement, while Recke looked doggedly ahead.

The machine slowly rolled up. Once again, fine plumes of snow blew away from the side of the chassis. A few

dark shreds of underlying moss lichen.

Reimer had to pull himself together. Contrary to his expectations, the cold outside had refreshed him despite its unpleasant properties, but his heated combination suit had awakened his need for sleep even more. "Give me a tablet up front, Günther! - Pervitin ..." His eyes widened convulsively as he stared at the track.

It seemed to be smooth. Ten metres, twenty metres, forty - the white snow hurt to look at. Yellow and purple circles danced before Reimer's eyes. Gutmann shouted from the right. "Watch out!"

The right side of the machine fell off with a small jolt. The right undercarriage had hit a hollow and could not quite get out. The machine made a slight involuntary turn.

Reimer immediately tightened the rudder and throttled the engines again. There was an even greater turn, a small jerk forwards in the new direction, and then the aircraft hung again.

"Out! - Check!" Reimer ordered as he brought the aircraft to a complete stop.

The canopies flew back again and the other captains jumped to the ground and towards the right undercarriage, much faster this time. What they saw was not particularly pleasing.

The bike was stuck in a hollow that was half blown over by the snow and could only be recognised at close range. Gutmann had only actually recognised it at the last moment

so that his warning could no longer be stopped. Due to the rotation of the machine, the wheel had slipped forward by about a metre in the longitudinal direction of the hollow oval, but was unable to climb the almost ridiculously small incline due to the weight on it.

"We have to put something underneath to prevent the slide!" shouted Gutmann.

"Easy for you to say," Recke replied. "We've got nothing with us!"

The men looked at each other, perplexed, as they had not acclimatised and were freezing terribly. They thought they were wearing a numb mask instead of a face. The draught from the slowly rotating propellers whipped up the cold air. Reimer no longer dared to switch off the engines completely.

Gutmann tried to scrape up the ground with his fur boots to uncover moss lichen that could be used as a rolling surface. It turned out to be so laborious that it wasn't worth it without a tool. He therefore abandoned his endeavour and hurried back to the hull, where he took out a larger tool. As quickly as his thick clothing would allow him, he raked free scraps of moss next to the hollow. Recke had followed his example without saying a word.

It took quite some time until they had paved over the hollow with a thick layer of the matted vegetation in the continuation of the wheel line. "Try to start, Reimer! - Maybe we can get the box out now."

The engines hummed more strongly again and the propellers described a glassy circle. The aircraft started up again and this time jerked forwards a little. But it didn't quite make it over the small slope.

Standstill again. Linz also jumped out of the aeroplane and brought a roll of rope with him. "Lay it underneath in serpentine coils!"

Once again, it was Gutmann who grabbed the rope first and hastily took it over. Recke helped him and Reimer hurried back to his seat.

When they tried to roll up again, the wheel almost reached the edge, then suddenly the entire moss underlay slid down into the trough together with the rope on top. However, they had gained one metre. They repeated the attempt several times and the men got really hot at work. It took almost an hour before they managed to get the right-hand chassis out of the hollow without breaking it.

Like Reimer, the men had now also had to fight off the great fatigue that a long-distance flight inevitably brought with it. Recke was almost reconciled with Gutmann, as the cognac he had smuggled with him had become a valuable source of warmth. Unusually, the cold that still prevailed here had taken its toll on them. The stimulant they'd been given had also left them exhausted as they carried out their work with haste and all their strength.

Just as they were preparing to climb into their cabins, a rapidly increasing hum interrupted the silence of the white wasteland. Shortly afterwards, a rapidly gliding shadow darkened the bright expanse of the landscape.

"Into the box in a flash!" yelled Recke. "Planes overhead ..."

The two hopped up like clumsy toads and threw themselves into their seats. Whilst they were still closing the flaps of the cabins, Reimer took off. Without paying any particular attention to the terrain ahead of him, he risked a speedy approach.

"We didn't hear the other noise when our own engine was whirring!" Recke defended himself as Reimer cursed violently despite his tension. "Yes, now we've got a cold arse!" he had to confirm.

The aircraft had not yet left the ground when a whole series of small snow fountains whipped up on the field in front of it.

"The guy is shooting at us with guns!"

Reimer stepped on the gas and the twin metal bird streaked across the surface like the shadow of a heron. As it came off the ground, the aircraft received its first hits in the wings. The projectiles hit with a vicious thump.

"No more grit!" Reimer eased off the throttle and started to land again. "There's nothing more to want ..." During the touchdown, the enemy aircraft thundered just over the German aircraft and described an arc. It was only now that the three captains saw

clearly the Canadian licence plates.

Closing the sweeping arc into a circle, the Canadian also hit the ground and rolled out. The pilot of the enemy aircraft was a master, as he drove straight towards the Germans on the snow runway from the front in order to block new take-off attempts. He brought the aircraft, which was recognisable as a two-seater, to a halt just in front of the twin construction. The fixed on-board weapons also pointed directly at the enemy.

"Don't shoot," warned Reimer when he noticed that Recke had picked up a submachine gun. "They'll blow us to bits before we've scratched them. Wait and see and make sure they don't get our order. Especially the card with the X-dot! - If necessary, pour petrol over everything that's paper and set fire to it!"

"I'll take it," said Recke resolutely. "You and Gutmann have to make the wall for me."

The roof of the cabin flew back from the Canadian and a hooded man jumped to the ground. He had a pistol in his right hand. "Hello, Germans!" he shouted. The second man was crouched in his seat and had - it was easy to guess - his hand on the trigger of an on-board weapon.

As the first one approached, the captains noticed that he had wrapped a scarf around the handle of the pistol. Understandably because of the cold. His right glove was dangling from a string.

"You are prisoners!" the Canadian yelled to the three

Men. "Caught ..." The man had respectable guts. Despite the noise of two engines, his words had been audible. He came very close to the left hull and first urged Reimer and Recke to climb down. Both of them obeyed with compulsion, but were prepared not to let anything fall into their opponent's hands. Recke had previously slipped his pistol into his right fur boot.

They had barely stood on the snow field when Gutmann jumped down from next door without being asked. He came down rather awkwardly as he didn't want to part with a sack he had with him. It was dripping out of the sack.

"Weapons?" The brave Canadian's fierce red face looked at her demandingly.

Reimer waved him off. He carried his pistol under the combination, where it was not visible, but not ready to hand either. Recke only mumbled something indistinct. The noise of the engine swallowed up any words that weren't shouted.

The stranger held the gun in front of their noses and quickly took hold of it at waist height. From the movement of his mouth, it might have been an "OK" that he muttered. Then he looked at Gutmann, who seemed to be standing there undecided.

"Hello, fellow!"

Gutmann pretended not to notice the request to come. Slightly stooped, he trotted towards the enemy aircraft, dragging the bag behind him, the tip of which was black with wetness. He made such a

funny, helpless figure that the Canadian showed an ironic smile.

"Come on - join us!" the man called to Reimer and Recke. He indicated with his hand that they should follow Gutmann.

"No!" said Recke with a defiant expression. Reimer was desperate at the moment because he couldn't find a way to get the papers away from the enemy.

Now the Canadian's grey eyes took on a dangerous gleam. He raised his pistol.

Reimer and Recke threw up their arms to indicate that they would give way. Then the wind blew an indistinct call over. It sounded like a long drawn-out "Heeeeeeh ..."

All three turned their heads towards the other aircraft. They saw Gutmann lying on the ground and slowly picking himself up. He had already reached the front of the pilot's seat. When he stood upright again, he laboriously brushed the snow off his thick clothes, then picked up the bag and looked inside. Apparently to make sure nothing was broken, as there was already a trace of damp on the twin machine.

The Canadian who had stayed behind leant out and shouted at the German. "You damned bloody fool ..." At that second, Gutmann yanked out his submachine gun with his bare hands and swiftly aimed it at the enemy above him. A short staccato of shots came hard on the wind. The man in the aeroplane reared up abruptly, then fell

limply over the edge of the entrance.

The three men on the German aircraft froze for a moment. The lightning-fast events had taken them all by surprise. "Damned ..." yelled the Canadian. His half-lowered pistol jerked up again. "Damned ..."

Recke didn't have time to bend down for his weapon in his boot. He had the presence of mind to get his glove off quickly, as never before, and hurled it in the man's face.

Bang, bang, went the gun. The Canadian had fired unperturbed, even though he was unable to aim. While his troublesome glove fell to the ground, Reimer, who had been standing next to him, had thrown himself at him. The impact caused both men to stagger and roll into the snow. Recke immediately jumped in, grabbed the dropped pistol and pressed it into the Canadian's hip.

"Another hands-up - but different this time!"

Reimer and the other man pulled themselves up. The latter breathed warm breath onto his bare right hand and then resignedly pulled on the dangling glove. He cursed, but his words were unintelligible.

Now Gutmann came back. Holding the pistol in front of him, he stepped towards the prisoner guarded by Recke. "Sorry for your comrade - I'm sorry for your comrade!" he shouted, making a sign of regret. "Do you know Shakespeare?"

The man nodded expressionlessly. Only his eyes were

suspiciously damp.

"Well - to be or not to be is the question! - According to Hamlet

..."

Reimer stepped towards Gutmann. "You made a bloody mess, stargazer!" he shouted in his ear. "But now you've made up for everything. I didn't give another fifty pfennigs for us. Didn't see a chance ..."

The man from Kassel went to Gutmann without taking his eyes off his man. "You've got a tick, Gutmann, but when it comes down to it, you're a smart bloke."

"Oh, leave it alone. We're soldiers!"

"Well, at least," shouted Reimer. "But what now?"

"Go over to the other machine and take over the petrol!" Gutmann thought the obvious. "Maybe the guy has a few drops left so he can fly back south a bit. If he gets to people, it won't be too bad for him."

"Run over there," said Recke. "I'll keep an eye out in the meantime."

Reimer trudged off with Gutmann in agreement. When they stood in front of the other machine, they saw that the second man was dead. A thin strip of frozen blood was visible on the outer fuselage wall. It came from the lower-hanging sleeve.

Gutmann couldn't quite look. He had never had to fight like this before. He felt sick. Reimer climbed up carefully, as if not to disturb a sleeping man, and looked over the man's body

away into the driver's seat. "It's still worth it with the petrol. We can even leave a few drops behind. The four of us will form a carrier or refuelling caravan using canisters. Let's go!"

He carefully put the dead man back into the seat so that the exit was clear. He threw a can behind the second seat down to the ground. It was even filled.

When both captains were back at their machine, it was Gutmann again who had his eyes everywhere.

"What's that puddle under the centrepiece of our apparatus?"

Reimer looked and winced. "You're not going to do that, are you? ..." His nostrils fluttered slightly as he tried to detect an odour. Then he jumped forward between the two fuselages to the centre section of the wings. "Our petrol! -"

Together with Gutmann, who had followed, he examined the centrepiece from below. The whole thing was very simple. Some of the shots fired by the Canadian had pierced the part containing the fuel. Now it was leaking like a battered boat.

Recke had also joined them, pushing the Canadian in front of him. The three companions looked at each other in despair. Only the prisoner understandably laughed derisively.

"No more sealing will help," shouted the man from Linz. "I want to check how much fuel is left!" He swung himself up to his seat and looked at the fuel gauge. "Hey, mates - with the loss

nothing more can be done!"

He switched off the engines and reduced the supply. All of a sudden, the powerful roar stopped and the men could hear each other again without difficulty. The noise of the second machine was no longer so strong. "Quick palaver, gentlemen - what now? -"

The men stamped briefly in the snow to keep warm. Gutmann advised: "Do it the other way round. - Use our remaining fuel to refuel the Canadian aircraft. We'll just have to change aircraft!"

"Three men in this box?" Reimer shook his head. "And the Canadian?" He threw an empty canister out of the cabin. "Gutmann, put it under a reject hole and use it to catch the petrol. Too bad about every drop!"

There was an awkward silence for a few minutes. Then Gutmann suggested: "I can only see two options. Either the three of us fly off together, two of us squeezed sardine-style into the second seat, and simply leave the Canadian behind, or I take him and only one of us with me! After landing at point ZYX," Gutmann's voice sounded insistent, "return again and pick up the second one."

"Not very possible," explained Recke. "One of us here alone - I think that's very dangerous. I would report myself ..."

"No!" Reimer replied harshly. "The solution must be different. Of course, we can't let this guy go to the dogs alone. The prisoner's statute burdens us with the responsibility for his life. One alone

We can't stay behind either, because we have to destroy our machine as quickly as possible so that we don't fall victim to another surprise. So I suggest we stay behind: Recke and I stay behind together and are picked up as soon as possible. You, Gutmann, must of course make sure that you do not give your prisoner the opportunity to overpower you during the flight. There is simply no other way, so any further debate is a waste of time and not militarily responsible!"

"That's difficult," Gutmann said, looking at the burly prisoner.

"Tie and fasten. Very simple!" said Recke. "Reimer and I clear out everything useful from our machine and build ourselves a snow house. They say the Eskimos in these latitudes also live in things like that. I read about it somewhere once ..."

"Tying the prisoner to the second seat and living in a snow house are useful ideas. As we all know, it always takes the longest to find the simplest solution!" With these words, Reimer took his seat again and began to clear out. He showed himself to be determined and energetic.

Gutmann and Recke forced the Canadian to come with them to his machine. There they pushed him into the second seat and had him help to lift the dead man out. Recke, being the strongest, let him slide gently to the ground and laid him down a little apart in

the snow. The Canadian pulled out a blanket from somewhere and threw it to Recke to cover the fallen man. They understood each other without words.

"We'll bury him when you're gone," the man from Kassel said to Gutmann. Then he told the prisoner to put his hands backwards, where he tied them together at the wrists. He had cut off a pair of straps from the inner equipment without further ado, which did an excellent job. The man was then strapped in with the seat belts. "Unfortunately, there's no other way," regretted Recke.

Reimer arrived with petrol cans and topped up the tanks.

When he returned, he handed Gutmann the maps. "Just take them!" he said when Gutmann showed him the special Canadian maps.

"Where to?" asked the Canadian, who had followed the departure preparations in amazement. "Europe - it's not possible!

..."

"Of course - we can hardly get to Europe with this machine," Reimer grinned in response. "Officer?"

"Yes - Lieutenant!"

"I would like to untie your hands if you give me your word of honour. Word of honour - understand?"

"Okay - I understand. You would'nt have trouble with me. - Errenwuord!"

"Then free his hands again, Gutmann!" he asked

Reimer for the prisoner. "He will keep his word ..."

"I prefer it that way too! It's a stupid feeling to have someone tied behind you." He shook the Canadian's hand.

"Word of honour, then!"

"Yes." The man closed his gloved hand around Gutmann's right hand with firm pressure.

"That's still the way to go," Recke interjected half aloud. "But if one of us had stayed behind alone, I wouldn't have trusted him ..." He turned round and went back to Gutmann's cabin with Reimer to clear it out. In the meantime, Gutmann himself orientated **himself** on the furnishings and equipment of the aircraft, which was still unfamiliar to him.

Twenty minutes later, the prey plane was ready to take off. "Don't get too far away from here," Gutmann asked. "Don't forget to lay out or mark an airborne sign to make it easier to find you again. I'll be back as soon as possible!"

"My comrade?" the Canadian asked, pointing with his hand to the dead man lying off to one side. It was obvious that he was very upset.

"Will be buried - burried!" explained Reimer.

"I'm astonished - are you not hunns?"

"Silly chap!" Gutmann shouted. "Have you been fed with Hun tales too?" He repeated to Recke, who, standing further away, hadn't quite understood: "He thinks we're Huns and as such ..."

"Does he think that we are probably man-eaters

would be," growled Recke angrily.

Gutmann stowed his pistol within easy reach by his knee in the fur boot on the inside of his leg, just in case. The Canadian couldn't do him any harm there if, contrary to expectations, he should nevertheless attempt an act of violence. He tucked the submachine gun behind his legs on the ground. He had taken the valuable sky compass himself and stowed it away. The direction of flight was perfectly clear to him.

The companions shook hands. "Break a leg, stargazer!" The Canadian saluted. The aircraft, which had been turned round earlier, started to taxi and thundered over the white surface. Plumes of snow dust rose up, then the plane detached itself from the ground and, slowly gaining altitude, flew into the grey twilight of the northern night.

Recke and Reimer sat in the closed cabin and discussed the situation. They realised that, despite a few ridiculously small holes, there could be no rescue for their aircraft at this point. They were depressed by the realisation that the flight they had begun with such high hopes would end with the loss of the test aircraft they had been entrusted with. Recke's prompt reproaches to Gutmann had been all too justified. The two men could not help feeling that Gutmann had been playing a game which, despite his grit and prowess, was against the rules of true flying comradeship. His previous hints were too unclear to form an understandable picture.

to be able to win.

"So get out - build a snow house!" Recke concluded the previous palaver. "Waiting here would be very comfortable and bearable; but if one or even more Canadian shooting wasps turn up, then we're finished and so is the crate. We won't get off lightly a second time."

"Yes - what must be, must be!" The Linzer was very dejected.

"There's no other way! - Let's start by clearing out everything we can use. Suggest we remove the seats, because we can hardly sit on the snow. I don't want to get a frozen or wet backside."

The men set about putting the suggestion into practice. They removed the seats and threw them outside. Then three warm blankets followed. Food, thermos flasks and cognac - Gutmann had had to sacrifice one bottle during his attack march on the Canadian aircraft - were brought to the ground by the man from Kassel himself. Likewise the two M-Pi's, which he temporarily wrapped in a blanket. Some tools, knives and other small items were also placed in a blanket. Reimer squeezed an overview map of northern Canada into his combination.

"Have we got everything we need, Herbert?"

"Yes," replied the man from Linz. "Here - the order. I'll burn it right away. I've got position X point in my head!"

"Then out with us. Goodbye - old crate!"

Reimer emptied a full canister of petrol into the seat and had taken a second one to the objects he had put aside. He soaked some more rags, tied a string to them, which he also made very wet with petrol, and then jumped in after Recke. He had thrown the order into the pool of fuel.

Recke rubbed his lighter and held it to the cord. It took a little while for the fire to catch and a small bluish flame slowly flickered upwards. Then suddenly the fire continued to glow as if it was being driven by an invisible hand.

"Get back!" shouted Recke. He and Reimer ran as hard as their legs could carry them.

While they were still running, they felt the tanbark rise. Sufficiently far away, they turned round. A bright flame rose with a loud crackling sound diagonally towards the draught from the driver's seat. Above it was a thick, thick black cloud of smoke that was growing in size.

The men continued walking backwards as a precaution. Then the first explosions began. First a few bangs that continued like a chain reaction, then a bright flash accompanied by a terrible crash. Debris flew into the air, trailed by a billowing cloud. The hydraulic left undercarriage collapsed like a bent stork leg and one half of the machine hit the ground, falling apart.

At the same time, the centrepiece popped up and the right

Part of the apparatus burst into flames. The radiating heat was so great that the snow all around evaporated with a hiss. Hot waves swept over the faces of the two pilots. Soot flakes impregnated the air. At the end of the drama, a tangled heap of twisted and melted metal parts remained, still glowing. A dark column of smoke stood out into the bright night like a giant warning finger.

Deeply shaken and with narrowed eyes, the two friends went to their recovered belongings. Reimer took out one of the two remaining bottles of cognac and handed it open to Recke.

"Tally-ho - hunt over!"

"Hunt off!" repeated the man from Kassel.

They lashed the knotted blankets to the two seats after taking out the submachine guns and slinging them on. They let the rope ends of the two pieces of luggage run out into a wide loop so that they could pull the seats along like a sledge. It was tedious, but it worked. Once the work was done, they walked over to the dead Canadian and dragged him to the hollow where they had sunk with the right undercarriage of their machine. They dug away the moss lichen and laid the man at the bottom of the oval pit. Then they piled up all the moss again, heaped back the snow on the sides and formed a small mound.

While Reimer stowed away the dead man's papers, which had been taken from him earlier, in order to hand them over to the captured Canadian.

Recke returned to the scene of the fire on their aircraft. He returned with a part of the propeller that had flown away.

"We don't have a cross," he said gruffly. So he heaved the flying sign into the snow at the head of the burial mound. Then they both paid their last respects to their fallen opponent.

The light of the bright nights lay like a dim veil over the lonely expanse of the polar landscape.

NULIAJUKANAIINAQ

Hamungah-jah, hamungah-ja,
hai-jah, hai-jah, uwangah...
Down towards the west, down
towards the west, heia, heia,
here I am ...

(Eskimo song)

The two airmen trudged with their dragging seats towards the nearby coast to the west of the Boothia peninsula. A nearby hill lured them to find a somewhat sheltered place to camp and await Gutmann's return. Still shaken by the great tragedy of their recent experience, they found it relatively easy to overcome their physical and mental fatigue.

They were too jaded to look at the watch. It seemed too much trouble to take off their gloves and then push back their sleeves to take a look at the dial. Nevertheless, it could only be a short time that separated them from the scene of their misfortune. As they rested for a few minutes during this sensory determination of time, they saw a row of dark dots coming rapidly towards them from halfway along the coast. The men pulled their submachine guns from their shoulders and stood still with their weapons cocked.

Slowly, the dots began to appear. Smaller and larger ones. Until the men could pick out dogs and sledges on which fur-clad men were crouching as they approached. Small, pointy-faced dogs with shaggy fur and bushy tails, smooth and spotted, then people whose faces protruded from a white oval of fur as if they were adorned with jewellery.

Between the yelping of the animals, you could already hear the howls of the people.

There were half a dozen sledges with just as many Eskimo men who stopped in front of the two airmen, travelling in a semi-circle. They jumped down from their long, flat-bottomed sledges, grinning and chattering. Almost all of their Mongolian-looking faces had chin beards or goatees and shaggy strands of hair peeked out of their fur hoods.

Some of the men had bows with them as weapons, their shape reminiscent of Tartar or Mongolian types. Nevertheless, they looked peaceful and their yellow teeth were bared. "Sunakiaq una?"

"Don't understand," Reimer tried to communicate in English.

An Eskimo stepped forward and spoke in English: "Who are you - who?"

"How are we supposed to explain that to them?" the man from Linz asked his companion.

Recke took a step forward and, after he had slung his weapon around his neck again, he spread his arms like wings and marked a bird's flight, to which he

humming sounds.

"Cupanuarpaupsuaq! ..." the Eskimos chattered and then stared in awe. The English-speaking man, who seemed to be a chieftain, repeated:

"Giant eagle!"

The airmen nodded in confirmation. Recke whispered in between: "Those guys talk a nice Kauder-Welsh. I could never learn ..."

"Ilibse qablunait - you - white men! - Uwagut netsilingmiut - we Netsilik Eskimos!" Another grin slid across the chief's face at this statement "Uwangah Aglumalogâq! isfit? - I am Aglumalogâq - and you?" he pointed at Reimer. To be on the safe side, he had repeated his words in English, otherwise Reimer would not have understood him.

"I'm Reimer, that one - Recke!"

"Rai-mer and Rek-ke. Good. picaivoq!"

The other Eskimo men repeated the names. Then they crowded in one after the other and called their own. Tiäksaq, Netsersuitsuarssuk, Itqilik, Inalusuarshugohk ...

The two airmen would have loved to cover their ears. They would never learn to repeat these words fluently. But they didn't have time to express their astonishment at this strange encounter. The leader of the Netsilik people asked where from and where to.

He was very lively. With words and gestures, he explained that the men from the nearby settlement on the coast were the

dark-coloured mushroom cloud and that the shaman had spoken of a lucky sign. Despite the dark colour of the smoke.

The other men were noisy in between. They all pointed in the direction from which the two planes had come. In the background of the vast landscape, the site of the fire stood out like a giant black flower.

"We want to look there!" said the chief, without waiting for the answers to his torrent of questions.

His people demanded. "Qablunait - white men, you're coming with us!"

Urging his men to be quiet, he offered Reimer a seat on his sledge and directed Recke to the nearest Itqilik. At his behest, the two seats with the luggage tied to them were stowed on other flat sledges. "Avaya - up!"

"Avayaja - pavungahjah! ..." repeated the hooded men repeated. Whips cracked through the frosty air, the small, thick-furred dogs yipped and barked. So the whole pack sat down again in on the move again.

While the short During the short journey, Recke and Reimer felt the cold rising more and more in their bodies as a result of the sleepless time. Both men shivered and gratefully took the caribou skins offered by their sledge men, which they put over their heads. In a few minutes they had reached the scene of the accident again, which they had previously left by trudging with difficulty

had. The Eskimos shrieked like a large flock of wild geese. "Avayaja!" they shouted, reaching for the scattered pieces of metal, which seemed to them to be valuable prey. As they rummaged around, they shouted words to their chief and looked at the two airmen.

"My people can make good use of the things here!" he said, translating the shouts. It sounded like a statement and a request at the same time.

"Take, take!" she encouraged Reimer, addressing the old man.

The Netsilik people collected eagerly and loaded their sledges. Metal parts were very popular with them. Reimer asked the chieftain to also load a piece of wing, on which the beam cross was still almost completely visible. It was a little out of the way and he intended to lay it out as a signal marker at their resting place later.

By now, the dodgy, bright night sky had darkened a little. The Eskimos sniffed the air and hurried to finish loading up what they thought were valuable scraps. Some shouted: "Qanik!
..."

"Snow is falling!" said the old man. "We must hurry to get to our settlement ..."

Again the Eskimos screamed and snapped, the huskies howled and the teams moved across the white expanse like a wild hunt. Letting out shrill cries, the

The men led their nimble animals, skilfully dodging small obstacles and rushing along, showing the white men their dexterity.

They hadn't been wrong before. During the great journey, individual large white flakes began to flutter from the sky. As they fell, they became more and more dense, forming a veritable flurry that made visibility difficult and unpleasant. Thanks to the weather-accustomed safety, the men found their way without difficulty and the dogs' instincts also made it easier for them to return home quickly.

Due to the snowfall, Reimer and Recke did not see much of the village they were being taken to. As they drove in, all the dogs were barking at the top of their voices, women, just like the men, came out of white snow huts and children stared in amazement at the white men.

The old man steered his vehicle in front of a snow structure with a caribou skull with elk-like antlers perched on its semicircular top and called out to Itqilik to bring Recke along as well.

"Qablunait, this is my house - you are my guests!" In front of the two of them, he had the luggage loaded into his den and then instructed them to crawl inside through the tunnel opening in front.

Warmth greeted the two friends. In the centre of the round room, two tranlamps were burning, providing light and warmth at the same time, and the floor was covered with caribou skins. A young girl crouched on

a fur camp and looked in amazement at the strangers from her slightly slanted eyes.

"Hungry?" asked the host who had followed.

The airmen both shook their heads. Reimer added: "Nothing to eat - just sleep!"

Shortly afterwards, with the help of the girl, the old man had prepared two warm beds of furs and furskins, which made the tired men feel like down. Stripped of their combinations and fur boots, they wrapped themselves up with a feeling of relief. There was no more room in their minds for caution. They were content to be safe for the moment and even the intense smell of fuel inside the den barely caught their attention.

"I'm all muddled in the head now," Reimer struggled to speak. "From one night in Vernäs to the next overnight stay with Canadian Eskimos - that's some magic. I think I must be dreaming..."

"Me too," grumbled Recke. "But I'm already too tired to pinch my nose ... Jesus, A ..." His words died away.

Reimer blinked; then, with a sigh, he followed his companion's example and rolled deeper into the fur blankets.

Both slept ...

The northland storm roared over the Boothia Peninsula. Huge black wisps of cloud chased low under the darkened bell of the sky and the swirling

Drifting snow made everything visible disappear in a veil of flakes. An eerie roar filled the icy air. The sea on the coast rolled with thunder against the beach and bright bands of foam rode on the crests of the waves. Ice floes crashed together and drowned out the powerful high whirring and wheezing of the air masses that had been sucked in over hundreds of kilometres.

It was one of those storms that rage in the far north in spring. The Eskimos and their dogs had crawled into the small but sturdy igloos and slept through the time that belonged to the spirits. Only the Angätkoq, the shaman, sat in his snow hut and sang his incantations.

Time was running out. There seemed to be no end to the rage and it was a long time before the storm subsided. It wasn't until the dogs were whimpering to get outside and the Eskimos were chatting again that the two airmen woke up.

At first, Reimer opened his eyes and looked around him in amazement. He couldn't immediately find his bearings and thought he was still dreaming. Only when he sensed the smell of burning animal oil and saw the blacking flames in two soapstone lamps standing next to each other did he return to a strange reality.

His eyes wandered. The dim light of the outside world came in through an ice window set into the wall of the snow hut above the tunnel entrance. Looking around inside, he recognised an older woman.

Eskimo woman who had just brought a pot over the flames. Behind her, the girl who had prepared the camp for him and Recke with the old man stretched out on a lounge. Her upper body, lighter in colour than her weather-stained face, was naked and her plump breasts betrayed both youth and maturity. She was just beginning to dress. As if she felt the eyes of her guest resting on her, she turned her face towards him and laughed broadly.

At that moment, the old woman also looked at him and asked a few words in Netsilikidiom, which he did not understand. Then she pointed to the pot and made the gesture of eating.

Reimer was a little suspicious and hesitated to give a sign of approval.

"Of course we want something to eat!" came from Recke's camp. The man from Kassel had also woken up in the meantime and sniffed. "It seems we've got ourselves into a bit of a savage mess ..."

The Netsilik woman had not understood the words, but she had understood the meaning of Recke's words. She immediately reached for a small tin bowl, which a whaler or sailor might have left here once in exchange for skins, and made preparations to fill it with the unfamiliar, unpleasant-smelling food.

The Linzer warned: "Watch out - here comes the cod liver oil soup!"

"Ahhh - Uaaah." The man from Kassel was horrified and quickly turned his face to the wall, turning back to the wall.

putting him to sleep. As a precaution, Reimer followed his example so as not to offend people by refusing.

Time passed again. The two planes dozed off again against their will. Only a new, increasing noise woke them up. They were still dozy.

This time, in addition to the two Eskimo women, the chief and two other men were huddled together around the tranlamps. They were talking and gesticulating eagerly, often turning to look at the strangers. When they saw the two wake up, the chief immediately got up and came to Reimer.

"It's good that you're awake! The Angätkoq is here and wants to see you."

Reimer and Recke looked curiously at a tall Eskimo wearing a strange belt with strips of caribou skin hanging from it. He too came closer, driven by curiosity. Now you could see that he had a headband made from the light-coloured belly fur of the same animal and a small loop of beads dangling down to the root of his nose. It looked a little odd and gave the man a feminine air. If he hadn't had a shaggy walrus beard and a tuft of hair on his chin, he would undoubtedly have been mistaken for a woman by the ignorant guests. His clothing, in particular, showed no particular difference between the sexes. Behind him, two dogs pushed their way to the front.

"Qingmima kavnah! - Back, dogs!" The shaman gruffly shooed the landlord's animals back. Then he grinned at the guests and asked: "You have a good spell! - But why is the giant eagle burnt?"

The chief translated.

Reimer looked at Recke. "What should we tell him? ..."

"Let me do it!" With a serious face, he continued in English in Reimer's place: "Old giant eagle is burnt and at the same time has flown away as a new eagle. But he will come back soon and get us!"

"Avayaja! ..." shouted the Eskimos. The shaman nodded gracefully and added: "This is truly a great magic."

The airmen jumped up and threw back their warm skins. While they were still answering a series of questions, they slipped into their suits, which they didn't close completely because of the heat. The shiny zips caused astonishment among the people.

The officers had strapped their pistols inconspicuously under their combinations. The submachine guns, on the other hand, were very conspicuous.

"Serqorsishut?"

"The Angätkoq asks if these are rifles," the chief repeated.

"Yes," said the man from Kassel. As a precaution, he drew his weapon close to him and beckoned Reimer to do the same. "It will be good if we give them something to divert their attention a little. The

Blokes may look good-natured, but what do I know about Eskimos? We didn't learn anything about these snow people at school."

"Me neither," confessed the man from Linz. "But we can leave them the two armchairs and some of our tools. That should be of particular value to them!"

Recke thought this proposal was excellent. He immediately explained to the old man that he and the shaman would each receive an armchair as a gift. They would also collect the tools later and leave them behind. "Picaivoq, picaivoq!" they laughed joyfully. "Eh, eh ..."

They felt the seats carefully to familiarise themselves with their new property. Without seeming to diminish their joy, Aglumaloqâq said: "The sledges are very nice, but very small." As he had seen the strangers dragging their things on the seats, he thought they were transport equipment.

Then Recke picked up a seat, brushed away the fur and hide covering with his foot at one point on the floor and heaved the armchair into the floor with all his strength, the pivot pin downwards. It stood upright for a moment, then fell over. The ground was too frozen. Nevertheless, his feat of strength had made an impression and the Netsilik people had understood. The old man diligently dug a pit with a bonnet tool until an armchair was able to stand on the ground. He then sat down proudly and leaned back as if he were this piece of

already used to it. He was quick on the uptake.

The shaman was more comfortable. He sat down on the backrest to try it out and rested his upper body on the seat. The pivot pin protruding backwards looked as if it were the fastening piece of a man who had been bolted down.

In the midst of all this strange primitiveness, the well-crafted seats with the Netsilik men seemed so strange that both airmen burst out laughing at the same time. The stark change in their whole situation and being torn out of a service that had become a habit in the monotony of an almost sheltered everyday life made them feel that everything was a comic farce.

The Netsilik thought the outburst of cheerfulness was a sign of a particularly good mood and were happy about it. At the old man's request, his wife arrived again with the dented tin bowl and offered food. Perplexed and secretly horrified, the two officers looked at each other.

Reimer was the first to reach for it. "What's that?" he asked the host.

"Blood soup with seal meat!"

"Ah," the Linzer replied, rolling his eyes in delight. He handed the bowl to his companion and, without waiting for his objection, rushed to the packs he had brought with him. There he dug out a bar of the caffeinated chocolate he had brought with him, tore open the wrapper and divided it into several pieces.

"Here - here!" He gave the old man, the shaman and the two women. He kept the rest for himself.

The Netsiliks grabbed it greedily. First they smelled it, then they gobbled the pieces down. Reimer also ate a piece, while Recke slipped out of the igloo with conspicuous haste. He had been forced to eat the meat soup while Reimer was rummaging around and felt sick as a result of his reluctance and refined stomach. A few steps from the snow hut, he vomited.

He felt lighter afterwards. The clean, cold air freed him from his drowsiness. If he had had his fur hat with him, he would have stayed outside for a while longer. It was only the frost that drove him back. Only now did he realise that a group of Eskimos were standing in front of the igloo, awaiting with understandable curiosity the return and report of the shaman staying in the hut. With begging gestures, they held out their hands to him. "Tobacco - tobacco ..."

They all knew the English word for this stimulant. One of them stepped forward and spoke:

"You - give tobacco, - I'll lend you wife ..." With a torrent of Eskimo words, the other men joined in, and women also pushed their way forward.

Recke defended himself and regretfully showed them his empty hands. Nevertheless, the people didn't seem to want to believe him. So he fled back into the igloo.

Reimer welcomed him immediately. "I have the good

I took advantage of the mood of the two kayak admirals and secured their help. We must begin immediately to lay out a clear flying mark for Gutmann. The wing piece with the ... beam cross will be of valuable service to us. Let's get ready right away!"

"All right!" said Recke. "But be careful, Herbert; the blokes out there want to sell us their women for tobacco ..."

"How do you know tobacco?" the man from Linz asked the old man.

"Oh, Tobacco!" The Eskimo rolled his eyes. "Tobacco from white men on smoking giant kayaks! - Give us tobacco and take women under ship in return. Do you also do business? ... Give a roll of tobacco - you can take my daughter Ubloriasukshuk to you. There - Ubloriasukshuk - evening star! ..."

The buxom girl with the mischievous slit eyes had understood the words tobacco and her name. She promptly came to Reimer and stood next to him. "Eh, eh ..."

Later," said Reimer to the chief. He wanted to gain time and then said: "First the work. Make signs for giant eagles!"

"Eh - yes, yes!"

The officers fastened their suits, put on their lined bonnets and took t h e precaution of strapping on their machine guns. "Ready!"

One by one they crawled out into the open, where the chief immediately quietened the surrounding Eskimos and told them to come along.

The piece of wing with the white-edged black cross was loaded onto a sledge and, accompanied by two other snow vehicles, the men hiked up the slope along the coast to reach the plateau.

The biting cold had subsided. The violent storm had been followed by a slight moderation in the weather, so that the airmen felt the winter temperature they were used to at home. A glance at the sea showed them that the wind-whipped waters had accelerated the drift, so that the waterways were wider and the floes more torn. The dark colour had given way to a more friendly turquoise hue. This may also have caused a slight brightening of the sky.

The men soon stopped. They were still close to the village and not too far from the site of the accident. "We want to mark an arrow here!" Reimer decided. He fetched a half-full canister from the accompanying sledge and spilt the contents in the shape of an arrow on the snowy ground. Igniting a bale of paper, he threw it into the spout.

The fire leapt up with a sudden flurry. The Eskimos jumped backwards in fear. The suddenly warmed air followed them like a warm hairdryer. The melted snow under the spray arrow evaporated with a hiss. What remained was a scorched scar on the ground in the shape of an arrow, pointing in the direction of the nearby settlement.

indicated. The men placed the wing piece at the opposite end of the ground arrow. The piece of light metal with the cross stood out well against the white surface and made a clearly visible and flawless flying mark. In all probability, it would hardly be covered by a new layer of snow in the short time until Gutmann's arrival. The Eskimos assured him that storms were still expected, but little snow at this time of year.

"Giant eagles will soon come for you," Aglumaloqâg comforted his guests. "Not in the past; but now they often come ..."

"Canadian weather squadron - of course!" Recke confirmed, turning to Reimer. "If only they don't arrive earlier than Gutmann. That will cause new complications ..."

"I hope Gutmann will be here sooner. He certainly won't let us down."

"He could possibly be there in a few hours." The man from Kassel looked at his watch. "It's stopped ..."

"Mine too!" The Linzer shook his head angrily.

"At these latitudes, you can hardly tell the difference between night and day. So we have to be very careful that we can signal Gutmann in good time when he comes buzzing in."

"Heavens!" Recke slapped his head. "I didn't think about the flare gun when we were clearing out the box."

"Me for that," replied Reimer dryly. "Pistol and flares. All I had to do was shoot a rocket into the spray-stained aeroplane instead of patiently burning the soaked glow cord. It would have resulted in a prompt firework display, but would have cost us a rocket, of which we only have a few. You never know in a situation like ours ..."

"Good that at least one of us had his five senses together. Besides, two brains can think better than one."

Now it was back to the small settlement. The huskies pulled the men squatting on the vehicles down to the lowland. Their maws were steaming as they pulled briskly.

Back in the village, Reimer spoke to Aglumaloqâq: "You must always leave a man outside to keep an eye out. We'll give you a nice present to say goodbye!"

"Eh, eh!" He gave the nearest tribesmen the appropriate instructions. In the middle of this, one of the men suddenly shouted: "Ahrluk, ahrluk! ..." With an outstretched arm, he pointed out to sea.

All eyes followed the direction. Far out, between the occasional swaying floe, a number of dark bodies darted through the turquoise waters. Whale-like animals with long, pointed dorsal fins that cut through the air like swords.

The airmen looked at Aglumaloqâq. "Ahrluk - killer whales!" he declared. "Very nasty. Attack everything! ..."

"Interesting," said the man from Kassel to Reimer. "We only saw herrings in Vernäs ..."

The Netsilik looked after the animals. The chief said: "Too bad white men aren't here with whale ships. With a big harpoon gun ..." He shrugged his shoulders regretfully.

Walking towards the old man's hut, the airmen looked at the Netsilik people's place with increased attention. Their igloos were scattered in the shelter of the coastal slope and all had the same strange entrance in the form of a low tunnel in front of them. All the snow huts had recessed ice windows, which proved to let in plenty of light. Only Aglumaloqâq's igloo was adorned with the caribou skull seen earlier. In front of some of the huts were poles with skins and furs hanging from them. When they took a closer look at a strange fence, they were astonished to see large frozen fish standing upside down in a row in the snow. They were half-man-high salmons. Everything was very simple, mostly primitive, but still functional. Close to the row of salmon were a few tilted kayaks. They were long and narrow, neatly made of caribou skin. Two of them had outrigger-like bundles on either side so that they could not tip over as transport kayaks. These were the boats that the Eskimos often used for long journeys.

Whimpering or growling dogs roamed everywhere. Every now and then, a few slipped into the hut tunnels to warm themselves inside the igloos.

When Reimer and Recke crawled into Aglumaloqâq's hut behind him and the shaman had trolled, the chief's dogs followed them.

There were other guests here this time. In addition to the old man's wife and daughter, there was a young couple who grinned and moved aside.

"Erneq Katsarsuk - my son Katsarsuk!" said Aglumaloqâq proudly. "I have five sons. This one is the fourth son with his wife!"

The loneliness of these latitudes meant that the Eskimos showed a greater sense of community than the space-poor cultural nations, who envied every inch of land and every possession. They hunted together and shared the spoils, helping each other out so that an entire tribe lived like a family.

Nevertheless, it was a barbaric life that they led. They killed some of the newborn girls by strangulation so that they would not have to eat useless food in the periodic times of need. They gave the old people of the nation only as much as the healthy and fit could spare. They did all this in a way that was natural and understandable to them, differing only in its simplicity from the procedure of the civilised peoples, where brilliantly decorated hands steered the wheel of a supercar while people in rags starved to death on the next street corner. There, social stratification demanded far more sacrifices than a harsh nature demanded of hard-fighting people.

The two aviators learnt all this when they listened to Aglumaloqâq briefly describe the life of his family and his people. And the comparisons of a socially enlightened mind led to the conclusion that these people acted barbarically and ignorantly as a result of their low level of development, while civilisation deliberately indulged in mass murder out of insatiability and hunger for power.

Even if Recke and Reimer did not try to convert to the Eskimo way of life, they still understood the old man's pride in his sons. Katsarsuk himself eagerly recounted how he had already speared thirty seals under their breathing holes in the ice this winter. It was undoubtedly a good hunting number, as could be gathered from the accounts.

That gave us a lot of meat and oil for the heating lamps.

This time, the captains had no choice but to refuse the food they were offered again. The only thing that made it easier for them to accept was the fact that the previous excursion to erect the flying mark had whetted their appetite and the cold brought with it a natural need for fat. They were lucky in that the blood soup with its strong odour had already been eaten. So they had to be satisfied with seal meat. They gulped down a few chunks with contempt for death.

"We can expect Gutmann every hour now!" Recke told his companion casually. "Due to the strange circumstances of our existence, I am

somewhat restless."

It seemed as if Recke possessed a sixth sense. That sure instinct that only natural men possess when danger is imminent. Reimer felt the same way, even if he didn't want to admit it to himself. The man from Kassel was just about to get up to look for the expected machine in the open when all the animals in the settlement started barking violently. Aglumaloqâq's dogs also came screeching outside. Shadows flitted past in front of the igloo's ice window and the tapping of the seals' boots signalled a hurry.

Ready to crawl out of the burrow as well, they heard a man shouting in front of the opening: "Pingasut qablunait! ..."

"Three white men!" the old man translated and raised nimbly. "Maybe there's a ship nearby ..."

The officers looked at each other. Almost simultaneously they reached for their weapons, Reimer took the flare pistol and ammunition from his pack and then they followed the chief who was crawling ahead. The whole tribe was already on its feet. The children huddled around the adults like shy mutton and looked northwards with their beady eyes, where three sledge teams, each with two men, were running towards the village.

"It's impossible that it could be Gutmann. - Neither firstly, nor secondly ..." Recke concluded without speaking.

The people who came closer were strangers. One

of them had a rifle with them, the others appeared to be unarmed. There was one white man and one Eskimo on each sledge. Panting and panting, the teams drove into the settlement.

The German officers immediately attracted the attention of the strangers. In their clean leather suits, they stood out from the mass of Netsilik people standing around in their shapeless fur clothing.

"Heavens!" said the first man to jump from the stopping sledge. "Police plane there?"

"No," Reimer replied cautiously. He resolved to speak very little so as not to be noticed for his lack of pronunciation or accentuation.

"How did you get here?" the man continued to ask. He and his two companions were visibly surprised to come across white people here.

"Sky," Reimer said briefly. "Sky ..."

"It would appear so," the man sneered. "You seem to be very mouthy."

The Eskimos had formed a curious circle around the group. They watched intently as a meeting of white men who were strangers to each other unfolded.

"Where are you from?" the man from Linz now asked in order to avoid any reverse questioning. "That can be said in a few words," the man explained more readily than his counterpart. "We're from the Waler 'Seahorse'. Got stuck in the pack ice some time ago.

and couldn't get free. The ice has compressed our box miserably. It's now a ball of metal down by the fish." He made a resigned gesture with his hand. "The captain is up on Bellot Street with twelve men. I'm the harpooner and I'm on my way to Port Epworth in the Coronation Gulf with two men. As a whole group, we barely make it there. They are all Christian seafaring men who are not used to rolling ashore. In this stormy season, hunger would also be at our heels. The three of us with company have a better chance of reaching the place. Think that an aeroplane could bring food to our crew and a ship could be directed by radio to pick us up." With noticeable relief, he added: "The whole thing should be much easier for us now. Since you are here with an aeroplane ..."

"Stop," warned Reimer. "Don't get your hopes up. Our plane has crashed."

"That's not bad either," smiled the man, two rows of yellow teeth visible from his beard-covered face. "When one of you flyers is overdue, a whole pack flies out in search. That makes for a nice double rescue in this case!"

The other men stood behind their leader. Intermediate questions to Recke received only an incomprehensible grumble in reply. The new arrivals were struck by the

The restraint of the pilots is generally noticeable.

"Damned!" the leader suddenly rumbled. "I don't want to be a harpooner and I don't want to be called Billy Howard when it comes to you. Just 'Yes' and 'No' and nothing else, I'll swallow a whole whale if you want to be Yanks or Canadians!"

"Neither are we," Recke replied calmly, without paying much attention to pronunciation. "We are Russian courier pilots."

Reimer quickly turned his head sideways to hide a surprised laugh. Billy Howard, however, seemed to have travelled the world.

"Russians? - By Jove, I had imagined them differently! I'd never seen them with blond stubble before. Always just short, stocky people, almost always dark-haired. Hm, hm ..."

Recke turned to Aglumaloqâq with equanimity: "These white men here are very hungry. Give them food and places to sleep so that they can also rest. You'll get some nice presents!"

"We're going to help them build a snow house. It'll be very quick." He shouted an order to his men. They ran off and immediately returned, long snow knives in their hands. Together with the three Arvertormiut who had come with them, they cut large bricks out of the nearby snow slope and piled them into a round building that quickly grew up to the dome. Two men brought a small floe from the beach, which, heated several times, became thinner and more transparent, so

that it could be used as an emergency window. Made of frozen salt water, it was cloudier than the freshwater ice normally used. The new arrivals had brought most of the furs and skins with them. Aglumaloqâq only had caribou skins brought to lay out. He also provided the new guests with tranlamps.

The Netsilik people brought meat and salmon to the strangers. Although summer and autumn were their main hunting seasons, this time they still had enough supplies, so they willingly gave away some of their reserves in the hope of receiving useful gifts.

"Take a rest first," said Recke patronisingly as the men moved into their new den. "We'll come and talk to you later!"

"All right," the harpooner thanked him briefly. He pushed his shotgun into the tunnel of the entrance and followed his men.

"I'm in good hands," chortled Reimer. "When it comes down to it, you two, you and Gutmann, are gifted with enough gruel in your heads. That thing with the Russians - hahaha! ..." He clapped his hands cheerfully on his thighs so hard that the leather goods cracked. "We've got rid of the blokes for the moment. This magnetic pole really does seem to have magnetic powers in every respect. It really is the most attractive spot in this vast deserted area. A daily newspaper could soon be viable here."

"I agree with your opinion. Hopefully

Gutmann before the peak excursion season begins!"

But the day passed and Gutmann did not come. The unease among the airmen increased. If something had happened to their mate, they were in a bad situation. Aglumaloqâq had told them about the storm that had roared over the land with tremendous force during their sleep.

They could do nothing but exercise patience. Whilst the female housemates busied themselves outside, Reimer and Recke lay on their fur camps and tried to understand Aglumaloqâq's explanations. Although his vocabulary was very small, they understood his mishmash of words reasonably well as he gesticulated eagerly. He had acquired his knowledge of English through his dealings with passing whalers. Years ago - he expressed the time in suns - one of their ships had wintered north of here. It was a good time for his people. The women had brought a lot of tobacco from the ship ... He regretted that his guests had no rolls of tobacco. He had chewed a cigarette offered to him together with the paper and swallowed it afterwards.

After a while he said that his guests were different from the white men who had been here before. You always had to let these people have their way. They were like little children. If you didn't let them have their way, they became angry and dangerous. Naughty children! - That was Aglumaloqâq's conviction.

It was understandable to him, since the white

people were bastards. The Eskimo people had once chased away some disobedient and arrogant women. These then formed a small community far to the south and sired bastards with dogs. This is how the qablunait from the south came to the Eskimos and this was the only way they could understand that these people were all so conceited and unteachable. If they were provoked, they murdered ...

Aglumaloqâq thought nothing of offending his guests. He harmlessly shared his knowledge and opinions and was happy when the men of the giant eagle showed a cheerful face.

When the men told him that they had never been to Eskimos before and knew nothing else about them, he told them about the hard life they led. The good hunting grounds were dwindling, the herds of animals were becoming smaller and smaller and rarer. The whites were driving the Indians further north, Crees, Chippewyans and Yellowknives were sometimes advancing into the hunting grounds of the Eskimos and then there would be fights. The Indians often had guns and the Eskimos were powerless against them.

In the past, an infinite number of suns ago, their current living and hunting grounds would have been a paradise. Back then, there was no need to fill lamps with whale blubber. In those days, forests grew at the bottom of the sea and the storms tore the trees loose and flung the trunks all over the coast. There was an abundance of wood. People mastered magical

formulae and knew how to conjure up remote places with their huts. This meant they never had to go hungry. Aglumaloqâq sighed as he painted these pictures. Later, the earth collided with a star and much of the land was destroyed. A tremendous flood destroyed all life. Only two shamans remained of the humans, none of the animals. The two shamans lived together and one of them had a child. He was a great magician and made it into a woman, who later also had a child. So the women descended from the one shaman. And slowly the earth became populated again.

The old man's stories sounded simple, almost primitive. The two officers were therefore all the more astonished to find ancient traditions preserved here that would have been forgotten in the civilised world without books. World without books would have fallen into oblivion.

"Do you remember Gutmann's explanations about the Golden Age and fertile Greenland?" Reimer suddenly asked, looking his companion full in the face. "When we flew over the geographic pole ..."

"Certainly! - Gutmann briefly explained an Atlantist theory." With a thoughtful expression, Reimer continued: "The simple and brief lore of the Eskimo peoples is consistent with these hypotheses. All knowledge preserved from prehistoric times has a true core."

Recke nodded. "That's right. And it's strange that traditions among primitive peoples confirm that

which current science does not always dare to recognise due to its exact-constructive attitude. Of course, it is not only the conscience, but also the dutiful responsibility of scholars; two concepts that often provoke counter-opinions in people seeking opinions. Naturally, in the age of materialism, the constructive always takes precedence over the spiritual. This is probably because there are too few traditional foundations. And foundations are prerequisites for evidence. The difference, however, is that fragments as undeniably existing things - insofar as they form their physical substance - are a priori pieces of evidence around which the scaffolding of constructive thought can be erected; in contrast, even older traditions are mostly dependent on the personal viewpoint of the researcher to be evaluated as such or only as myths or fairy tales. It is therefore understandable that the sparsely preserved traditions are doubted and not always carefully scrutinised. A consequence of constructive criticism that wants to be smarter than a possible event. It is well known that one can build on opposite sides. It is only a matter of opinion. However, one thing can be said about primitive peoples: regardless of the different cultural stages, traditions have been preserved whose core is based on real events. Whatever embellishments and embellishments were added, the core was not destroyed. In a few cases, perhaps a

Distortion. And this ancient knowledge remains eternal because it is sacred. Books, on the other hand, entrusted in the materialistic sense with the preservation of a limited period of thought or knowledge, decay or may even be condemned as nonsense in the distant future. For the simple reason that the books of a materialistic epoch smother the core of the concepts with constructive commentaries. Comments of an arrogant, ethos-poor time, which is more intolerant than any epoch before."

"I'm amazed," the Linzer interjected. "I thought you hadn't thought about things before because we only hinted at them for the first time during the flight. Your views are completely in line with my thinking."

"I have rarely thought about any problems," Recke confessed frankly. "Although we are currently under the pressure of extraordinary events, I can't break my habit of thorough reflection. Netsilikmann's story has aroused my interest. Once the war is over ..."

"There's still time, my dear! When the shooting stops, the war will still continue in a different form. You don't need to be a prophet to know that. When Germany falls, the chaos will really begin. And where there is chaos, there is no peace!"

"I know that just as well as you do. Nevertheless, the 'If once' be a little lamp that shows us the way through

to illuminate the darkness that lies ahead. The light that is also called hope!"

When Aglumaloqâq had finished telling his short story about the early days of his people, he paid no more attention to his guests and began to doze off. He did not understand the white men's interchanges. He knew that they did not speak the language of the Qablunait from the south, but he did not care which tribe his guests belonged to. While they lapsed into silence and pursued their thoughts, he rose leisurely and prepared to leave his igloo. At that moment, Ubloriasukshuk emerged from the entrance tunnel.

She spoke a few words in her strange-sounding Netsilikidiom and Aglumaloqâq translated: "The white men in the new igloo have awoken. They are asking if there are any useful things left with the crashed giant eagle. They want to visit the site!"

"That's completely superfluous. You saw for yourselves that our giant eagle was burnt. You took metal parts with you if you thought they were valuable," said Recke to the Eskimos.

"Eh, eh," nodded the old man. "But they still hope to find something ..."

"I'll talk to them myself!" declared Reimer with a quick decision. He didn't wait for an answer, but crawled outside immediately. For better or worse

Recke follows him.

Together they made their way to the new snow house, in front of which those who had arrived last seemed to be eagerly negotiating with some Netsilik men. Only one of the three Avertorini people was standing next to them.

Reimer began to speak: "If you're hoping to find anything in the remains of our plane, you're mistaken ..." He paused suddenly as the men looked at him in surprise. Their brows furrowed and Howard, who was holding his rifle in his hand, slowly began to raise his weapon. Before Reimer realised the cause of this change of mood, his companion had released his pistol in a flash.

"Hands up! - And down with the gun. Down!"

As Reimer instinctively drew his weapon quickly, three pairs of hands slowly went up. Howard bared his teeth angrily and let his shotgun slide gently to the ground on one slightly bent leg. "Damned Germans! ..."

While the Eskimos were still staring uncomprehendingly, unable to comprehend what had happened, Recke quickly picked up the weapon he had lost. Without taking his eyes off the men, he explained: "We horndogs didn't fasten our combinations. Now the blokes have seen our flight blouses with the officers' mirrors on the collars. Of course, they know perfectly well that this isn't pyjamas or a Russian uniform. No

No wonder they made big eyes!" After a brief inspection of the prisoners, he asked: "Are you soldiers?"

Again, Howard, as leader, was the spokesman. Sullenly he replied: "We've already said we're sailors!"

"I know that. Just wanted to confirm it again.

We don't go to war with civilians."

"Don't understand ..."

"Very simple, misters! - You can go scot-free if you are sufficiently equipped. Including your shotgun, so you can hunt on the way!"

Howard and his men looked at the two officers in surprise.

"Don't look so stupid!" said the man from Kassel cosily. "We're not ghosts or monsters. Where nature threatens people, it's our duty to help! War doesn't change that. Do you understand?"

"Yes." The answer was hesitant and mistrustful.

Recke was about to add a few more words when he suddenly felt one of the stray dogs nudge him several times with its snout. At the same time, he noticed other dogs nudging Reimer, the Canadians and some of the Eskimos with their muzzles and then raising their heads skywards as if to attract attention to something.

"There!"

"Takuvah, takuvali - seqineq! Look, look - a sun! ...", the Eskimos shouted and pointed excitedly into the

Height. The whites also looked up, while the dogs let out a joyful whine and jumped around excitedly. High above them, under the grey expanse of the twilight polar sky, a flickering orange disc was rotating. It had emerged from behind the horizon as quick as an arrow and remained just above the small settlement. The apparition actually looked like a small sun and radiated an intense light towards the earth, which refracted like a dancing fire on the ice floes of the coast.

"Seqineq, seqineq! ..."

More and more Eskimos approached the group of onlookers, lured by the eagerly signalling dogs. Suddenly the shaman stood in the centre of the gathering. His eyes gazed with a strangely mixed expression of rapture and transfiguration at the calmly pausing disc. His fellow tribesmen formed a ring around him, which the dogs prevented them from leaving with furious growls and snarls. Reimer and Recke watched the strange behaviour of the animals and the shaman carefully. It seemed as if the dogs were subject to a higher directive, which they instinctively obeyed in order to force the humans into the circle.

The shaman's silence lasted only a few moments. Then he suddenly began to dance. A ring of dogs sat around him, like an inner circle, watching his grotesque movements with their heads tilted. A centre circle was formed by

the Eskimos with the five whites and outside again a number of dogs rounded a third ring.

"Strange," muttered Reimer and looked at Recke, who nodded in understanding.

"By God, this isn't a circus ..."

The shaman's dance became wilder and wilder. His face showed rapture and his legs stamped on the ground as if he were beating a drum.

The eyes of the bystanders kept wandering to the brightly lit window, then back to the dancing man in the centre.

The shaman's hands twitched as if he wanted to reach for the disc, which kept rotating without changing its position. His hood had long since slipped off his head and his forehead beads lay scattered in the snow. Sweat trickled down his greasy face and his chin hairs trembled. The tension was so great that no sound could be heard.

The hanging strips of caribou skin that adorned his belt flew like the ropes of a merry-go-round. The dance became faster and faster, more and more grotesque. Then - the tension became almost unbearable - he tore his fur clothing from his body with a sudden movement that was also characterised by an almost supernatural strength. Piece by piece, until in an ecstatic state, stark naked, he continued to dance his figures, which became more and more like a belly dance; already exhausted, he limited himself to movements that had a distinctly erotic flavour.

character. However, they did not appear obscene.

The disc was still in the sky and the body of the man in a trance was still twitching. The pounding footsteps became slower. Then - the bystanders could feel the cold slowly descending - the shaman suddenly threw his arms up with a final effort.

"Nuliajuk - mistress!" he shouted with an animal-like shriek. Then he collapsed as if struck by a blow. The white men and the Eskimos were horrified to see that the shaman was dead. Looking at the disc, they noticed that it had sunk lower and was now a blood-red colour. While perplexity and astonishment were still reflected in everyone's faces, a golden glow descended from the strange materialisation above them to the dead man, like a connection between him and the disc producing.

"Takuvah ..." murmured the Eskimos shyly. "Look, look ..." Immediately afterwards, the disc rose steeply upwards, changing colour to an intense yellow, and disappeared again, flying northwards behind the white jagged ridges of the land.

While the dogs stared after the disappearing apparition in a crouched position, the Eskimos fell to their knees one after the other and, following an obviously instinctive ritual, raised their palms upwards as if saying a prayer of reverence. The two officers and the Canadians were also able to say a foreign prayer.

feeling.

As the spell of this strange event slowly began to lift and the Netsilik people whispered shyly, the chief of the clan stepped into the centre of the ring and bent down to the dead man. The murmuring around him died down and the bystanders waited to see what the old man would do.

Aglumaloqâq picked up the naked body, speaking soft words that no one could understand. The dead man's flesh no longer yielded at any point of pressure and, contrary to the otherwise slow onset of rigour, already seemed to be frozen hard.

Recke brought his mouth to Reimer's ear and whispered: "The whole thing is rather strange. You'd think we were under a suggestion. This rigidity ..." He made a movement as if he also wanted to step into the centre of the ring, but Reimer held him back,

"Tusarpah - listen!" cried the old man, rising to his feet. "The Angätkoq has died a magical death and his corpse is enchanted." Turning to the white guests, he repeated his words in broken English. "The soul of the Angätkoq is elevated and followed the Great Mother - Nuliajukanahnaq!"

With an imperious wave of his hand, Aglumaloqâq shooed back the dogs gathering around the corpse. Reluctantly and snarling, they barely moved a foot. Then, easily recognisable by his tone, he gave a short order to the men of the clan.

What followed horrified the white guests to such an extent that

they turned away, shuddering. The Netsilik people crawled into the surrounding igloos and came back with knives and axe tools to dismember the stiff corpse according to the chief's instructions. Then they picked up the individual pieces and limbs to carry them out of the camp in several directions. Growling and whimpering, packs of dogs followed.

"What's the matter," Reimer quietly asked Howard, who was lingering next to him. "What does it all mean?"

The Canadian looked distraughtly behind him at the group that was just leaving and replied willingly: "I can't say anything about the apparition. At first I thought it was another one of your damned dangerous inventions. But it's not just that, it's the really strange behaviour of these people here. It's not the first time I've travelled on a whaler and I'm halfway familiar with the customs of the Eskimo people. And I know that when one of them dies, they observe strict burial ceremonies that are quite different from what we see now. They usually bury their dead in the same way as other peoples. They observe various rites before a funeral. They are not allowed to clean or comb their hair, drive sledges or feed dogs. They mourn like other people. But this here - horrible! ..."

One of the other Canadians confirmed Howard's account. "As my name is Boissart, this is more like a dog feeding than a burial. And what's more, where the dead man is a shaman. I too am

I'm not a newcomer here, but I've never experienced or heard of this reversal of their customs."

"We should retreat to the igloos for the time being and leave the Netsilikis alone," suggested Reimer.

"I have reservations," warned Recke. "If these people are acting so against their kind, then it is unwise to leave the three Canadians unprotected without a weapon." He also spoke in English so that the others could understand him.

Howard casually waved him off. "We ourselves are in no danger whatsoever. The reputation of the white man is too great ..." He turned round calmly and walked towards the igloo intended for them. His companions nodded, took another look at the Eskimos standing around and then crawled into the shelter behind Howard.

The officers holstered their pistols. Their hands were clammy from holding their weapons during the strange events. Recke lightly gripped his comrade's arm. "I can't get away from the thought: a week ago, the mess in Drontheim was our only diversion on stage duty, and now we're being tossed about by capricious fate. It must be as Gutmann claimed, that everything is fate and destiny. What may be in store for us now?"

"Sentimental?" The question was without mockery.

"Absolutely not! - If Aglumaloqâq wasn't coming towards us right now, I would still believe in a dream!"

The old man approached the guests accompanied by his clan. With a serious expression, he said: "The great mother has called our Angätkoq to her. He left no apprentice to succeed him and his son was torn apart by a bear. The tribe was honoured by the appearance of the Nulijukanahnaq, but it is bad to be without a shaman. I must consult with the elders of my people. For the time being, go back to the igloo alone. If the giant bird comes in the meantime, I will send for you immediately!"

Reimer and Recke merely nodded. When they complied with the request, they found themselves accompanied by the chief's wife and daughter, while the chief alone sought out a group of older men standing at a distance.

The thinking of the Eskimo women was not as complicated as that of their men. They had certainly been very impressed by the appearance of the glowing disc, but like all primitive people, they never forgot what was next. So it was understandable that Ubloriasukshut dared to ask again with a flirtatious sideways glance inside the igloo: "Tobacco? - Achiugaunga ..."

"Neither tobacco nor ... gaunga," Recke explained. He had a hunch that the Eskimo word was a friendly request. "We want peace and quiet!"

The girl looked uncomprehendingly at the white men. Scowling and worried about Gutmann's absence, they threw themselves onto their campsites.

POINT 103

The sound of the hymn
in the highest heavenly space,
Supported on the
the gods are all enthroned,
If you don't know it, what good is the
hymn?
We who know him,
have gathered here.

(Nrisinhapûrvatâpanîya-Upanishad)

Neither Reimer nor Recke actually knew how long they had slumbered. Shortly after falling asleep, they had tossed and turned restlessly on their beds for a long time; their expressions clearly betrayed the inner vision of vivid dream images. It was only later that long, deep breaths signalled calming and release.

When they were woken up unexpectedly, they had lost all sense of time. Ubloriasukshut had shaken them violently and was excitedly spouting a series of sentences that the officers could not understand. Only when she pointed to the exit of the igloo with her hands and then pointed upwards did they both guess that it could be an aeroplane again.

While they were still in a hurry to get dressed, they heard Aglumaloqâq from the entrance to the hut

shout: "Pavungahjah - mahunga! - Come out, white men! - A nice spell is circling over us! Quick ..."

Never before in the entire war had an alarm had such a stimulating effect as the waking of the Eskimos. What kind of surprise was in store for them? - If it were Gutmann, the Eskimos would surely report a giant eagle.

They grabbed their weapons, took a quick look at each other and hurriedly crawled outside. Fresh, cold air blew towards them and once again the inhabitants of the small settlement stood together not far away. Among them were the Canadians, who had apparently already got up before the event. They all looked skywards.

Strangely, there was no engine noise to be heard and no aeroplane to be seen. Had it flown past?

"Sule - now, - suna una - what is that? ..."

A strange shape flew towards the village from the direction where the flying mark had been erected.

Eskimos and Canadians shouted at each other. The harpooner's rough voice drowned out the shouting and screeching. "A flying puzzle! ..."

Instead of the usual roar of propellers, all that could be heard was a humming and whirring. A discus-like gyroscope stood out glittering against the overcast sky and glided at a slight angle towards the settlement.

The captains followed the movements of the missile, which showed no sign of having left the harbour, with their eyes wide open.

nationality. It was a gigantic disc that was manned and controlled by humans.

The dogs of the Eskimos behaved no differently this time than dogs anywhere else on the face of the earth. They barked and drooled angrily without following any magical law.

The craft circled the small town, then arrowed towards a nearby area of the rising coastal slope and landed smoothly without any difficulty. However, it was not the strangeness of this technical marvel, but the incomprehensibility of a personal encounter under these circumstances that surprised the two captains.

Because one of the two men who left the strange vehicle was - Gutmann.

Recke and Reimer had shouted their companion's name at the same time. The impulsive Reimer pushed aside some Eskimos standing in the way and hurried towards his expected companion, followed by a few snarling dogs.

"You've made friends really quickly!" Gutmann laughed in greeting and patted Reimer on the shoulder. "Here - may I introduce you: Captain Reimer - Major Juncker!" Pointing to the Recke who had joined him in the meantime, he concluded the brief introduction by mentioning their names again.

The captains were not yet finished marvelling. The combination worn by Gutmann's companion was fastened to his neck and displayed the rank insignia of the

German Schutzstaffel. Reimer asked again: "Major?"

"Yes, yes!" confirmed the Waffen SS officer.

Now, driven by curiosity, Aglumaloqâq and some Netsilik, as well as the Canadians, approached. The latter showed undisguised dismay when they recognised the new arrivals as Germans. "Bless our souls," murmured Howard, shaken. "The German invasion ..."

"What kind of people are these?" Gutmann asked, pointing to the Canadians.

"Men who have lost their ship," Reimer replied. "They're heading somewhere south-west, where they know of a station. Couldn't remember the name." He turned to Howard and asked for another explanation.

"To Port Epworth in the Coronation Gulf!" Howard said briefly.

Gutmann looked firmly at the man. "Are you an old Arctic man yet?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You should know that you can find a station not too far from here. There's an outpost on King Williams Island a little south of here, about two hundred kilometres, but as far as I know it doesn't have any radio equipment. All you have to do is cross Peterson Bay. In general, the Canadian police stations are relatively easy to reach without any particular difficulties. If there is a large station much further north on North Devon Island, you will have much easier access here to the south.

You will find help more quickly than if you try to grope blindly to the left and right to the west."

The Canadian harpooner opened his eyes and looked at the German officer wide. "How do you know that, sir?"

"I know it just as well as you will know it!" Gutmann's voice had become hard and unfriendly.

"Why are you lying?"

"I beg your pardon," murmured the Canadian. "I couldn't know at first - I had reasons ..."

"I'm not interested in them," Gutmann cut him off. Then he turned back to his two comrades: "Let's get your things now and take off again straight away. Juncker will stay behind for the time being so that nobody gets too close to our machine or damages it ..."

The major nodded in agreement and slowly backed away again, endeavouring to keep the Eskimos at bay.

Walking towards the igloos, Gutmann said: "You did a good job with the flying sign. It really wasn't difficult to find you. Although the storm has blown a lot of things away in the meantime. Now we can finish this little adventure here and start a big one! ..."

"This is already enough for me," Recke interjected dryly. "It could hardly get any better!"

Gutmann smiled subtly. "Maybe so ..."

Now Reimer became violent. "I don't understand the world any more. Here come comrades with an air vehicle that

could be considered a variety of a giant toy spinning top and instead of highly necessary explanations, a palaver breaks out as if we were sitting round a regulars' table. Adventure or not, folly or otherwise, why don't you explain these wonders and mysteries to us, Gutmann?"

"Take it easy, dear Reimer! First we want to get away from here with our V7, then we'll have time for explanations. We don't want to risk being surprised a second time by another enemy aircraft."

Recke gasped: "So this is a German V-construction?"

"Yes!"

Aglumaloqâq had trotted along silently beside the three officers. When the white men crawled into the interior of his igloo, he stopped outside. He felt that he was now rid of his guests, who were making him uncomfortable. Trouble and witchcraft had come over his little world since the smoke signal of the burnt giant eagle had lured him.

His face was completely expressionless when the whites came out of his den again. As if in passing, he said:

"Are the Qablunait flying away with the big magic drum now?"

"Eh," nodded Reimer, who had already mastered the Eskimo word for 'yes'.

Gutmann also addressed the English-speaking Eskimo chief: "The three sailors stay behind. Help them on their way to the next

Police station. You know all about it yourselves. Don't you?"

The old man blinked his eyes. "Takujamablugo - want to see what can be done to help. But I'd much rather you took these men with you. People from Waltöter ships are usually rough and dangerous."

"That's not possible, good Aglumaloqâq," Reimer interjected.

"We don't have that much room in the thing you call a magic drum."

"Then let the Qablunait move on from the big smoke kayak with the three Avertormiut," the old man said stubbornly. "They'll get some meat and fish. Ublume - today!"

"It shall be done as the chief wishes," Gutmann decided briefly. "The Canadians will leave with their companions and take some food with them. Their return to so-called civilisation is only a matter of a very short time. There's nothing else we can do ourselves."

Aglumaloqâq showed his satisfaction at the acceptance of his proposal. Grinning gratefully, he accepted some tools and small utensils from Reimer, which the airmen considered expendable. For him, these gifts were a great present, as his small people did not have much.

Returning to the flying disc, in front of which the entire Netsilik population was staring, Recke called Howard, who was standing to the side with his companions, and gave him back the rifle he had taken earlier, which he had kept in Aglumaloqâq's hut. "Here - don't do anything

Stupid things, man!"

The harpooner hesitantly accepted the weapon. Only when he held it firmly in his hand again and recognised the sincerity of the foreign airmen did he offer his hand to Recke. "The Germans are strange birds," he said more to himself than to his counterpart. "Thanks! ..."

Standing in front of the disc, Reimer and Recke realised that this strange apparatus had a considerable circumference. Around the spherical body, which was fitted with a glass cover, was a convex ring disc consisting of a number of blades mounted between the base of the sphere and an outer centring ring. They were unable to make any further observations at the moment, as the Waffen-SS officer urged them to get in.

Gutmann handed the packs inside and told his companions to get in through the hatch at the bottom of the gondola. "Into the thing that the old liver uncle here thinks is a magic drum. Zackzack, comrades!"

Reimer nimbly jumped through the entrance into the gondola, supported by Juncker. The broad-shouldered warrior followed a little more slowly and finally Gutmann squeezed in after him, closing the entrance behind him. Through the windows of the sphere they could see the silent, expectant front of the three Canadians and the Netsilik people, all of whom were waiting with their children for the spectacle of departure. Juncker sat down in the

The three other officers took their seats behind him, facing in one direction.

"Ready!" Gutmann shouted.

A few quick grips by the Waffen SS officer. A loud roar, flames flashed from the edge of the windscreen, the circular wing blades began to rotate at breakneck speed and with a gentle jerk the apparatus detached itself from the ground to climb steeply upwards. While Juncker's eyes wandered unperturbed between the arctic expanse and the driver's cab with its controls, the other three occupants saw how the Eskimos, growing smaller and smaller, had scattered in horror or had thrown themselves fearfully to the ground. Three figures standing close together appeared to be the Canadians, who must also have been uneasy about the launch of the strange disc.

Silence reigned among the men for a short time. Reimer and Recke were in a mood that made them stare around them in silence, as they felt they were in a dreamlike, unreal state due to the all too great surprise of Gutmann's return under such strange circumstances. It was only after some time that Recke asked the first question: "Tell us now, Gutmann, what kind of bowl this is that we're flying in!"

Gutmann barely moved as he answered. Only his eyes roamed inquiringly over the faces of his

Companions. "We are in a flying gyroscope, which is known as V7 in a small circle of insiders. We have two such devices here at a post in the Arctic region. When I arrived with the captured Canadian and his aircraft at the base known by the call sign ZYX, comrade Juncker immediately volunteered to take off with the aircraft he had flown in after I described the situation. Although we arrived a little late, this was due to the weather reports and certain other preparations. But we were convinced that we would find you safe and sound!"

"Very nice," said Recke. "Finding it again would have worked. So there's just a little more to satisfy our curiosity. Wouldn't it?"

"How far away?" Gutmann asked hypocritically.

"Why don't you put us on a spiky fakir bed?" interjected Reimer. "Why don't you explain to us in turn where the journey is going for now and then - what this gyroscope stuff is all about and what else is interesting. Put yourself in my shoes: you're sitting in a glass sphere, a horizontal disc surface flickers rapidly in circles before your eyes and a fiery aura sprays out from the edge. I think you would ask more questions than an old woman!"

"It would very likely be as you say," Gutmann admitted. "Of course, it shouldn't and can't remain a secret for you. I wanted to explain the whole story to you in peace a little later. But after all - about

We can talk about the technical aspects of this flying machine until we land. It's quite understandable that this thing must captivate you."

"It's high time you realised that!" growled Recke.

Gutmann waved his hand placatingly. "Well - our This thing here, the V7, was created in a peculiar way. Starting from the fact that up to now take-off and landing for an aeroplane was always connected with the question of space and that speed also had to be taken into account, a resourceful designer, going beyond the helicopter project, found the solution of having adjustable flying blades circle around a curved cabin. Incidentally, this was a peculiar duplication of ideas, whereby our devices are already in use, while another designer is currently still busy somewhere near Prague with the production of the same project."

"The reason that the problem of the runway required a solution is quite understandable, as it was long overdue," Reimer interrupted Gutmann's dry lecture. "But why the cancelled circular solution of all things?"

"The term gyroscope is correct!" Gutmann continued unperturbed, without responding to the objection for the moment. "After various tests, it was realised that this construction promised to achieve an extraordinary speed even at the experimental stage. In fact, this

flying machine has reached speeds previously thought possible."

"How fast?" asked Reimer excitedly.

"With medium-power engines, it is theoretically possible - that is, without taking the human factor into account - to reach four thousand kilometres per hour, with a climb speed of one hundred metres per second. The principle of movement is very simple: after climbing - you must have noticed it to some extent anyway - the rotor runs a little slower so that the apparatus hovers in the air, then the jets are started for forward flight. Of course, this maximum speed could only be achieved if, in addition to the turbine engines, ramjets were also operated, although these are only capable of operating at speeds of eight hundred kilometres per hour or more. The extraordinary manoeuvrability seems obvious thanks to the ingenious gyro design. Of course, the apparatus can also stand still in open space. The motor prevents it from going down when the horizontal drive is set."

"So it's a jet aircraft," remarked Recke.

"That's right! - I said it before." Gutmann continued: "In terms of construction, I would just like to briefly explain that the fuel tanks are stored under the cabin floor. On the outside around the centre is the bearing for the rotor blade ring, below which are the engines that start the rotor. On the outside is the centring ring that surrounds the rotating blades. Almost ingeniously simple!"

"Phenomenal!" Reimer could not contain himself.

"And what is the range of this V7?"

"Currently away from a base - about two thousand kilometres," Gutmann replied. "That's still the only sore point. Nevertheless, the military possibilities are quite extraordinary. I believe that the V7 will continue to occupy the minds of our world for a long time to come!"

"And where is our destination now?"

Gutmann turned to the questioning knight. "You'll be surprised. Near the eightieth parallel!"

"Pötzblitz!" Recke could not contain himself.

"How long are we flying for now?" Reimer asked.

"To the finish?"

"Yes!"

"About half an hour," said Gutmann. "Because we fly at a reasonable speed."

Reimer and Recke looked over the rotating disc at the landscape. As experienced pilots, they were able to estimate the speed of the flight from the passing of the landscape. After all, it was considerable. Masses of water and ice flashed past as far as the eye could see. To the side, a dark land mass, also covered with white snow fields, moved backwards as if pulled by an invisible hand, in the opposite direction to the direction of flight.

"You'll be interested to know," Gutmann suddenly remembered, "that our type of aircraft, a design from Breslau, has a diameter of thirty-one-point-four metres.

metres. This is known to correspond to the number pi. Since fractional numbers cannot be used in certain cases with machine sets, the number of nozzles on the circumference was set at thirty-two."

"That almost looks like a mathematical gimmick," said Recke with a slight sneer. His critical nature found a target for his remarks.

Gutmann remained serious. "Everything in nature has harmonious laws. The same applies to technology. Incidentally - there are certain role models ..."

"One more technical question," asked Reimer. "How does the rotor process the air?"

"You can easily see this after landing. There are slits at the top for the air to pass through, while the outflow fields are at the bottom. Also very simple!"

"Every miracle becomes simple when it can be justified or explained." Recke suddenly leant forward. "You were just talking about certain examples, Gutmann! Let's bet that there are such without you realising what real miracles there are!"

"Ah! -" Gutmann was mightily astonished. "Have you actually seen another disc that seemed to be of supernatural origin?"

"That's exactly what I mean!" confirmed Recke, now surprised for his part. Reimer also nodded excitedly.

"A Manisola ..." Gutmann muttered. His words were barely intelligible over the roar of the flying machine. Instead of getting up to explain, he put the

Counter question: "What was your impression of this apparition?"

Recke's eyes widened, as did Reimer's. "Have you become omniscient, Gutmann?"

"Answer me first," he urged. "Tell me quickly what you and probably the Eskimos have experienced!"

"It was in the Eskimo village," Recke admitted. In a few words, he described the whole strange process from the appearance to the departure of the glowing disc. Reimer only interrupted him from time to time to explain some details in more detail.

Gutmann nodded often. From time to time he made it clear that he knew the apparition well enough. He was most impressed by the strange behaviour of the dogs and the death of the shaman. After describing the incomprehensible burial of the medicine man and the sudden departure under the disc's discolouration, he said: "You will get to know the whole thing in detail shortly. Right now is not the time to talk about it in detail. It is quite understandable that you alone cannot cope with this most peculiar problem." He smiled enigmatically. "To comfort you for the next few hours: in about two years, millions of people will know nothing about these phenomena!"

"Is that also a V-construction?" Recke's new question sounded doubtful.

"Do you think this phenomenon is connected with

their behaviour technically possible?"

"Technically impossible!" Reimer immediately thought in Recke's place. "I would most likely consider it a meta-physical matter."

"You mumbled a name earlier," added Recke. "You know..."

Gutmann cut off the subject with an energetic movement. "I know - but I've already told you that you'll have to be patient for a few hours. There are more things to say than you realise!"

"That's your quirk, always playing the mystery man!" sulked Recke, scowling at the airspace.

"Absolutely not," the reprimanded man defended himself. "Now that we're almost there ..."

"... soon at our destination," Recke mimicked, "we will first eat properly and then sleep in a bed. I assume that our famous organisation has provided the appropriate comforts!"

"Certainly! - You will be able to see for yourselves in a short time."

Once again, the glances of the passengers flew through the cabin windows. Ice and water everywhere, as far as the eye could see. Attractive and tiring at the same time.

"Our mate Juncker flies his route quite safely," Reimer remarked casually. "Apparently without navigation; just following the terrain, which has no special marks around it. Can't the magnetic pole play any tricks on us?"

This was the first time Juncker had joined in his comrades' conversation. "We are being instructed by magneto radio! Our aircraft is guided by a direction finding beam that leads us to every target within the radius of action and back to the home field. Our flight is controlled from the station by a television disc."

Reimer pursed his lips. "If the Yankees find us here one day, they'll use their bombers to destroy all kinds of valuables that must be concentrated in a confined space. Since we're bound to attract attention in this area after a certain time ..."

"Don't worry!" Gutmann reassured Juncker.

"It will hardly be the case that an enemy aircraft will ever find us."

"The Yanks and Canadians won't be so obliging as to play blind man's buff all the time!" said Recke ironically.

"Yes - we'll make them do it!" Gutmann clucked like a hen. "From our station, we are able to irritate approaching foreign aircraft by magnetic rejection, so that their localisation devices give a barely noticeable deviation. These artificially induced navigation errors guide the aircraft around our base. As navigation in the Arctic zones is notoriously difficult, any foreign influence on the devices can hardly be recognised. Minor errors are therefore quite credible. This method is better and more reliable than our

otherwise excellent flak."

"For crying out loud," Recke rumbled again, "Why are we taking these magic devices to the arse end of the world instead of using them to distract the bomber units of the civilian killers at home? - I think our supreme warlords are getting a soft head!" He tapped his forehead angrily.

"That's not what it looks like!" Gutmann defended. "Magneto radio for these purposes is also of recent origin. Besides, hardly anything within the territory of the Reich is safe from betrayal any more. Nor can we bring about a turnaround in the fortunes of war with this alone. Neither with these tools nor with our latest V-weapons and similar things. We have simply missed the time and the past opportunities. We were already quite clear about that in Vernäs."

Recke twitched the corners of his mouth slightly. "Even if it's partly true - you're a pessimist by nature!"

Gutmann tightened up. With a quick movement, he pulled the zip of his suit down a little from the neck. Instead of the expected grey-blue pilot's blouse, field-grey cloth with the collar patches of the Waffen-SS was revealed. Four silver stars indicated the same rank as Juncker's. Without looking at the astonished faces of his comrades, he said: "I hope that this uniform, which is actually mine, will protect me from certain suspicions."

protects. In any case, would I otherwise be familiar with the last secrets of our warfare?"

He received no immediate answer. Recke looked straight ahead silently. Only his facial muscles showed signs of excited thought. Reimer, on the other hand, had leant back in his seat and then asked: "How did you come to be here in Vernäs, so far away from the hustle and bustle of the war?"

"That's easily explained! Before I came to you, I was involved in the development of this machine - the V 7 - in Breslau. Gutmann and disc - that goes better together, doesn't it? - But back to Breslau; I had got fed up with the highly superfluous posturing of certain party people and opened my mouth wide at a necessary moment. I was very badly criticised for this, as the bigwigs felt they had been stepped on. I took the view that where there are entry bans for soldiers, this applies at least as much to the pompous civilian generals, no matter how many gold braids and buttons they may have. The game ended in a draw. In other words, the gold pheasants didn't get a step into the area of their curiosity, whereas I was transferred from there to the Luftwaffe as a captain and then came to Vernäs by order of the OKL. A short and simple story."

"And now?" Reimer's voice was full of expectation.

"I've been promoted to major and called up for further duties with honour. I received this message shortly before our departure from

Vernäs. Colonel Troll and Major Küpper knew about it. Nobody else. So ..."

Junckers cut off the conversation. "Point 103 ahead!" - The simple message from the man in the driver's cab immediately distracted from personal and problematic matters. Four pairs of eyes scrutinised the area that promised the approaching destination. The sky was brighter than average and the sea of ice shone between the ice fields. Like a network of small rivers and streams, the water broke its way between the cracked ice surfaces, floes and small bizarre mountains that glided like small glaciers in the open water. From the background, a raised area came closer, on which a small ring mountain rose, showing the observers in the flying disc a gate-like interruption. There was nothing to suggest that there was a station here. It was undoubtedly the mainland and only here could the announced point 103 be located.

"Point 103?" Reimer had asked.

"Call station ZYX is identical to point 103!" Gutmann pointed into the interior of the small ring mountain range.

"Here is the station!"

Reimer and Recke could see nothing that suggested a human presence. They shook their heads in amazement.

The gyroplane descended steadily during its horizontal approach. At a low altitude, the aircraft passed the open ring interruption and then came to a halt.

The disc remained motionless in the air for a moment, as if held by a magic hand. Only the disc continued to rotate, indicating that the gyroscope was working. A few seconds later, the flying machine descended vertically. The occupants felt as if they were travelling downwards in a lift.

Juncker looked through the floor window to check the landing. To the extraordinary surprise of Reimer and Recke, it suddenly went dark for a very short time, then artificial light shone into the cabin from outside. A gentle push and the sound of the rotor stopped. "End of the line - all aboard!" Gutmann joked, gloating at the amazement of his comrades who had been picked up. The floor hatch opened and the crew climbed out behind Gutmann into the underground space.

A spacious hall presented itself to the eyes of those who had landed. The two Waffen SS officers walked confidently ahead of their two comrades. A number of men in field grey and blue-grey Luftwaffe colours hurried past the arrivals and saluted them in a military manner. Reimer and Recke could not cope with their haste. The lowest rank they encountered wore the epaulettes of sub-officers. Not a single crewman was to be found among the numerous personnel. The bustle and behaviour of the men betrayed prudence and planning. Hardly an order could be heard.

The bright light from the ceiling spotlights dazzled the

Eyes. The four officers deviated slightly from the straight line of their path as a large flat railway carriage forced them to make a turn. So far they had been walking alongside the track of a railway line. While they were still turning to the side of the hall, the warrior, who was looking all around him, nudged his comrade Reimer and pointed into the background. At the end of the track, which ran in semi-darkness, a strange steel construction loomed up, its purpose and meaning unclear. Gutmann, however, did not give them time to take a closer look and pushed forwards.

They came to an opening that had no door. Nevertheless, the air force captains, who were here for the first time, felt a noticeable change in temperature. Reimer could not refrain from exclaiming. "Why? ..."

"The warm air curtain closes against the outside temperature instead of a door," explained Gutmann as he continued. "The interior temperatures come from an electronic heating system!"

"Not even the Berlin Nobeleta blissements have made it this far," said Recke, shaking his head. He breathed in the mild air comfortably.

After walking through a few corridors, the new arrivals came to a series of rooms, all of which had doors with numbers on them. Gutmann halted his steps roughly in the centre of the row of rooms. "Here's my room," he said and opened the door.

The men entered a small chamber, which looked sparse but clean. Two camp beds, a simple locker, a folding table and two matching chairs made up the furnishings. The overhead lighting was switched on and provided a bright light.

"Juncker and I each have a free bed in our rooms," Gutmann explained. "If you want to stay with me, Reimer, our friend Recke can move in with Juncker. His room is diagonally opposite here. I have room number twenty-four, Juncker has twenty-nine. As you can see, we are close together!"

"Anything is fine with me," replied Recke. "The main thing is that I'm allowed to fall into one of these inviting beds very soon."

"And I'll ask for a hearty meal first," added Reimer. "But not an Eskimo menu!"

"Wouldn't a bath be nice first?" Gutmann asked.

"Would be nice," Recke added. "If you said it one more time, I'd be tempted to accept this luxury as credible."

"Then I must repeat my question!" laughed Gutmann. "There really is everything you need for a longer existence everywhere."

The two captains were astonished. Helping each other, the officers slipped out of their fatigues and took off their belt and handguns.

"After the bath, we pick up our things from here

our place," Juncker turned to Recke.

"After the meal", improved Gutmann. "The definitive order is: bathe, eat and sleep!"

"Agreed - let's go!" shouted Reimer,

The following evening, Reimer and Recke sat together in Gutmann's parlour and listened to the first explanations for their presence here. Both captains sensed with their healthy instinct that Gutmann was cautiously endeavouring not to go beyond the generalities of this hidden base at the beginning. Even if it was undoubtedly not mistrust that could have stood in the way, the two officers still found no explanation for their comrade's cautious behaviour.

"Everything you see here and which arouses your astonishment and admiration," said Gutmann, "was created after a carefully considered plan with long preparatory work. The fact that this operation and the base have so far been protected against treachery is due above all to the particularly thorough selection and testing of the personnel. It has required preparatory work and endeavours that are unparalleled."

"One question!" interjected Recke. "The expansion we have seen so far certainly suggests that work on this base has been going on for some time, not just for weeks. But I hardly believe that the Reich government has been anticipating such a distress in our military situation for some time.

or would even have been prepared to accept it. What reason was there to tackle this work here?"

Gutmann looked at the questioner in surprise. "Logically and thoughtfully spoken, dear friend! - That is precisely the point I wanted to leave for later."

"I realised that," said Recke dryly.

The major deliberately ignored the objection. "In the next few days, you will have to change your previous views and see things that will present you with a new world view. It will show you power-political relationships that are by no means geographically fixed and will overturn all common expectations. However - I must confess to you - it was not intended to transfer you both here because you have a good description, but because the Do-Ju twin construction was to be flown here in front of everyone. It is not our fault that this did not succeed. But I took full responsibility for introducing you here as reliable and hope for your support in a battle that goes beyond the seemingly limited war!"

"Aha, werewolf..." said Recke sarcastically.

"Pah," said Gutmann. "Werewolves could be used in the Thirty Years' War. In densely populated Central Europe, dependent on technical supplies and sufficient provisions, this type of combat is limited at most as a disruptive factor, but not at all

fundamentally effective. What is possible in the Balkans or Eastern Europe ..."

"But you don't seem to realise that at a higher level?" Recke's interjection sounded cool and matter-of-fact.

"Yes, comrade! - But we must not forget that the ill-advised demands of Casablanca, which call for unconditional surrender and would entail a super-Versailles, are forcing us to acts of desperation."

"We know that," Reimer confirmed bitterly. "Also that the realisation is already spreading - the demand for capitulation is not directed against the regime, but against the German people in general. Somehow, the shawms have been blown before: War against the kaiser, not against the people - but in truth it was precisely the people they wanted to see oppressed!"

Gutmann looked over the two comrades as he continued thoughtfully: "Old and familiar things. It's all idle polemic. We have to reckon with facts and take a practical stand on them. My previous introductions therefore mean the explanation of world political forces which are active and effective on a higher level and which I will reveal to you all. If I am not prepared to do this immediately with all thoroughness, it is because the whole complex of circumstances would seem too improbable, indeed downright fantastic to you."

"We're not small children," grumbled Recke, showing an offended expression. "After all, we did get to this fairytale castle with a new machine. That is," he improved immediately, "almost got here."

"Actually, an aircraft was planned for this tour that should have already had diesel engines. We could have easily landed with this model and restarted later," Gutmann interjected. "However, there seems to have been a mix-up from Berlin. Whether intentional or unintentional will be difficult to clarify."

"You could really soon get fed up with the whole circus," Reimer said angrily, having kept a fairly low profile up to that point. "We front-line soldiers always have to pay for the filth of a few ragamuffins!"

"We have to get past it," said the major.

"We at Punkt 103 in particular form an activist task force that will serve its goals even when there is no longer a German government. And unfortunately that will soon be the case."

"Yes, for crying out loud," Recke roared, "I'm not talking about mistrust, but who are we supposed to fight for if there is no order and no authority at home?"

"Our friend Reimer mentioned earlier that it is already common knowledge that our enemies pretend to fight our imperial government, but our people

mean," Gutmann replied calmly. "So we serve a higher order in the interests of our people."

"If it doesn't go against our oath as soldiers and our will to serve isn't abused ..." Reimer spoke hesitantly. Gutmann cut off the sentence with a metallic edge: "There are no Stauffenbergs here!"

"Sorry!" muttered Reimer. "But it's good when everything is always said clearly!" With firm pressure, he took Gutmann's hand, which he held out to him. Recke followed Reimer's example and added the question: "What's going to happen to us next?"

"I think you deserve a few days' rest. Ahead of us lies a time that harbours manifold secrets behind veils and will also bring dangers to life and limb. Make the most of the few days you have left to rest before an order to deploy arrives. And one more thing: if you come across other uniforms and foreign civilians here in the next few days, don't be surprised! We have friends and allies in the world who are all willing to serve a new order." Gutmann's voice became warning and insistent: "But above all: ask few questions and learn silence!"

"... as if we were washerwomen," Recke growled softly ... " Before Gutmann could reply, Reimer intervened: "A comparison comes to mind; we have an amusement park in Vienna known as the Prater. Between the shooting galleries

and sausage stalls, there is a grotto railway pulled by a hideous Lindwurm locomotive. Once you have paid your six-figure ticket, you are allowed to board the train and are pulled into a dark tunnel by the beast, which is a mixture of crocodile and herring. It's a bit like going to Hades. Then suddenly, small illuminated grottos appear on either side of the dark corridor, animated by cute figures and representing a moving magical realm. In other words, a menacing entrance with all sorts of funny gimmicks afterwards. And it seems to me that we've just been allowed to pay a sixpence to whizz into a new gallery of joy!"

"So what?" It was meant to sound joking, but there was no hiding the ambiguous undertone.

"... so what!" Recke grumbled again. "For snot and bollocks, isn't it? - Why don't you at least tell us a fairy tale, Gutmann, like our friend Reimer can? There must always be something in the mind's eye to cheer the soul before one gets a bullet or something else!"

"Why not?" Gutmann spoke slowly and broodingly. "As far as I can remember, you are both somewhat well versed in history. Do you perhaps know the lore of the old king Mithradates Eupator, who was also called the Great?" When the two captains shook their heads in the negative and Reimer interjected that he had not heard of the school of

The major continued: "Mithradates fought three protracted wars against the then world power Rome with varying degrees of success. At the time, he also had the support of the Silician pirate state, which was in reality an exile kingdom of Mithra cult followers driven out of the neighbouring countries. The strict discipline and order of the Mithra people from Silicia, who had to fend for themselves against a hostile environment, made them feared adversaries and so their help was of great importance to Mithradates. And it was not Rome's fault that the king fell, but the apostasy of his sons brought about the suicide of the ruler of Asia Minor."

"The world has always been shabby," said Reimer.

"Not the world, but the people!" Gutmann corrected. "In any case, I am comparing point 103 with the time of Mithradates Eupator, a Silicia where men resolutely defend themselves against an environment. Guided by invisible, evil forces, this environment is the visible expression of an intolerant and domineering age. It must have been due to the times that Mithradates, the one given by 'Mithra', was unable to achieve his historical high goal. The environment of his epoch was simply stronger. But it doesn't always have to be that way!"

Reimer nodded. "Absolutely not. It just depends on how far you can go with the power of the old and the new."

of the earthbound."

"Everything new is usually just as earthbound; it's just that people don't want to recognise it because the bearers of an existing order don't like to be replaced by a new order. This explains the hostility of an environment!"

"Very nice," said Recke. "That explains everything. But the fact that old Mithradates ..."

"There's a reason," Gutmann defended. "Causal connections will still emerge!"

"Wash me, but don't get me wet!" mocked Recke. "Somewhere I read the sentence: Dark is the meaning of speech!"

"Let's leave it at that," decided Reimer. "I understood Gutmann. Our company's slogan would have been more realistic and more timely. Namely: Ultima Thule. But at least ..."

Gutmann spread his fingers so that the joints cracked. "One thing interlocks with another ..."

"Ultima Thule, the island of the last heroes," shouted Recke, slightly theatrically. "As far as I'm concerned, I'll keep flying if it means I can help our homeland. If it's not already too late!"

"It's never too late," Gutmann replied cautiously. "Our slogan is: Salvation and light do not come ex oriente lux, but from the north!"

In the days that followed, Reimer and Recke had enough time to familiarise themselves with their surroundings.

make. To their astonishment, they were not ordered to report to the base commander or his adjutant, nor did anyone else look after them. Recke had found a sociable comrade in his roommate Juncker, with whom he got on well and who took great care of the two captains in place of Gutmann, who was often unavailable.

During their extended tours, the two flight officers realised with great astonishment that their great amazement on arrival at the base had only been directed at a fraction of the facilities they had now found. Among other things, Juncker had explained to them during a partial escort that the ceiling hatch of the underground disc hangar was also used to deploy a missile launcher. In addition, caverns had been blasted into the semi-circular interior of the Ringgebirge to accommodate various types of aircraft, which had an excellent runway on the hollow level. As Juncker indicated, there were types here that were not yet in series production and were far superior in many respects to the aircraft currently in use. In this way, at least some of the military secrets would be kept out of the hands of enemies invading the empire's soil, Juncker explained.

In the centre of the Ring Mountains was a weather control station, humorously called Frog Glass for short. They also learnt that the station had its own underground power station, which generated a

high performance capacity.

Pointing to the landing site, Recke said: "Only for experienced pilots ..."

"You have to approach the aircraft for landing, veer off to the side, intercept the aircraft again and only then land," explained Juncker.

"It's not possible any other way," admitted Recke.

In response to an occasional question from Reimer about the functioning of the replenishment, Gutmann himself gave an astonishing answer: "The technical supplies come from home, the food supply mainly from the USA!"

"Lazy jokes!" rumbled Recke angrily.

"It's true," Gutmann confirmed. "As I mentioned earlier, we have friends who have relieved us of these worries. There are people in the USA and Canada who are aware of the existence of Point 103, but don't know its location and would never find us against our will. Our magneto radio is safer than a series of anti-aircraft batteries. Even men from the American Federal Court are aware of the existence of our base."

"And what about the support?" asked Reimer.

"Very simple! - Our supporting forces on this continent believe that they are not acting against their country's interests because Point 103, as a stacking point, deprives the Empire of potential that could currently serve an ongoing operation. Moreover, the whole unit is seen as a kind of opposition

against certain forces of the imperial government, which are labelled with the code 666. These are not the official bodies of the enemy power, but only the small circles of the tolerators who have a different political outlook. It is these circles that supply our transport machines with provisions and certain metals and alloys that we need here. We also have workshops and a laboratory here; you will also get to know these facilities in the next few days."

Reimer grabbed Gutmann firmly by the arm, while Recke clammed up. "If point 103 is a potential extraction point ..."

"Don't get so excited," Gutmann reassured the captains. "There are two ways of looking at it: an earthworm perspective and a bird's eye view! As fliers, you should be ashamed to be counted among the earthworms."

"Rubbish!" barked Recke.

"All you have to do is replace the word potential removal with the word potential rescue and you will have grasped the true meaning of the station!"

"Juncker already hinted at that too," admitted Reimer. "It's better to heed such hints," Gutmann said coolly. "Then certain rocket minds won't have to explode!"

Recke saw that Gutmann was close to losing his otherwise inexhaustible patience. He put his massive hand on his shoulders and said good-naturedly: "No offence, stargazer, but you also have to be understanding."

for us ignorant sheep who are constantly being assaulted by new insights and facts. We have the utmost confidence in you, but it could be that we are all just puppets in an infamous game whose background is not recognisable. We've seen horses puke in these times!"

"It's fine," replied the major, reconciled. "But whatever may come, we can serve with confidence!"

The next morning, the captains were in for another surprise. Dressed in warm fur parkahs, they were out for a short morning walk when a plane rolled out onto the runway bearing a foreign signature instead of the expected national emblem. This time they were alone. They both stopped walking and stared at the wings and the fuselage of the aircraft as it climbed into the sky, where black dots were emblazoned as a distinguishing mark.

"Potzblitz!" shouted Recke and looked round. Some of the men who had been present at the launch had just disappeared into a rock cavern. "What was that midnight Japanese?"

"Let's see where Gutmann is." Reimer pulled his comrade away with him to climb inside the station. "Strange, very strange," he muttered.

"I had met a mate in Oslo who claimed to have seen an aeroplane that was also in Oslo.

had a black dot on its wings and flew in the direction of Sweden."

"If I hadn't seen the same thing now, I'd say he'd mistaken a ladybird for an aeroplane!" said Recke. "Hallucinations like that sometimes happen after a night of drinking. But like this ..."

Rushing through the underground halls and corridors, they searched everywhere for Gutmann. This was also the first time they came across the civilians mentioned by their comrade, who were moving freely and at ease among the German personnel. They did not take the time to take a closer look at these strangers. They could only gather from the passing that there were exotic types among them. A few foreign military personnel also crossed their path.

Right now they couldn't find Gutmann. It was only on the way to their rooms that they came across Juncker, whom they immediately stopped.

"Where is Gutmann?"

"At a meeting, gentlemen!" Juncker asked them both into his room. "What's the problem, mates?"

"Hm," Recke began hesitantly. "There's this thing with black dots ..."

"Our aircraft registration number! So what?"

"Our - ? ..."

"You don't know that yet?" Juncker snapped his fingers. "Gutmann will be back around noon. He can explain it to you better. I'd like to leave that to him."

Well - goodbye for now!" He pushed his cap back onto his neck, tapped the peak with his index finger and walked away.

"Simple thing," Reimer surmised. "Must be the new Schutzstaffelluftwaffe that Mr Himmler always wanted. They just didn't want to tell us so as not to offend us as rival club members."

"What do you mean, offend?" Recke sat down on his cot. "They can paint whatever they like on the aeroplanes for all I care. The main thing is that we remain intact enough to at least prevent an invasion from the east over our unfortunate homeland!"

"Which has already begun!" Reimer added thoughtfully. "The last Wehrmacht reports already mention German place names from both fronts. East Prussia is already gone!"

"I know that just as well as you do! The poor women and children. It's unthinkable! It's a stupid strategy to hoard weapons and people here instead of doing everything we can to protect our civilian population. I'll tell Gutmann to put in a good word for me with the local commander, the great unknown, to get me transferred back to a front-line unit!"

"Is there still any point?" Reimer doubted. "Whatever we can do, the time would already be too short and the fronts too pressed together for us to stop the rollers from East and West.

Even the celebrity can't hide that."

"The Ministry of Propaganda is just playing more of a roller," Recke admitted. "But then what?"

"Gutmann has already hinted at this! Persevere and force a liberation and reversal of the situation on the higher level unknown to us. Your return to the home front would not change the existing facts. I share your feelings and have never shirked a mission either. Let's leave it at the tasks intended for us, because we are soldiers and not politicians!"

The two men sat together for just over an hour before Gutmann turned up. "I heard from Juncker that you were looking for me. I'm sorry, but my service ..."

"It's not our fault if we're not on duty," interjected Recke, who didn't like the idea of doing nothing. "Besides, we wouldn't have come looking for you if there hadn't been something we needed to know. After all, one must at least know what friend and foe are!"

"Junckers has already indicated to me that it's because of our aircraft registration plates. Is that true?"

"Yes," they both admitted.

"That can be explained," said Gutmann. He threw his cap onto the bedspread and sat down on the edge of Juncker's couch. He then slowly leaned back, resting on the elbows of his bent arms,

he began to speak: "I will explain without much introduction why we do not have a crossbar on the machines here and have chosen a black roundel as our symbol. Above all, it has already become clear to us that the homeland will have to capitulate sooner or later ..."

"We talked about that just before you came," Reimer replied. "A bitter realisation!"

"That's right! - But you can't bury your head in the sand like an ostrich. It's all the more bitter because we've already marched through the whole of Europe and were almost at the Suez Canal. But you know the saying about times that change. Whether a huge portion of sinful politics or a number of missed opportunities are to blame for this is of no particular importance at the moment, because it is not the past that is decisive, but what is given in the present. If the case should really arise that Germany has to capitulate or the war is declared over after an occupation of the Reich, all hostilities must cease from a point in time X. This would mean that the German Wehrmacht would be forced to surrender. This would mean that the German Wehrmacht would cease to exist and no one would be authorised to continue fighting under the banners or insignia of the Reich!"

"Oho!" Recke let himself be heard.

"Unless - as unrecognised belligerents who ..." Gutmann made a shooting gesture. "If the fight continues nevertheless, then the Reich must not

The fact that our machines must not be compromised because otherwise the impact on the civilian population through reprisals would increase hardship and misery. For this reason, we have decided to introduce a new symbol for our machines as an independent organisation, which will be discussed in more detail later. This black dot, as you call it, is Sol nigra, or the black sun, as it is called in German. It has a deep symbolic meaning and should actually be a deep dark red in place of the visually visible black. It is the sol nigra of alchemy, the colour of which indicates a certain phase of lapis."

Recke's mouth twisted. "What does that have to do with alchemy?"

"Just slowly! - Firstly, the meaning of the sun: it is the same symbol as the gamma stage, but with the aspect of the crucifixion. Exactly: our beam cross!"

"Ah!" Reimer furrowed his brows. "What does the symbolism of the crucifixion mean? - Does it mean that we are to be sacrificed? ..."

Gutmann looked past his two friends. "You can interpret things however you like. The round shape of the sun can become a sign of salvation and save the German people, who are destined to be sacrificed under the sign of the cross! World politics is not only conducted by governments alone, but also by forces that are above the visible powers."

"These are no longer big secrets," said Reimer calmly.

"It all depends. You speak of forces that are hardly visible, but at least recognisable. But I mean forces that are neither visible nor recognised! That's a big difference. Behind the scenes of world history, a great trial of strength is taking place, which will definitely be won by a force known to the initiated few as the esoteric world centre or the high seat of ethically positive forces. It is the true Ultima Thule; not only of the Aryan peoples, but of the whole world!"

Recke laughed mockingly, but Reimer leaned forward with interest: "Where is this centre?"

Gutmann shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know that either. Globally speaking, it can't be far from here, but very few people are likely to know the exact location of this mystical point. Not only we from Point 103, but also other organisations and groups of people are striving to find this place, or at least to receive the support and protection of this power. The future will show whether our search will lead to success."

"In connection with the words myth and esotericism: can't that be a mere assumption that, if mistaken, would have dire consequences for the gullible due to an incorrect assessment of world forces?" Reimer gave Gutmann a warning look.

"This centre exists!" the major replied with certainty. "Even the ancient Egyptians knew about it and called it Mount On, somewhere in the north."

Likewise the ancient Sumerians, who called the mystical place Kharsak Kurra or "World Mountain". In the Bible, in the book of Isaiah, it appears under the name Har-Moed, which means "mountain of the assembly."

"No proof yet. Only traditional assumptions!" Gutmann ignored Reimer's objection. "In Asia has now even been connected to this force in recent times."

"By radio?" said Recke ironically.

"No - telepathically!"

"Haha, now the oriental storytellers are coming back into their own!"

"I appreciate your critical mind, Recke. But always remember that a person's knowledge is only a fraction of what is available. We Westerners, as subjugators of Eastern peoples, have for centuries looked down on the so-called natives with arrogance and contempt and must now realise with shame that their history and tradition are at least as old, that their art and philosophy are just as great and that some things are even superior to us. Their transcendental knowledge and their powers in this field are highly developed, while we Europeans still stand before a gate that is closed to us. You will get to know Mongolians here on our station - I can see you are surprised! - Perhaps after a few conversations you will see some things differently than before."

"Why not?" replied Recke affably. "But what about the connection?"

"Very simple. Tibetan lamas of higher degrees came into contact with the centre mentioned. They also know of a world mountain and high seat, which they call Ri-rap-lumpo in their language. I cannot say anything more about these things at the moment, but our connections with Tibet will undoubtedly be very helpful and provide us with details worth knowing. An emissary, a Ta Lama of the Black Cap sect, is even expected here today or tomorrow!"

Recke swayed his head. "What options does Tibet currently have to help the German Empire?"

"None at the moment. But it has helped and it will do so again if the opportunity arises. Until not so long ago, it provided the German Reich government with important documents on the English war effort via its liaison offices in England and was also able to inform them of the results of secret sessions of the English House of Commons within twenty-four hours. The whole thing is said not to have been particularly difficult!"

"What interest do the Tibetans have in this?" asked Reimer.

"A very big one!" smiled Gutmann. "Above all, the visit of the German Tibet expedition under Professor Schäfer established a valuable and favourable personal relationship between Germans and Tibetans. Even if the people in charge of the expedition did not

managed to solve certain esoteric tasks and gain insight into secret books in the Potala library, which are said to contain, among other things, secret prophecies about a resurrection of the former Mongolian empire, the visit fulfilled enough expectations. It also led Tibet to see great political opportunities, as it expected to be relieved of British and Soviet pressure by supporting the new Germany. Not only did it assume that Germany would bind Tibet's two dangerous neighbours, it certainly hoped for a better opportunity to win over the West to Lamaism as a result of the repression of the Roman Christian position of power and to do preparatory work for the prophecies unknown to us. We do not want to examine whether this would ever be possible or whether it is a miscalculation; the political short-term goal of relieving each other by throwing the balls to each other is a good move and Tibet has the greatest interest in Germany remaining strong or becoming strong again. And inconspicuous helpers are often better helpers than so-called strong friends."

"I don't know much about the Tibetans," said Recke. "Just that they like to drink tea with rancid butter. But I could still sympathise with them. Apart from the seal blubber, I like the Eskimos too."

Another smile flitted across Gutmann's serious features. "You should never judge nations by their menu

judgement. This often leads to wrong conclusions. Furthermore, let me advise you: Take the Mongols seriously and do not doubt them. They have a keen instinct and can sense immediately whether you are trying to please them or whether you are not taking them seriously. If they notice a trace of mockery, they turn away and become as dumb as fishes!"

Recke swallowed. "Mhm ..."

"Black cap lamas are coming to the realm of the Black Sun," Reimer whispered broodingly, more to himself. But Gutmann had heard the quiet words.

"Yes, it is the realm of the Black Sun! It is the meeting point of the esoteric circles of the Schutzstaffeln, whose knowledge Mr Himmler also suspected but was not given access to. It is that circle of men who, according to the instructions of one of our spiritual leaders, Standartenführer Rahn, seek what is right and just, who, regardless of the Mosaic Twelve Commandments, have found it out of their own right and duty; men who do not expect help from Mount Sinai on their own authority and pride, but who have gone to a 'mountain of assembly in the farthest midnight' to fetch help and bring it to the people of their blood!"

Reimer pondered for a moment. "Rahn? - Isn't that a man from the modern Cathar tradition?"

"Ah - what do you know about it?"

"Actually, nothing at all. I heard about it in passing, to a certain extent."

"Yes, that's right. The Cathars in the Schutzstaffeln and

The Blackheads are the ones who look to the far north and Tibet in particular. Rahn has also made particularly important connections that are only known to a select few."

Recke straightened up from his casual reclining position. "I can see more clearly now. I don't know any more than Reimer, but your explanations have only just opened my eyes. I am a soldier and know nothing of esotericism and metaphysics. But if people continue to serve the empire here, then that's fine. I don't care what you call things or how you explain them. I already said days ago: I'm flying on for the island of the last heroes. See to it, Gutmann, that I can get into a box again!"

"I'll see what I can do. I have to leave anyway, maybe I can get an order for the next few days. We can then discuss further details of our topic in the evening." He stood up and smoothed his skirt. Reaching for his cap, he said: "See you later, comrades. Goodbye!"

The two captains heard him cross the corridor and enter the room opposite, which he shared with Reimer, at the creak of a door. Immediately afterwards he left it again and moved away with slowly fading steps.

"I must go and see what else Gutmann wanted in the room," said Reimer curiously. Followed by Recke, he also went out.

In the other room, everything was as usual. Reimer saw that Gutmann's locker was ajar. He gently opened the door and looked inside.

Recke saw that Reimer's face was surprised.

"What's wrong?"

"Not much," he grumbled, putting on an indifferent face. "I found a red cloak in Gutmann's wardrobe two days ago. Some kind of robe. Now it's gone. What could Gutmann have to do with it? A strange thing! ..."

THE BOTH

Grace be with me and you, Providence and Fate, as I write these first mysteries handed down, solely for my child Immortality, a Mystic, worthy of this power of ours, which the great god Helios Mithras has given me from his archangel, so that I alone, an eagle, may soar the heavens and behold all things.

(Translation from the Mithras liturgy)

The Arctic sky was a bleak grey. A pale glow behind the crest of the horizon hinted at the light of a distant sun. Gusts of wind whirled small ice crystals and blew fine veils up from the crest of the Ring Mountains.

The two airmen went on their daily short walk outside in disagreement. Gutmann had returned so late the previous evening that the conversation they had started during the day could not be continued. Left to their own devices, the two men found the boredom that had arisen downright oppressive.

In the long run, all the novelties of modern technology and the serenity of their surroundings could not replace the inaction to which they had become accustomed.

were apparently sentenced to indefinite detention. Somehow, however, everything went according to plan, as they had come here from Vernäs with valid orders from their commander and Major Küpper from Berlin must also have been in the loop. Furthermore, the presence of the Waffen-SS men, all of them above team rank, was further visible proof that Point 103 must be of extraordinary importance to the Reich. For this reason, it could not have seemed particularly strange to them that the core personnel of the secret base was made up of religious orders who might have taken on a special mission within the Schutzstaffel order. Gutmann's reports from the previous day had now revealed a corner of these secrets.

The two officers had pulled the hoods of their warm fur parkas low over their faces. Just as they were about to turn back, they suddenly saw three bright lights high up in the sky, travelling at a steady pace and in a triangular pattern. Pale green iridescent discs, like the apparition above the Eskimo settlement on the Boothia Peninsula. The men could not estimate the height or size of the discs. Nevertheless, they got the impression that the strange flying objects were considerably smaller than the disc they had first seen. They sailed silently along like light-emitting discs and disappeared from view after a short time.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," said Recke. "However - aviation could become a little uncomfortable over time!"

Reimer stretched out his arm and pointed over to the weather station in the centre of the mountain. "The men in the frog glass have also seen these illuminated discs. You can clearly see their heads behind the frosted window of the station!"

"I guess they always watch when there's nothing else to see!"

"There!"

A subtle humming sound came from the air. A V7 gyroplane rotated closer and remained in place over the side centre of the landing area. Shortly afterwards, the camouflaged bottom flap opened into a dark maw. You could clearly see how the flying machine made a slight correction to its position, then it glided vertically downwards and disappeared exactly into the ground opening, which closed again immediately afterwards.

"Just like ours!" said Recke. "The first landing we see as observers. Because as often as we are out in the open, we usually find the airfield deserted. For the level of activity here, you should actually see more"

"I think we're sleeping too much. That's the problem!" grinned Reimer.

Recke looked at him askance. "Would you know something better to do about doing nothing?"

Reimer suddenly changed the conversation. "I have the

I had the feeling that it might have been Juncker who came back with the machine. If this is not deceptive, then it might be possible to get some news. Because the aerodrome command doesn't let V7s take off for weather flights!" Followed by Recke, he walked to one of the station doors in his thick flying boots.

"When the wind blows, this dog cold outside is almost unbearable anyway ..."

They made their way towards the large landing hall. Coming through a connecting corridor, they saw the downed gyrocopter standing not far ahead of them, and in the background of the hall two more that they had never noticed before. Reimer approached one of the men who was looking after the aircraft that had landed.

"Has Major Juncker landed?"

"Yes, sir!" the man replied. "As far as I know, he's with the commander's adju right now."

Reimer thanked him. Turning to Recke, he said: "Juncker will certainly return from the Adju to his room to take off his combination. It will probably be best to wait for him there."

As they walked on, they suddenly heard a loudspeaker announcement: "Attention - listen up! - Clear hangar three for landing! - Hangar three ... - Also: Ground crew stand by for the outfield! - I repeat: hangar three ..."

"It seems to me that the shop is finally getting going somehow!" said Recke.

"I already noticed a higher level of activity this morning!" Reimer agreed with him.

"I wonder if that has something to do with the illuminated plates we saw earlier?"

"Hm - on the Boothia Peninsula it has also begun to initiate a change of pace and location. It was quite nice back then - Aladdin's magic lamp above the magnetic North Pole! - If it hadn't been for the tragedy with the old shaman ..."

"It was somehow connected back then," replied Reimer. "For the time being, this story is still a mystery to us. Perhaps we'll find an explanation for it later. And by the way, we were wrong when we landed; the magnetic pole is no longer to be found on the Boothia Peninsula, but has now moved north-west to Prince of Wales Island. I spoke to Gutmann about this a few days ago and he explained to me that our maps still had the old positions. The magnetic pole is moving and has already shifted about three hundred kilometres from the point we had assumed. The concern of our magnetic needle was quite understandable, even at this distance."

"Nobody told us before we left. Bloody negligence in Vernäs."

Just outside the corridor where their rooms were located, they came across three Japanese men in uniform. The stripes on their shoulders identified them as officers.

Reimer and Recke saluted militarily and the Japanese also thanked them, smiling obligingly. They were all three small in stature, but looked incredibly intelligent.

"The Japs probably didn't dream of the North Pole half a year ago any more than we did!" said Recke when they had passed. "They're good soldiers!"

Reimer had guessed correctly when he assumed in the landing hall that Juncker would soon come into his room. The two captains had not been in the room that Recke shared with him for long when Juncker entered in his flying clothes.

"Hello, comrades," he greeted and began to open his combination. Recke willingly helped him undress. He even wanted to hang the overclothes in Juncker's locker compartment, but Juncker refused: "Leave the suit on the bed, Recke! - I may have to start again soon. We don't have many men who can fly with a gyroplane. Would you like to do a training course?"

"Why not?" laughed Reimer. Recke also nodded in agreement.

"We don't have enough men here for everything now," Juncker said casually. "You will certainly find many uses in the very near future."

"I hope so," grumbled Recke.

"Why are you grumpy?" Juncker asked, looking at his mate.

Reimer replied in his place: "He is curious and

actually expects scalding hot news!"

"Ah - and you don't?"

"Also," Reimer admitted and laughed.

"Hm - actually, we're just about to get the news. I picked up an emissary from Asia from a certain point outside the Arctic. We have quite a few people here now and some are expected later today. At the Great Assembly, much will be revealed that we do not yet know."

"We met three Japanese officers," Recke confessed.

"Oh, they've been here for three days! They're the emissaries from the Black Dragon."

"Oops - how gruesome!" Recke laughed broadly. "What kind of club is that?"

Juncker remained serious. "The most powerful organisation in Japan! It has an influence that extends far beyond the borders of its country. They are valuable allies, these Japanese?"

"Did you land here on your own plane?" Reimer wanted to know.

"No. We picked them up in a long-haul aircraft about halfway there. We always do this for safety reasons, and it's also very dangerous to fly in this area!"

"Why?" asked Recke. "If you can manage the navigation and have a good machine -"

"That's not what I meant," Juncker replied. "But there is a certain area - not too far from here - where there have been missing persons who could not be found despite a thorough search. It's forbidden land."

"I don't really understand that." Reimer shook his head. "With the current state of aerial reconnaissance?"

"That's just it! - I would just like to point out the sensational case of the polar aviator Levanevsky. In 1937, this Russian flew a four-engined aircraft with five companions over the Pole on a non-stop flight to Alaska and suddenly disappeared from the scene. A radio message from him reported that he had flown over the Pole, later a message arrived that the right engine had broken down and immediately afterwards all radio communication ceased."

"Crashes happen from time to time," said Reimer laconically.

"The unusual nature of the case is based on the disappearances and the presumably misguided search flights. We old people who have been here at Point 103 for some time are well acquainted with this story. Listen further: The aviator Wilkins carried out ten flights from northern Canada, as did the experienced Grazianski. The Russians themselves sent an icebreaker with aeroplanes into the Beaufort Sea, but had no success in their extensive search. The most interesting aspect of all the research flights, however, is the fact that a reconstruction of the flight route on the polar maps shows the

It was determined that the search planes should have discovered a trace of the missing persons at a distance. However, the routes forked conspicuously around an area; it seems as if some forces had diverted the search planes from their original course in order to keep them away from a particular area. The Russians later made a number of flights from a base on Crown Prince Rudolf's land, but all their dogged efforts were in vain. The mystery surrounding Levanevsky and his companions has remained unsolved to this day. Since we ourselves are able to keep foreign aircraft away from our island here, it is quite possible that

..." Juncker made an indeterminate movement.

"If you have reconstructed a flight route, it should be easy to make flight corrections on the basis of this," objected Recke critically. "A strictly fixed route ..."

"I told you earlier," Juncker repeated, "that our magneto-radio equipment is known to be able to deflect any aircraft approaching us without the pilot noticing."

"That would mean that Levanevsky must have discovered something and no longer had the opportunity to transmit. That left two questions: what did he discover and who could have caused the Russian to crash or prevented him from transmitting?"

"Correct!" confirmed Juncker. "However - the answer to that is still open."

"Very strange." Reimer ran his hand over his forehead.
"There's no parallel for this incident."

"Yes, but not so tragically!" Reimer
looked at Juncker. "Which one?"

"Point 103!" replied Juncker, clearly enjoying the astonishment of the two captains. "Land was once found in this area too. During the First World War, the Canadian Macmillan undertook an expedition in search of Cracker Land, which the famous polar explorer Peary reported on in 1906. Macmillan undertook expeditions with sledge teams from Ellesmereland and Axel Heiberg Island and penetrated beyond the 82nd parallel, but was unable to discover the land. It must have been easier to find back then. Since then, Cracker Land has become a legendary land ..."

"That such a thing is possible?" Recke marvelled.

"Oh, science knows of two more such cases! In 1907, the Koch brothers sighted an island that was later named Fata Morgana Island. Around thirty years later, Lauge Koch repeated the search for the island suspected to be on the Nansen Ridge in an aeroplane, but was also unable to find it. Around the same time, a larger Russian expedition under Samoilovich set off to search for the legendary Sannikov Land, among other things. Despite modern aids, the Russians were also unsuccessful. It is said to be north of the

New Siberian Islands lie around the 80th parallel."

"You are well informed about the history of polar research!" Reimer had to recognise.

"Pah," Juncker said dismissively. "Gutmann knows a lot more!"

Reimer looked up. "Gutmann spoke of a mystical high seat ..."

"Ah - really? -" Juncker raised his eyebrows. "When did he tell you about the Blue Isle?"

"Blue Island?"

"You're saying! ..."

"Gutmann didn't mention a name," Recke remembered.

"Then he was probably just speaking in general terms. But still: this could possibly be the solution to the Lewanewski problem. The command staff at our base is working on this still unsolved mystery."

Recke got up from the edge of the bed, put his hands in his trouser pockets and stood with a broad stance. "That's very interesting, dear Juncker. But doesn't our staff here have any more pressing concerns at the moment?"

"I think that Gutmann has given you clues that point to causal connections!"

"You must understand Recke," shouted Reimer in between. "He probably understands everything, but at the moment he's only ever thinking about the obvious. We all have relatives back home and are worried about the chaos that is about to ensue."

"That's understandable," Juncker admitted. "I'm not much better off. I have a family in Magdeburg." A slight wince crossed his sharp-featured face.

"It's clear that we need to get out of our ruminations. When the Great Assembly is over, there will be an abundance of deployment orders!"

"What kind of meeting is this?" Reimer wanted to know.

"Big council meeting!" said Juncker mysteriously.

Recke scuffed his heels on the floor. "Like the Fiji Islanders ..." But Juncker didn't listen. "I'm a bit tired. Let me sleep for half an hour!" Reimer poked Recke angrily. "You should take certain things a little more seriously."

"Don't blame him!" Juncker said to Reimer while lying down.

"It's always good to look at things with a dry sense of humour. We all understand each other, don't we?" He waved his hand in an agitated manner and then turned his face to the wall. A few minutes later, his deep breaths revealed that he had fallen asleep.

When Gutmann came into his room late at night, Reimer was already asleep. He was about to leave early in the morning when Reimer woke up.

"Hey, Gutmann!"

"Yes?"

"Where to so early?"

"Lots to do today! - I have to hurry." He pushed the door open and left before Reimer could ask any more questions. Through the briefly opened door

Command announcements from the loudspeaker system.

Reimer stretched his arms and jumped up with a jerk. He had to yawn while he was still dressing. He had had a somewhat restless sleep and had been dreaming. While he could hear the hurried patter of footsteps through the door from the corridor outside, revealing increased activity, he tried to organise his thoughts and recall the dream images of the night.

However, he was only able to piece together vague ideas connected to the mysterious high seat in the centre of the Arctic. Gutmann's hints and Juncker's remark about a blue island had stimulated his imagination and conjured up images in his dreams that would not return in his waking life. Somehow he had retained a memory that the strange glowing discs had played a role in his inner vision. A feeling that could not yet be explained made him suspect that these phenomena could be connected with this unknown centre.

However, he immediately became uncertain in his combinations when he used his technical knowledge and logic for his observations. There was a gap here that he was unable to bridge. While he was still picking up his towel to go to the wash and bath room at the end of the corridor, he decided to keep these mind games to himself for the time being.

and wait to see what Gutmann would say about it from time to time.

In the washroom, he met Recke, who had also got up and was about to leave. "When did you start getting up with the chickens?"

Recke wiped a splash of soap off his right boot with his towel. "Funny comparison, when there are not only no chickens here, but no zoo at all! Your comparisons are a bit flawed."

"My God - idioms!" Reimer placed his small shaving kit on the top of the wash basin and brushed off his shirt. "Gutmann has flown out again."

"Juncker too!" replied Recke. "The whole corridor seems to be empty today. The hustle and bustle and the loudspeakers woke me up."

Reimer had turned on the hot water tap and started soaping himself up with the shaving brush. "Yes, no more people in the neighbouring rooms around us. I think we could have the whole bathroom here to ourselves for a while. No-one's crowding in."

"Come on - have a bath! - I want to see what's going on today. The station is open like a beehive."

"The messengers must all be here by now, I reckon." Reimer slowly began to scrape his chin.

"That's exactly why. Hurry up with mowing your stubble field and pick me up for breakfast."

"Mhm," said Reimer. He hurried to the toilet to get out of the bathroom as quickly as possible.

out. After just under a quarter of an hour, he took Recke out of the room and went with him to the dining room. None of the known and unknown comrades were still there. Only the three Japanese officers seen the day before were sitting around a table in the corner of the hall, chatting animatedly with a bald Mongolian wearing a wide black overcoat.

The strangers were engrossed in their conversation and paid no attention to the breakfast stragglers. Their expressions were serious and calm. No gestures disturbed the dignity of their conversation.

"I once got my hands on an illustrated work by the great Swedish explorer Sven Hedin," Recke whispered to his mate as they took their seats. "Among other things, it showed a Tibetan abbot who looked exactly like this black skirt here with the Japs!"

"It's possible that this man is the Ta Lama Gutmann was talking about," Reimer replied. "An interesting person!"

The bald stranger exerted an indefinable attraction. Recke kept glancing furtively at the man. "The Tibetans are strange and seemingly impenetrable people. I almost wish I could get to know their strange country!"

Reimer was just about to reply when he saw the man in the monk's habit put his black

jet eyes suddenly turned to Recke and stared at him piercingly. The lama's face resembled a carved mask.

Attracted by the power of this gaze, Recke withstood the scrutiny for a few seconds, then he became restless. He moved his lips slightly, as if searching for words, but couldn't get a sound out of his throat. Only his fingers made a few fidgety movements on the tabletop.

"What's wrong with you?" Reimer tapped one foot lightly against Recke's shin. At the same time, he noticed that a fleeting smile slipped over the stranger's features after his comrade's wince. It was only a slight twitch of the corners of his mouth, which lent an ironic touch to his otherwise impassive expression and betrayed an underlying meaning. The small black eyes glittered almost piercingly under half-lowered lids.

The Japanese also sat silently and did not move. A spell had fallen over the people. Then the lama stood up and said loudly and clearly: "Buddha's ears are everywhere!"

"Buddha's ears are everywhere!" Recke repeated with difficulty. "The man can't speak German and yet he understood everything! ..."

The Tibetan nodded briefly to the Japanese, then tightened his robe and walked slowly out of the room. His gait was slightly slurring and his gaze was now turned inwards. A few minutes later, the Japanese followed.

Reimer looked thoughtfully at his comrade, who was still staring at the exit through which the Asians had disappeared. "That wasn't a pickpocket trick! ..."

"Truly not! - But we'll probably never be able to find out what it really was. It must be a strange mixture of telepathy and metapsychics."

"Asia will always be a mystery to us Europeans. No matter what you call or label the inexplicable, it goes beyond our intellectual horizon. The materialism of the West has drawn its own boundaries, which only hinder any view beyond."

"Maybe that's a good thing," said Recke slowly. "Otherwise we would perhaps no longer be ceaselessly creative, but dream and twilight. We must constantly create and build, but not always have one foot on the ladder to the afterlife. Otherwise the world will decay!"

A man from the kitchen staff came over and put breakfast on the table. Black coffee and conig bread with jam.

"I just want to know where the blokes here get their coffee beans from?" asked the man from Kassel, who always drank two or three cups. "In Vernäs, they only had beetroot water, called negro sweat for short!"

"Probably from our patrons in America. Gutmann was alluding to that."

"Hm."

During the quick early morning meal, the meagre conversation between the two captains was interrupted several times by loudspeaker commands for airfield operations. Standbys were constantly being called. As little as it was possible to estimate the number of personnel at Point 103, the ongoing instructions indicated that a considerable number of men had already been flown in. The great strategic importance of the North Pole was unmistakable.

The two men were clear about this without words. At the moment, however, their thoughts were still mainly focussed on the strange man in the black robe, who must have understood Recke's thoughts.

Recke suddenly said: "When I get home safe and sound, I will read books about Tibet and also look into Lamaism. I am now very interested in how far our knowledge has progressed. If the inner core is likely to remain a mystery, I would at least like to delve into the outer world."

"Buddha's ears are everywhere," Reimer repeated his mate's translation from before. "I wouldn't be surprised if the Ta Lama also felt the repetition of a similar wish."

"That is so incredible that I would have denied it most vigorously at any time if I had not been proven wrong by the facts. If one

However, if we disregard the strangeness of this occurrence, guessing such a wish is meaningless. One may be able to guess thoughts. You can never put them into practice!"

As the day wore on, the tension between the two officers eased. The extremely high level of activity on the station and the hustle and bustle of the men made Recke in particular grumpy again, as he was already fed up with doing nothing. Only the hope of the imminent missions kept the men's spirits down. Reimer was also beginning to wear down.

The captains slept through the afternoon in their rooms. Recke, who woke up first, sought out Reimer and shook him awake. "Get up, Herbert! - Before I stumbled into your bower, some guy from the staff came running through the corridor shouting something about the cinema. They want to see if they're showing a film with salon heroes and sugar dolls. You don't even know what a pretty girl looks like any more."

Reimer pulled himself up and blinked. "Who's talking about a cinema here? If that were true, Gutmann would have said something about it long ago."

"Nobody talks here!" grumbled Recke. "I've heard the word 'cinema hall', so something like this must exist."

"Whatever." Reimer got ready and stepped out into the corridor with Recke. Heading in the direction of the dining room, they didn't meet anyone. It fell

They noticed that, in contrast to the morning, there was an unusual calm. There were only a few men on duty in the hangars of the gyroscopes. All work was at a standstill.

Recke approached a technician he already knew by sight. "Where is the cinema?"

The man looked at him in astonishment. "He's ..." He interrupted the beginning of the sentence and showed uncertainty.

"Well?"

"You should actually know! Or - ?"

"For crying out loud - not even a police dog can find its way around this labyrinth!"

The man breathed a sigh of relief. "I see. - From the corridor that leads to the frog glass, just before the weather station, there's a dead end that leads to room Roman thirty-eight. Go through there - you can't go wrong!"

"Mhm - thank you!" Recke greeted briskly and pulled Reimer along with him. "Funny bloke. He acted like it was the secret laboratory of Peenemünde."

They followed the path indicated. Their shadows on the floor grew or diminished depending on whether they entered or left a circle of light from the overhead lighting. In contrast to the other connecting corridors in the station, this corridor was somewhat less well lit due to its extraordinary length.

In front of the stairway to the Frog Glass, they came to the entrance of the dead-end street indicated, which led for about fifty metres to a small door with the Roman numeral XXXVIII emblazoned on its smoothed wood. At

A guard stood at the door, keeping a firm stance.

Passing through the half-open door, they entered a small hall with a wall opening straight ahead. Dim light pointed to a continuation of the path. A low murmur of voices drifted out.

The two airmen had no idea that the next few seconds would bring them the biggest surprise of their lives so far. Unsuspecting, driven only by the need for a little change, they entered the next room and stopped in surprise. What presented itself to their eyes was neither a cinema, nor any other sober or technical facility, as they had found everything so far to be fully functional, but modest and only according to the aspects of military needs.

They were in an anteroom with a bronze astrolabe hanging from the centre of the ceiling as a light fixture. An opal lamp formed a luminous centre in the middle of the intertwined metal rings, spreading a mild, pleasant light. Two-thirds of the way up the otherwise bare room, the walls were decorated with the symbols of the twelve signs of the zodiac, while the ceiling featured brightly coloured dots of the figures of the northern night sky painted on a dark background.

Their eyes wandered. On the wall to the left was another opening, with a red curtain drawn to one side. From the next one

The murmur of voices came out of the room like the sound of the sea. A large part of the station crew seemed to have gathered there.

A realisation struck Recke's brain like a bolt of lightning. He clutched Reimer's arm: "The Great Assembly!"

"Very strange," he said as he walked on. Behind the curtain a spacious hall opened up, to which a series of steps led downwards. And here they saw what they thought was the product of an exalted imagination. A strange hall with strange people.

The room looked like the nave of a church. On both sides of the elongated hall were rows of benches where some of the men from the ward sat. The centre aisle was lower and the hall continued into it with four more steps. The whole thing looked like a street, flanked by the walls of a low parapet on both sides, leading to the rear end of the hall. A kind of procession of people, most of whom wore red cloaks, stood on this lane. The white cloaks of the temple lords must have looked something like this.

At the head of the procession were foreign guests, whose garb also emphasised the strangeness of this gathering. The helmet-like black headgear of the Tibetan Ta Lama towered above all the men, making the Japanese standing behind it look almost small. Whilst the Tibetan man

The Japanese officers were probably wearing their uniforms, but they also had black cloaks over them. A little later, the two airmen could see that these cloaks had a dragon outlined in silver on the left side of the chest.

The presence of officers from other nations, including two American officers, was also striking. Some of these men also wore red robes, some of them black. A number of Indians with their tight white trousers and black, frock coat-like outer garments were also at the head of the long group. A few tall black men, one of them a typical Ethiopian, Arabs in black burnouses and two Persians with their lambskin caps completed the picture of a worldwide rendezvous.

They all stared at a man in a German uniform who, throwing back his red robe, raised his arm in a solemn gesture. A silver oak leaf gleamed on either side of his collar.

"We welcome the messengers!" His voice sounded full and audible throughout the hall.

The two captains sat inconspicuously to one side and waited for what was to come next. All the quiet murmuring in the hall had ceased. With a quick glance round, Reimer and Recke noticed that to the left and right of the man who had just spoken the greeting stood a statue from ancient mythology. One of them represented

one depicted the lion-headed Kronos, the other was the well-known statue of Helios.

At the side of these mythological figures stood a German and an Italian officer of higher rank, representing a kind of guard of honour. The back wall of the hall itself had a large sculptural mural; it showed the depiction of Mithras, also familiar to all people with a humanist education. The Lord of the Sun, slaughtering the bull, and on either side the torchbearers, the lion, the dog on the bull's belly, the snake, the scorpion on the victim's genitals and above Mithras the raven.

In the meantime, the red coat from the end of the hall had started talking again:

"Praise to the Supervisor, the Lord, who rewards those who do good deeds according to their own will and who purifies obedience in the end!" A slight murmur answered him as he lowered his arm. "The messengers know why they have come and we are eager to hear what they have to tell us. Let the messengers speak so that we can make decisions together!" He nodded to the messengers and stepped aside a little.

A Japanese captain in a dragon cloak was the first to step forward and address the gathering. He bowed deeply before beginning to speak.

"We envoys of the Black Dragon bring the greetings of our covenant to the Lord of Point 103. The dragon is ready, together with the others

organisations to fulfil the Great Commandment of the world and to contribute to its reshaping. In the struggle on the mental and mystical level, the Federation, together with the members of the Oomoto Centre, will do everything in its power to achieve the great goals in its field. The Red Sun and the Black Sun serve the same Lord! - This is our message and we will convey the decisions made here to the dragon in front of our Sacred Mountain." Once again, the Japanese man bowed solemnly and then stepped aside.

Another messenger emerged from the small circle of Indians. Plainly, without ceremony, he approached the assembly, bowing only in a measured manner. His almost flawless German had a slightly sing-song tone.

"What is above the sky and what is below the earth and what is between the two, the sky and the earth, what they call the past, the present and the future, is interwoven and interwoven in space, so it says in the Upanishads. - I am a Chaprasi, a messenger of my country, and we greet the Lord from point 103, who, like us, is in the service of the Lord of the world! Our message is the same as that of the brothers of the Black Dragon and our mission is to communicate to our Guru the decisions taken here by the Great Assembly in the service of the Supreme Power. Here, near the Su-Meru, the ancient sacred high seat, the power is given that will open the gates of a new world for humanity.

age will open." The Indian's eyes burned and mesmerised the crowd present. "When the people who serve the Lord of the Sun here touch the hands of the world clock, they will also be supported by centres of ancient wisdom. This is what the Great Guru is saying through my mouth!" With a slight bow to the German officer, placing his right hand to his forehead, mouth and heart, he stepped back and made way for one of the two Persians.

"I am the Sâfir, the envoy of the sons of the Black Widowers We also look unwaveringly towards the World Mountain, which we pure ones call the Hara- berezaiti in our language and to which we are all close here. Ahura Mazda's grace has opened our eyes and found us worthy to bring the greetings of our community to those gathered here on behalf of the Ustad. Those who are among the knowledgeable know whose message I am echoing and that it cannot be other than that of the men before and after me. Whoever is purified by the fire and remains waiting in silence will have all doors opened to him. We the pure are ready to do what must be done. My brother Mukaddasi, the Sâfir of the Sufi Bi-Shar, is like me ready to take the message as we have delivered it. It is time for the flames of light to blaze higher and for the forces of darkness to be repressed. That is all I have to say!"

"That's right!" confirmed the second Persian, also emerging from the procession. "Im nâzdi bâkuh dunjâi - we

are close to the mountain of the world, may the Great Power be with us! We are ready!"

As he stepped back, the first Persian added:
"Huda wänd dunjâi 'l-ed'an-e mubaräk nikân-ra negâh nhi-daräd - The Lord of the world, who must be obeyed, protects the good!"

The Persians were followed by a Chinese man, again wearing a uniform, whom Reimer and Recke had overlooked. Smiling obligingly, he introduced himself as an envoy of the Hungbund and repeated in English phrases similar to those spoken by his predecessors.

"We summon the spirit of the North Pole, Si Nen Ti, who lives in the Great Bear, and look towards the Tien tze shan, the mountain of paradise!" he exclaimed.

"It is the Tao," he then concluded, "that creates the harmony of the universe and to which we are subordinate in service. The Tao that was taught by Mount Tai shan and is recognised and preached by the Heavenly Master and the Hungbund as the foundation of all being. So we, the knowers of our gross covenant, also look to the secret high seat of humanity, the Kwen-lun, to receive the power to fulfil our task. The sage Kung Futse said in his book Lun-Yü: The superior man is skilled in duty, the common man is skilled in gain! - If the hour has now come when the knowledgeable are called, then we too are ready. This is the message of the great Koh, our old man from the mountain, and his two Hiong-ti!"

After the Chinese man, the following took it in turn to the

Ethiopian, a Brazilian officer, a Venezuelan, a Siamese and a Mexican full-blooded Indian with the rank of captain all sent the same messages. All were ready to serve the same goal at the given hour. The penultimate messenger was an Arab, the only one accompanied by his two companions, who strode onto the platform with the two mythological figures. He raised his right hand with dignity before beginning to speak. Beneath the dark kaffjeh, a striking face looked out at those gathered, passionate eyes flashing.

"We are the Sufâr, the messengers of the Guardians of the Mysteries, the ancient Ali Sikh from Cairo and the Guardian from the Valley of Wisdom of Jebel Hadhur! We are sent by the men who guard the ancient black stone Anât in the 'Tower of the Transient', which is considered the mother of all being. Their words are: 'Bring our greetings to those who are on their way to the Mountain of Assembly! We too are willing to complete the time and reach perfection ourselves. Countless people have sought the path to the light and yet ended up getting stuck in the thorns of doubt. We no longer seek knowledge, because we have been given knowledge! The realisation of the secrets of the world that separates being from appearance. Just as the Yezidis at Jebel Sinjar still sacrifice to Melek Ta'us, the Lord of Evil, because they believe in the forgiving redemption of the High Judgement, people all over the world are bowing to the increasing forces of the negative pole and its magical influences."

The Arab took a short step towards the audience. His throaty voice rose as he continued in flawless German: "But no one can escape where his path has led him. A sura in the Koran says: "When the coming is near, there is no denial, no diminishing, no exaltation. When the earth writhes in labour, when mountain rubs against mountain and atomises into nothingness, then you will be ranked threefold!" - The Arab grabbed the burnoose.

"There is no crescent moon over the world, but there is a cross over humanity. The guardians around the stone Anät see a division of the earth into a western and an eastern half coming. This is the visible horizontal bar of this cross. The polar forces: of white and black magic, the top and bottom of the invisible, the vertical bar, dominate the horizontal! Thus the physical force is above the mental level and the ethos of humanity is determined by the Midnight Mountain, to which we recognisers turn our eyes. Hence the message of the Shêch: We have received the invitation to the Great Assembly of the Black Sun and at the same time we have seen the luminous discs in the sky. We read the signs that herald a turning point in time and promise a new paradise to the people of the coming Age of Aquarius. Before us is the High Time of the Great Mother. Let the gate of the 'Tower of the Transient' therefore be open to those who know! - *Insân idhab ilâ 'Ibhabi waftahhu!*"

Murmurs of agreement could be heard. The explanations of the man in the black burnoose had made an impression and identified him as a personality in his group. The Arab had undoubtedly studied in Europe and had also spent years in Germany. His way of expressing himself in this language was astonishing.

Sipping slowly and leaning slightly forward, the Tibetan Ta Lama stepped into the centre of the semi-circle formed by the previous messengers. Reimer and Recke used this brief moment of expectation to push themselves even closer to the front. Nobody paid any attention to them.

The Tibetan paused for a few breaths, completely absorbed in himself. Then he turned round and let his enquiring eyes wander over the assembly through half-closed eyelids. To those standing further away, he gave the impression of being asleep. The strangeness of his person was heightened by the fantastic-looking headdress; the typical Tibetan monk's cap with the large dragon helmet-like crest that curved steeply.

When he began to speak in English, everyone leant forward to understand the Ta Lama better, as he didn't speak very loudly.

"I come as Ku-tshap, as a messenger, of the Mahasiddha Lugtog, who is in contact with the sages of Shangri La and to whom the voices come from midnight and from the subterranean realm of Aggartha. And this is his message and his prayer: I

offer the lamp that illuminates all the kingdoms of the world and is filled with the light of the sun and the moon, in whose precious vessel, wide as the three thousand worlds, and in the sea of fluctuating butter, soaked with butter, is the wick, strong as Mount Meru! - The lamp illuminates the world, which is about to perish in chaos if people do not come to their senses in time. The shining discs of Mani are signs in the sky and they will multiply as the gulf between the peoples deepens. Ngönkyi Tsao Kung's message from the Lord of the World did not reach the ruler in the West, who has his soldiers fighting against the whole world. He has not been warned and his enemies will therefore benefit from it." The Tibetan's eyes narrowed even more. "The Mahasiddha will mediate between those who seek and those who wait. I also see men coming to us from here who are well received by us. They all have to follow the path to which they are destined and everything will be fulfilled in time."

"At this time, everything will be fulfilled!" repeated a voice from somewhere with a resonance that is characteristic of all sounds coming from loudspeakers. At the same time, an indirect light shone out and covered the cultic relief of the background with a bright red glow. While all those present remained in deep silence, the voice of the Invisible One continued: "We have heard the words of the messengers and now know that the

The communities represented have gained the same insights and are following the same paths. We are therefore also now revealing our messages, which will determine our actions! - Above all, the Yalta Conference on 1 February this year was an agreement between the Japhetites of Crimea and the Shriners, the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant in New York. These forces represented themselves through the figures of visible world politics. The result, beyond the fate of Germany, was a dictate to divide the world into an Eastern and a Western sphere of power for a period of ten years. These powers, both subject to grey magic, will be responsible for the chaos that will befall Europe and, especially in Germany, a terrible time reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War. It is the terrible fulfilment of Walter Rathenau's prophecy: Germany will be a desert! ..." There was a slight modulation in his voice. "It is already clear that a huge wave of persecution will be unleashed, comparable to the collective persecutions of earlier times. Just as the Albigenses, the Cathars, the Templars, the Waldenses, the Patarenes and the Bogumils were once persecuted for belonging to their orders or communities, so in the near future a collective agitation will begin against the Schutzstaffeln, the Vlasov people, the Ustasha members, against the men of the Italian Monte Rossa Division and also the Slovakian Tiso people, as many

The French and Flemish will be caught in the mill of an incipient East-West conflict."

A brief pause in the art followed, during which a few half-loud exclamations from the audience could be heard. Dispassionately and soberly, the voice of the Invisible One continued: "The persecuted Collectives will have the same path ahead of them as the hunted of an intolerant world centuries before. They are also destined to be preserved as a substance in order to enter the magical plane as such. The gates of Aggartha will therefore open to them! - Those who have acted contrary to the ethical principles of their communities and contributed to their misfortune through personal guilt are doomed to world judgement. The investigation and clarification of how and to what extent the collective persecution will begin is the coming task of the tactical group on point 103 - For the messengers of the communities close to us, it should also be said that point 103 will endeavour to expand its technical-military potential over the next five years in order to be able to appear as a co-determining factor on the mental level in due course. We request the support of our friendly organisations for the related actions, which will be carried out globally. Furthermore, we will devote ourselves increasingly to the discovery and exploitation of certain sources of raw materials and, in addition, to the search for and exploration of the technical-physical

potential of ancient civilisations. We would also welcome closer co-operation with the other groups in this area! And a reminder to all: we have no time to lose, as the Shriners in particular are endeavouring to gain the protection of the Great Pole. Their latest creation is the establishment of the United Nations - UN for short - which has been underway for some time now and whose symbol is a blue flag with the pole as the centre of the globe. This gesture and the symbolic bowing to the pole, this second edition of Wilson's old plan, must not be overlooked. The measuring of forces on the mental level has begun, the work on the mystical level is intensifying! We must therefore make decisions immediately after the messengers have arrived and we have heard their words. We will inform the messengers of the outcome. As commander of point 103, I order the staff to the command centre immediately and interrupt the meeting. The Ia must give an introductory report on the situation based on the latest reports and bring the relevant documents with him. The reconvening of the Grand Assembly will be announced by loudspeaker. The guests will be invited to the parlour for the duration of the interruption. I repeat once again: The staff will report to the command centre immediately!"

When the voice fell silent, the red light also went out. Into the silence that had fallen, the voice of the officer who opened the meeting could be heard

had. With polite words, he asked the messengers to follow him.

While the men in the rows of benches on either side remained standing up in their seats, the speaker with the red cloak walked slowly towards the exit, followed by the black-capped lama, the three Japanese from Aikyojûku and the rest of the sentinels.

Climbing up the first flight of steps behind the red coat, the Tibetan saw Reimer and Recke, who had pressed themselves against the wall and were scrutinising the train. The Ta Lama stopped walking for a moment and the train faltered.

"Sang-gye ku-wang tschem-po!" he said loudly and fixed his eyes on Recke.

The man from Kassel hesitantly put his right hand to the peak of his cap. "I don't quite understand," he stammered.

A smile flashed across the Ta Lama's mask-like features. Continuing, he turned his head slightly and repeated in English: "Buddha is omnipotent - Buddha is all-powerful!" A secret knowledge sounded from the Tibetan's sentence, the meaning of which lay hidden in the future. Without taking any further notice of their surroundings, the messengers left the hall. The strangest thing was that the interlude had not caused any surprise. The eyes of the other men had not rested on the man addressed any longer than the Ta Lama himself had paid attention to him.

It was only after the messengers had left that the rows of benches emptied casually and the men crowded in without

The crowd hurried towards the exit. Only the two officers next to the statues of Kronos and Helios, the German and the Italian, remained in their places.

Reimer and Recke, who were not hurrying either, saw a man pushing through from the side of the messengers' redcoat suite and coming towards them. It was Gutmann.

"Who brought you here?" he asked, not unkindly, as he stood next to his comrades.

Recke had been dwelling on thoughts that had filled his mind since the Tibetan's departure and didn't even understand Gutmann's words. Reimer answered in his place:

"Feeling lonely and abandoned, we wandered in the labyrinth of the immortal gods and ..."

"... and so on," Gutmann cut in with a sneer. "I know enough of those sayings too!" He took both friends by the arm and pulled them along. "It's actually a good coincidence that you came here on your own. In the last few hours, I really didn't know what I should have thought of first. Your presence shortens my explanations!"

Between small groups of men, they walked through the cosmic vestibule, as Gutmann jokingly called the anteroom, and then through the corridors and halls to their rooms. Juncker arrived immediately behind them. Both officers took off their red capes and made themselves comfortable in Gutmann's room.

"The red robes at the meeting were reminiscent of

reminds me a lot of a court of law," said Reimer, pointing to the coats.

Gutmann sat down on his cot next to Recke and replied seriously: "This impression is not so incorrect. It's actually - metaphorically speaking - an arm of a world judgement!"

Recke looked up from his brooding. Looking at Gutmann, who was sitting next to him, he said: "Court or no court - it doesn't matter to me! Something is happening on this sick planet that the little Landser at the front has no idea about. There's still a lot of fog around me, but it always seems to be the case in politics that some things have to remain hidden. One question: Who are the Shriners?"

Gutmann leaned backwards. "If you remember what the commander said into the microphone earlier, he called them the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant. In this, a shrine, they guard the magic personified by Yahweh as the power centre of a partly national, partly cosmopolitan active substance that is effective in both directions. Their political representatives on the visible world stage include the American President Roosevelt. Churchill and other men of world politics also belong to the world brotherhood of all lodges, whose mysterious head, the H.O.A.T.F. based in Chicago, is also above the Sanhedrin in the world's inner government. All lodges are subject to the 'Head of all true Freemasons', the auxiliary troops of the

Mount Zion will be led to the goal of One World Government under many profane guises. It is a power that has its net above all other forces and storms together with all of them against the Midnight Mountain."

"Oh, I'm beginning to realise," said Recke. "As far as the mystical or magical level is concerned, there seems to be a very old conflict between spiritual directions and ethical concepts!"

"That's right," Gutmann agreed with him. "The districts mentioned go back to the Golden Age of a long-gone human epoch. In the fragments of the Lost Paradise of the Atlantis period, there is also talk of an interregnum in which black magicians of Semitic origin ruled over the Aryan Atlanteans. No doubt they also placed their Bealim - their Baal gods - next to the dominant god Poseidonis. The old black-magical god cults of the Baal direction were rooted in the Semitic habitat; the Bealim survived the Old Antarctic catastrophe and were preserved - by a place name following in the genitive or with the article to characterise the god - as lords of the places concerned, predominantly as mountain gods. Thus Baal Lebanon and Baal Tabor. Baal Melkart was a Phoenician city Baal. The latter was also worshipped in Israel-Judah at the time of the Omri dynasty. Before the immigration of Israel, the indigenous inhabitants of the Palestinian region worshipped

The Bealim, who merged with Baal-Yahweh when the ancient places of worship passed to Israel, were worshipped by the Israelites. Esoteric concepts and mystery wisdom from the eastern circle of life seeped into the Israelites and gave them the knowledge of an esoteric world centre, Mount Meru, known by various names, the Midnight Mountain! This high seat of ancient Atlantis from a time when Greenland was still the Green Land reminded the Israelites of the interregnum their race once held there. Isaiah referred to the mountain in the Bible as Har-Moed, the mountain of assembly. This gave rise to a spiritual variation; Mount Zion as the Jewish centre with Yahweh as Baal-Zion. They labelled the mystery of Asgard-Aggarth in Semitic: Gabbatha. The knowledge of these things intuitively connected the Israelites with a longing for the happy time of their rule over generations of Atlanteans. This mystical subconsciousness is the true reason for their historically persistent restlessness and infiltration into the western and northern regions of life. In these they currently form a grey-magical circle with a black-magical centre, as they are unable to detach themselves from the black-cultic primordial ground. This focus on the Arctic World Mountain is now resulting in the advance into the areas of the Great Pole in a race with the white-magical forces of the Indo-Aryan groups, who are striving for an Atlantean renaissance. A long-term decision is **i n** the offing: Either the

Shriners the tablets from Sinai to Midnight Mountain and assimilate the White Power for the reign of Baal Yahweh, or the coming Aquarian Age of a new Yuga passes through the purifying fire of the North!"

"This is an invisible front that is labelled irrational by the mass of people," Reimer interjected.

"Invisible - in part, yes - irrational only for those who do not seek! - Incidentally, the irrational as an antipole in the dualism of all things is also a primal force that acts on us naturally without calculation and without the will to reason and cannot be replaced by consciousness. The materialistic world view of modern times denies all relationships to the primordial and, as rational, always remains on the fringes of all events. To know this is the secret of Asia. It is the result of the factual that we in Europe are slowly becoming desolate or "monotonous" because Europeans sacrifice their inner strength, the irrational, to the coolness of reason, to the coolness of the ratio. But those who know about these things can understand many things that might otherwise seem incomprehensible in life. If Tibet, the roof of the world, is connected with the Ri-rap-hlumpo and the Tschang-Shambala - the latter refers to Aggartha - then this is a result of obedience to irrationalism." Gutmann lowered his voice slightly. "And Tibet will be our best ally ..."

"But it can no longer help prevent the collapse of the empire," said Recke gloomily.

"No. - Germany will temporarily be the victim in the battle on the mental level. Not least on

Due to certain mistakes in its own politics ... However, it will reach for the torch offered to it by the North at the same time as other peoples. Until then, however, we must take defensive action under the sign of the Black Sun to prevent grey-magic forces from entering the area of the White Circle!"

"So there won't be a holiday for picking flowers and kissing girls for a long time yet," sighed Recke resignedly. "It's clear that I won't leave you in the lurch ..."

When there was a slight pause in the conversation, Reimer asked a question: "Why can we never see the base commander? So far, he hasn't received us for a report, nor has he shown himself on any other occasion."

As Juncker lay lazily on Reimer's cot and lolled about, Gutmann replied: "The commander lives among us unrecognised, so to speak. I'm sure we've all seen him without realising it was him. He comes into the halls and workshops as a fitter, a non-commissioned officer and God knows what else. As a result of the group organisation of the quarters, it is almost impossible to identify him. Everything here is very finely organised. Only the Adju and the Ia know him."

"And why all this?"

"For personal safety reasons! He has outstanding knowledge and losing the boss would be a disaster for us!"

"I thought the base would be shielded," said

Recke with hidden irony.

Gutmann looked at him disapprovingly, then said briefly: "Better safe than sorry!"

"Then even Ta Lama's magic eyes won't be able to harm him," grinned the man from Kassel.

"What do you mean?"

Recke hesitated for a moment. Then he told the two Waffen SS officers about the two brief episodes with the Tibetan. He did not conceal his feelings, which had made him feel strangely self-conscious. He reproduced the few words of the Ta Lama true to memory.

"Such words have weight and meaning," Gutmann explained. "I shouldn't be surprised if they should influence your fate. The man. knows more about it than he says!"

The conversation faltered. After a short while, the man from Kassel got up and went to his room. Juncker followed him. Before Gutmann lay down to doze, he said to his comrade: "I have the feeling that a lot is going to happen now. We have a difficult time ahead of us!"

The time the men were allowed to rest flew by.

One person's waking dream or another's light slumber was disturbed by a noisy loudspeaker announcement.

"Attention - attention! - The Great Assembly enters into

twenty minutes! - The messengers are also requested ... - In twenty minutes! - I repeat ..." Once again a voice croaked out the words.

"Hey, Reimer, get up!" Gutmann had jumped up springily and reached for his red cloak. A squeak from the door diagonally opposite signalled that Juncker and Recke were also on their way out. In fact, the former pushed the door of Gutmann's chamber fully open with the tip of his foot, while other doors in the corridor began to screech or slam dully shut. "Out with you, you sleepyheads! ..."

Just as drops of water gather in a stream, the ordered men streamed together from several sides in the main corridors and headed in the same direction towards the meeting room. Now Reimer and Recke no longer found anything strange about the men in the red coats who were travelling in the same direction as them. It no longer alienated them; everything was just unusual and strange details no longer stood out.

The loudspeaker warned us twice on the way. A myriad of little things showed again and again that strict discipline was observed. Everything was strict and exactly like in the barracks of a reserve unit.

This time Juncker took the two airmen with him into the rows of benches in the meeting room so that they had a good view at his side and no longer had to stand against the wall in the back of the room

had to go. Gutmann apologised as he was part of the messengers' escort and wanted to meet them.

Reimer and Recke still had several minutes to scrutinise their surroundings more closely. Their eyes were once again drawn to the Mithras relief on the back wall of the room.

The dimmer light from the ceiling lamps in the background conjured up soft shadows on the relief and allowed the figures of the god of light with the phrygian cap and the two torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates to stand out vividly on either side. The room itself was otherwise unadorned.

"What is the significance of the wall relief?" Reimer asked Juncker, who was sitting next to him, quietly. "I've already lost part of my humanist education."

The person asked turned his head slightly. "It is the Lord of the Sun! The one who is always awake, never asleep, the all-knowing and all-good. As the god of light, he is the irreconcilable enemy of darkness and its evil spirits. As the protector of all truths, honesty and peacefulness, he deals severely with all adversaries. His importance ..." He was abruptly interrupted by the appearance of the messengers. All the murmuring in the hall died down.

The procession of emissaries came striding down the centre aisle again, led by the Waffen SS officer who had greeted them at the opening of the meeting. Behind the men from various parts of the world came a number of officers from the

base as escorts, including Gutmann.

The leader of the procession climbed onto the platform between the two statues, while the following messengers formed a semi-circle in front of the steps. Once again he raised his arm, formally demanding attention.

"Whoever sees the upper world pure and lonely and none of the gods approaching, expect to hear a mighty thunderclap so that he is shaken. Then say: Silence, silence! and the prayer: I am a star that walks its path with you and shines out of the depths. After these words, the disc of the sun will unfold!"

The spokesman lowered his arm and continued in a changed tone: "We have asked the messengers into our midst so that they can hear the decisions of the task force from point 103 with us!"

Stepping back, he pulled the red cloak tighter and assumed a waiting position. At the same moment, the red light flared up again and covered the wall relief with a fiery glow. The full-sounding voice of the invisible man came from the hidden loudspeaker system:

"The Great Assembly has convened so that the time may be fulfilled as it is marked out in the plan of the world. May the messengers hear: In addition to the statements made earlier about the great tasks of Base 103 of a general nature, operational orders are now being given to a number of men. One does not need to be a prognosticator to know that the chaos

the earth is already beginning to flood and the politicians can no longer control the spirits they have summoned. We therefore do not yet know what difficulties our soldiers will face. If, contrary to expectations, individual members of our base are displaced to areas where men from friendly organisations live, we expect that they will receive help and support. From now on we will throw all available forces into Germany to rescue technical potential and plans. The subsequent actions will be concerned with scanning the forces opposing us in order to determine their strength and positions. Independently of all planning, however, a special task force will be deployed immediately to devote itself to intensive exploration of the Arctic. Anything significant that should occur during the operations or as a result of them will be communicated to the friendly organisations in an appropriate form. In return, we also expect to receive information quickly through the exchange procedure." There was a short pause. Then the voice continued: "At the end of this meeting, all off-duty officers will go to Hall 1 and take note of the new duty roster drawn up by the Ordnance Officer on my behalf. All officers who are not on duty for the next eight hours will remain at my disposal in their rooms or in the common room on call. During this time, they will be called to

Part called to receive deployment orders. This means we are now involved in world events under the sign of the Black Ronde!"

The voice, speaking in military terse sentences, broke off. Almost simultaneously, the red light went out again. The men in the rows of benches looked at each other and exchanged meaningful glances, while the messengers' expressions remained unmoved.

Recke leant over to Juncker: "Are Reimer and I also among the room prisoners?"

"If you're not on the new rota - then yes!"

"Hm..."

Now the messengers began to leave the estrade with the red-coated man leading the way. They walked back down the aisle and then turned into the side rows of benches. Spreading out to either side, they took their seats in the first two empty rows at their leader's request. At the same time, two men in the sub-leader rank ran to the front and lowered a screen skilfully set into the ceiling. Unnoticed by the meeting participants, a mobile film projection machine had meanwhile been brought to the hall entrance. The cables were connected with precise precision and minutes later a bright white cone of light flooded the screen.

This was followed by half an hour or so of extracts from mainly German and sometimes foreign newsreels. The skilful editing clearly illustrated

the true situation on the front lines in Europe. On the one side, vast quantities of American war material prepared for deployment; on the other, exhausted units of desperately resisting Germans. "We must recognise the situation as it really is," explained the accompanying voice of the tape.

At the end of the film, a map of Europe was projected onto the screen. A tall officer stepped out of the darkness to the edge of the circle of light and explained the true situation on the fronts in detail with the help of a stick.

Juncker smacked the two captains: "That's the Ia!" The one brought with responsible objectivity lecture left no doubt about the seriousness of the situation. The staff officer relentlessly explained the actions of the Allied troops, the withdrawal of their own units and the failure of supplies due to a lack of fuel and material. He concluded his speech by saying that the occupation of Germany would be an inevitable consequence of developments and appealed in his closing words to the men at the base to serve a greater future without wavering. He concluded: "May the messengers take with them the certainty that a collapse of our country will not hinder the endeavours of the communities. And however persecutions may occur, they are the refining fire of the highest trials. And the highest of all things is duty!"

The projection machine stopped and the room went dark for a few seconds. When the room lights were switched on again, those gathered saw the Chief of Staff leaving the room. The red cloak waved behind him like a flag.

"The meeting is closed!" the speaker shouted into the hall. Those present rose from their seats and allowed the messengers to go first before they also began to leave the room.

"I'm gobsmacked," said Recke to his comrades. "This openness ..."

Juncker raised an eyebrow. "Do you also believe that the SS front organisations are made up of mutton?"

"Mhm - not that ..."

"The Schutzstaffeln have an esoteric core, as Gutmann has already explained. The Reichsheinrichich - my Himmler - stands outside, but he knows of its existence. This creates a delicate situation that must be handled with great care."

"I really appreciate openness," Reimer joined in the brief conversation. "Especially when you have to be clear about certain things. But does it promote a fighting morale? ..."

"If a team is good, the truth will never paralyse it. Rather encourage the willingness to get the best out of it!" Juncker's explanation was dry and matter-of-fact. "This recipe is proving its worth here!"

The three men joined a small group

of officers, who were heading towards Hall One in lively discussion. There was a queue of curious people in front of the notice board. The men who had arrived first were already pushing backwards so that the others could follow. In a short time, Recke was the first of his comrades to stand in front of the board and look for the names.

His voice drowned out the banter of the others. "Hey, Juncker, you seem to be with the chosen ones! Off duty! - And Reimer? - Stay in the back, old chap! - Free too! - You've got a mighty pig, both of you!" His broad back arched a little and you could clearly tell he was tensely searching. "Eureka!" he roared, "they've got something planned for me too!"

He pushed back like a bull, laughing all over his face. He pulled Reimer and Juncker, who were both wedged into the crowd, with him and pinched the Linzer's arm with exuberance.

"You must be mad!" he said indignantly, partly in anger, as he felt real pain. Recke didn't have too delicate a grip.

"Don't be so silly," said the man from Kassel. "Let's see to it that we get to room arrest quickly."

Over the next few hours, the three men waited together in Juncker's room as he endeavoured to entertain his comrades. His remarks were repeatedly interrupted by loudspeaker announcements,

that came in audibly through the open door. They were mostly calls from officers who were ordered to report to the commander. Recke was inattentive, only Reimer answered Juncker from time to time. Time was slipping away.

"Now we've forgotten to check whether Gutmann is listed as off duty on the rota!" Reimer slapped his hands together.

Juncker was about to reply when the loudspeaker interrupted his intention: "Major Juncker and Captain Recke to the command centre! - I repeat: Major ..."

Recke was up in a flash. "All good spirits praise the Lord!" he exclaimed. "Onwards, forwards - both of us, Juncker! - Hey, what about Reimer?" He interrupted his spontaneous outburst and listened. But the loudspeaker was already silent and didn't mention any more names. "For crying out loud - they're not going to tear us apart, are they?"

Juncker was already standing by the door. "Don't grumble, listen first," he said reassuringly.

When Recke entered the command room with his companion, he found himself standing in a relatively small room with a large table in the centre surrounded by a few shifted chairs. A pile of cards covered it and lay seemingly at random around a towering microphone. Opposite the door, there was a glass pane set into the opposite wall, which did not provide a clear view.

"Major Juncker and Captain Recke!" reported the former. "There's nobody here yet!" said the man from Kassel in astonishment.

"Shh!" said Juncker. "You can see out through the glass, but not in. That's one of those things ..."

"Don't talk so much, Major!" rebuked the voice of the invisible man. "At the moment, we only want to deal with one mission. By the way - the Adju will be with us immediately."

"Höhö, be with us," Recke mocked half aloud. He looked at Juncker, who was standing there with a bright red head.

"Don't forget the microphone, Captain!" the commander also warned mockingly.

The man from Kassel bit his lips. Now they had both got rid of their reproach. He didn't even dare to look at the maps in detail now. Whilst he was sheepishly dragging his feet on the floor, the door opened and the adjutant came in. He had some papers in his hand and greeted him in a friendly manner. His collar tabs showed the same rank as Juncker.

Now the invisible man intervened again: "Unfortunately, I don't have much time and we have to get to the heart of the matter straight away. Just one thing for now: Captain Recke! - I am well aware that you are a dedicated officer with a great sense of duty. Due to certain circumstances, you came to point 103 without being prepared or screened beforehand. Major Küpper has for

the crew of the destroyed twin construction took responsibility and gave the best description for you and Captain Reimer. Let me cut a long story short! You don't actually belong to our community yet, but your comrade Gutmann - and I think Juncker too - has already informed you about everything as far as possible. You will also be informed in good time about our organisation itself. Based on the current state of affairs and your present knowledge, are you prepared to fly and deploy under the sign of the Black Ronde?"

Recke looked at the glass pane as if he could see the commander physically in front of him. "As long as you stand by your words - yes, Herr Kommandeur!"

A soft laugh came back. "You have character. I like you, Captain! I'll keep an eye on you and encourage you." An indeterminable noise came through the PA system. Apparently paper was rustling. Then the voice continued:

"I am ordering you to Prague with a new Dosthra aircraft, gentlemen! - The new model has a crew of seven, which means five men on duty in the aircraft and you as a special commando for the intended tasks. According to the current state of technology, this aircraft can be described as attack-proof, as it has flak-proof armour. I can see that you are astonished, Captain! You'll have to get used to other surprises! Of course

the entire crew bears the highest responsibility for the safety and secrecy of this model. When you land near Prague, no-one is allowed to approach the aircraft. Juncker, you take the lead!"

"Yes, Commander!"

"You have heard my words in the Great Assembly, gentlemen! It is now your task to protect certain plans or constructions of a flying gyroscope from foreign hands. It is a model that is fundamentally similar to our construction. The difficulty of your task will be that you will only be able to act during the beginning of the disintegration phenomena. At the same time, however, you must observe the collective persecutions that begin and report as accurately as possible on the proceedings. As far as it is within your modest power, you must provide all possible assistance if it does not jeopardise your task and the preservation of the machine. I have already **clearly indicated** in my remarks that forces in favour of the persecuted will make themselves felt. In this respect, gentlemen, it is particularly important to keep a close watch! Our later decisions will be decisively influenced by your reports. Always remember that!"

"Yes," the officers confirmed in a disciplined manner.

"In the Dosthra aircraft you will find a complete set of aeronautical charts `r e q u i r e d` for your route. I will also leave you

Army maps on a scale of one to one hundred thousand of the Bohemian region. The time of your departure has not yet been determined. Use the next few days to familiarise yourself with the peculiarities of the new aircraft and above all with its armament. These are still secret weapons that the enemy does not know about. You are both exempt from base duty, gentlemen! According to previous reports, your deployment may take place in about ten or fourteen days. Nevertheless, you must always be prepared for an earlier order. Before you start, I will send for you again. In the meantime, you will receive precise instructions for your mission from the Ia. Thank you in the meantime!"

Both officers clasped their hands together and saluted. The adjutant accompanied them to the door and shook their hands in a friendly manner. "Congratulations!" he said. "You've been given a fine commission."

"Blimey," Recke suddenly said to Juncker on the way, "now I've completely forgotten to ask about Reimer!"

"Just don't ask," warned Juncker. "At best, we'd deprive Reimer of a good chance. Besides, our team is complete. The boss doesn't like substitutions!"

Instead of entering their room, they first went over to Reimer's together. There they found him in animated conversation with Gutmann. "What is it?" he asked as the two of them entered.

"Everything's fine!" replied Recke, using a common soldier's expression. "We're flying to Prague!"

"And with a dosthra," added Juncker. Gutmann whistled through his teeth. "Our best model.

The big surprise of the airspace. If the boss uses this machine, then there's a lot to the job!"

"It seems so," said the man from Kassel. "I'm really curious about the new machine, by the way!"

"Let's see them tomorrow!" Juncker ran his hand over the top of his head. "I already know them well enough, but I'll explain them in detail to our warrior. Incidentally, I'm also in charge of the machine."

"I'm just curious when I'll be called to command?" Reimer interjected. To everyone's surprise, Gutmann replied: "Not for the time being!"

"Ah - why not?"

Gutmann blinked his eyes in amusement "He doesn't want to interrupt the tranquil life you've just started."

"Rubbish! - Seriously, what's going on?"

The interviewee put his hand on Reimer's shoulder.

"Together with me - zbV!"

"For special use?" The Linzer was amazed.

"We stayed together in pairs. - That's nice of the invisible boss."

"It all has its meaning." Gutmann made a mysterious face, the expression of which was already familiar to his comrades.

"Old mystery man!" rebuked the Linzer.

"Oh - not at all - to prove your assertion wrong, I'll even tell you that we'll be joining t h e inspection of the Dosthhra aircraft tomorrow. The boss wants you to get to know and familiarise yourself with this type as well. So it's all in one."

"The boss's wish is also my wish. He is a very polite man when he calls his orders wishes!"

"One more question," objected Recke. "What about the other five men in the crew?"

Gutmann made a casual gesture with his hand. "I'm sure they'll be in touch with us in the next few hours once the Adju has got them on their feet!"

Gutmann had been wrong. The excitement of the eventful day made the men forget that they were still exchanging views at midnight. The constant artificial light could easily confuse the concept of time. It was Juncker who, with a casual glance at his wristwatch, realised that it was actually bedtime.

In the morning, the telephone rattled. When Recke picked up the receiver, the adjutant answered and t o l d him that the other five crew members would be in touch in about an hour. He and Juncker were to stay in their room at this time.

The two men had enough time for their breakfast and to get ready. At the expected time

there was a knock on the door. When Recke opened it, he saw a young Luftwaffe first lieutenant standing in front of **him** and behind him, on the opposite side of the corridor, a Luftwaffe sergeant and three Waffen-SS subordinates in a row.

"First Lieutenant Jensen and four men report on the commanding officer's orders!" He brought his right hand to the peak of his jaunty cap with a casual finger position.

"Ah - I'm glad it's you!" said Juncker, who had stepped into the corridor behind Recke. He shook hands with the flight officer and introduced him to the man from Kassel.

"Jensen and I have already flown together a few times."

Looking at the four men, he said: "Well then - we all know each other already!" Then, turning to Recke: "That's us in order: Beer - an old Stuka man, then Paulsen, Krammer and finally our Flying Dutchman, Oberscharführer van Huys!"

They were selected men who had enlisted. They all had decorations and battle badges. Gutmann, attracted by the chatter in the corridor, had also come out of his room with Reimer and grinned. "A fine crew," he realised when the new greeting was over. "Already trained Dosthra personnel..."

The two airmen, led by the two Waffen-SS officers, entered a hangar room blasted into the rock of the Ringgebirge, which was protected by a

was extended by a small camouflaged porch. A few men from the ground crew stood ready to help.

Gutmann left it to Juncker to give explanations. After the initial astonishment of the two captains had subsided, he pointed to a large machine that stood like a monster in the bright light of the room. Reimer and Recke had expected a construction that would resemble a larger Heinckel or Dornier type. Instead, they saw a machine that resembled a real combat aircraft. "This is the Dosthra machine, version E!" said Juncker. It sounded as if he was simply pointing to an ordinary object.

"The latest standard large fighter aircraft, the series production and use of which is no longer possible at home."

The two pilots, who were seeing this technical marvel for the first time, took a few steps to the side to get a better look at the design. They saw a high-set mid-wing monoplane in front of **them**, with a pentagonal fuselage cross-section and a thickened head section that gave the apparatus the appearance of a vicious insect. This visual impression was reinforced by the fact that a large black roundel on either side looked like the eyes of the beast.

"A mighty bird," marvelled Reimer in his observations. "It has a wingspan of forty metres."

"Forty-five!" Juncker improved matter-of-factly.

"Hull length about thirty-five metres."

"Boy, boy!" said Recke in awe.

"We still have the C and D models here," explained Juncker. "The Model E is a significantly improved model and, as the commander has already indicated, it is flak-proof."

"I can't really imagine that," Reimer interjected.

"It is made from the latest material. Namely crush metal. This is a highly compressed metal that has been literally crushed under a compression pressure of up to four hundred thousand atmospheres and therefore has maximum strength with a low specific weight. As it is usually radioactive, the activity is dampened by a plastic coating. This process can be used to compress almost any alloy, including steel, into a light metal. As armouring for aircraft, it is practically impenetrable. Furthermore, secret inserts prevent hollow charges from burning through."

"You speak like a book!" Recke's words sounded respectful.

"You have to know your machine!" The remark was a gentle rebuke. He approached the protruding head pulpit, which showed two hull-shaped fighting positions arranged side by side. "Here," he pointed to two wheels about four metres in diameter and taller than a man, which protruded from the head on very sturdy undercarriage struts like the pincers of an insect, "this undercarriage is just like the one on either side.

retractable under the wings! - The aircraft has four engines, namely piston in-line radial engines of the Argus type. There is a fifth engine in the fuselage for special altitudes and an additional loading jet engine in each wingtip. These jets can serve as control elements for narrow-angle course changes."

"Excellent!" said Reimer. "It's just the angular engine nacelles and the bulky stanchions that look a bit strange." He added, as if talking to himself:

"Hm, hm - short, coaxial hammerhead propellers with four blades." He let his eyes glide along the fuselage. "Interesting! - Not usually V-shaped. The fuselage looks like a giant cigar!"

"And indeed - a somewhat peculiar coat of paint," the man from Kassel said again. "Looks like the machine as a whole is speckled with countless eyes. Strange bird!" He also checked like Reimer. "Relatively narrow wings, with the split wings arranged one above the other. Slightly slanted and low-set tail unit. Mhm ..."

"An all-metal construction," Reimer concluded his initial observations. Juncker nodded. "Already two thirds shell construction without frames!"

"And the performance?" asked the man from Linz.

"Well - you won't want to believe it. But the plane actually flies at about eight hundred and thirty kilometres an hour and has a range of twenty-two thousand kilometres at

a summit height of twenty-three. Particularly noteworthy is the climbing performance of seventy-five per cent above the current hunter performance, so that a playful ascent is possible at any time!"

"By golly! - With an air fleet of such machines, we could still turn the damned war completely in our favour. Unless fuel ..." The impulsive warrior clapped his hands together.

"I'm far from finished," Juncker said dryly. "The armament is also new and still secret! The Dosthra has on-board cannons that are actually metal blasters." The Schutzstaffel officer feasted his eyes on the questioning expressions of his comrades before continuing:

"The effect of these metal blasters is based on the sandblaster principle and their cutting effect can easily cut through the wing of an enemy aircraft. The weapon has a normal trigger like a conventional on-board weapon and looks similar to one. The process is similar to chasing metal dust through magnetic fields and ejecting it as an extremely fine beam at high acceleration towards the target. The effect of this weapon surpasses all on-board cannons!"

"Oh my God," whispered the man from Kassel. "This Dosthra E as a whole can no longer be surpassed!"

"Yes," Juncker immediately contradicted. "In just a few years, the Type E will already be obsolete. In the new age of jet fighters and the surpassing of the sonic boom, the

speed, the speed of our large combat machines must also be significantly increased. We are already working on new ways of generating energy. We still have revolutionary changes ahead of us!"

"That's enough with the explanations!" Gutmann cut in. "Let's take a look at the inside of this thing!"

When the four officers left the hall at lunchtime, they were serious and silent.

THE FLIGHT INTO CHAOS

All darkness is admitted, indeed the mystery of evil still has power far into the upper room. But no longer to the angel: to him in the centre there was the fruit: to atone for his earth: to be redeemed.

(Weinheber: Between Gods and Demons")

Three weeks passed without the hopes and expectations of Einsatzgruppe Juncker being realised. Recke and Reimer, like the two Waffen-SS officers, had now been trained on the Dosthra machine and were often involved in general operations. Being stuck at the base for so long and listening to daily Wehrmacht reports caused the mood to sink to a low point. Even Gutmann became secretive and avoided everything.

It had now become clear to the greatest optimists that the end of the war was imminent. Any use of miracle weapons and other surprises was undoubtedly too late in this situation, if such hopes could be realised at all.

The only pleasing thing in the monotony of the outwardly

The main attraction of the business, which was closed off from the rest of the world, was the prevailing clear weather, which tempted people to stay outside for longer.

A longer flight took Recke over the Boothia peninsula. Reimer flew in Juncker's place, driven by curiosity to the settlement of the Netsilik people. They found the small settlement without difficulty, but it was completely deserted. A short distance further south, where the peninsula jutted out from the mainland, the two friends were surprised to see two posts, which van Huys, who was experienced here, described as fur stations. So the Netsilik people had had some reason not to reveal the relatively close presence of police and trading posts to their guests. No doubt they also had more contact with the whites than they admitted.

Describing a large arc, the aircraft flew northwards again. The coastline of the Canadian mainland was the southern boundary for all test and training flights. This explicit order from the commander of base 103 was never to be violated unless there was a compelling reason to do so.

And so almost the month of April passed. Vienna had fallen, the Red Army was in front of Berlin, in the west the Allies were advancing rapidly into the heart of the Reich and Italy was lost. Just at the time when the bonds of a natural sense of home and human solidarity with loved ones were beginning to stabilise the mood.

were driven to despair, Juncker and Recke were ordered to command. The commandos and task forces designated for the time of the Great Assembly had long since flown off and no man at the base expected Juncker's group to be deployed.

When the commanding officers stood in the commander's command room and reported in according to regulations, they met the Ia and the adjutant present. The Chief of Staff, as the senior officer, shook hands with the two officers in a friendly manner.

"I have sent for you on the instructions of the commander, gentlemen! - Are you prepared to take on an assignment that requires your full personal commitment?"

Recke glanced briefly at Juncker, who tightened his body with an indifferent expression and answered the question in the affirmative. He immediately followed his comrade's example.

"I didn't expect anything else," the Ia remarked calmly. "I asked this non-military question solely because I need men who are willing to carry out the commander's orders under all circumstances. You must take the knowledge of the danger of your task with you and not be impressed by the possible consequences. It has been my experience that the best fulfilment comes from voluntarily accepted orders." The speaker's grey eyes slid over the faces of the airmen, scrutinising them.

"At the time, the commander spoke of a mission

to Prague," said Juncker. "The matter didn't seem particularly difficult at the time."

"The order hasn't changed," the Ia confirmed. "You have to fly to Prague. But be prepared for an extremely difficult situation. Above all, you must get to your destination immediately, otherwise you'll run into the chaos that has already begun and won't be able to complete your tasks. So pay close attention: Your first task is to secure the plans for a roundabout, which is currently still being worked on in the east hall - remember all the clues, gentlemen - of BMW Platz. If it is at all possible, especially if the object is ready to fly, then save the machine and the designer with his closest colleagues. The man's name is Schriever. If you get to Prague in time, you will most probably meet Major Küpper from Berlin, who will be a valuable help to you. The necessary decisions will depend on the situation you find yourself in. In addition, you will try to gain an overview of the treatment accorded to the volunteer units by the Allies through appropriate reconnaissance. Of course, this requires that you remain in the geographical area long enough to be able to report on it. But the top priority is always: Pay attention to the safety of the aircraft entrusted to you!"

"You can rest assured!" Juncker assured. Recke also nodded.

Becoming serious and insistent, the Ia added: "Whatever you may experience and whatever may move your inner being, switch off everything personal! - Think only of your duty!" He reached for a pack of cards and slid them over to Juncker. "Take the cards that have already been put together. They contain everything you need. We haven't skimped. The Adju will take care of the rest. Send Lieutenant Jensen to him straight away to organise the stowage of the provisions and other necessities. And now, gentlemen -" the Ia looked at his wristwatch, "- when can you take off?"

Juncker also quickly realised the time. "Half the morning is over. As far as we're concerned - in about two, three hours at most!" He took the pack of cards.

"Excellent! - It's very urgent. Every lost hour can be crucial. Do you have any requests?"

When the respondents said no, he shook their hands again. "Then get out of here with a broken neck and a broken leg!" he added half aloud: "God be with you! ..."

The adjutant warned Recke: "Don't forget - send Jensen to me here immediately!"

"Let's do it!" nodded the man from Kassel.

Both officers saluted again and left the room.

As the Dosthra aircraft stood ready for take-off on the matt white tarmac, an arctic phenomenon appeared in the sky. Like a white, colourless rainbow,

a snow-white arc of mist stretched like a huge gateway across the vast sky of the polar region. Like a gateway leading back into the human world.

In the air whipped by the roaring propellers, tiny snow crystals flickered silver as they were whirled up from the ground. The noise of the giant metal bird penetrated the vast silence of the seemingly endless Arctic like a defiant challenge.

The crew of the aircraft had already taken their seats. Recke said goodbye to his comrade, who had travelled with the adjutant to the Dosthra ready for take-off.

"Take care, Herbert! - If everything goes well, we'll be back here in two or three weeks. What do you mean if -" he improved, "- of course everything will work out." With a touch of gallows humour, he added: "Poor chap, you can't even catch flies for the time being because there are no such beasts here."

"Don't talk rubbish," said Reimer in an artificially rough voice. "We've got enough to do to fill the time. So make sure that ..." He faltered. After a firm handshake, he took a step back and pushed the adjutant forward. "He wants to shake your fin quickly too!"

The man from Kassel climbed into the machine with some difficulty. Juncker was the last to follow closely behind him. "Clear for take-off!"

"Clear for take-off!" came back.

While the ground crew cleared the runway, the Dosthra slowly rolled in; gaining speed, it lifted into the clear air in front of the exit of the Ring Mountains and thundered out of the safety of the base towards an uncertain fate.

Recke sat next to Juncker, who was driving the machine, and looked at the dashboard. "Six hundred kilometres per hour - that's a lot of speed!"

Juncker pointed downwards through the glass pane: "Grant Land. The northernmost Canada!"

The snowy land glided past as if pulled away by a treadmill. Then came an expanse of water covered in drift ice. Looking at the map, Recke realised that they were flying over Robeson Sound, which separated the remaining Arctic island from Greenland.

The men looked tirelessly through the windows at the captivating image of the white desert of land and water. Seen from a greater height, the water covered with drift ice looked like an endless expanse of marble veined with green. Then a coastline came into view again. Greenland!

Like the back of a whale, the high coast rose out of the surface of the sound, in which the only unevenness seemed to be scattered icebergs of various sizes, apparently standing still. The speed of the aeroplane gave no indication of the landscape's own movement.

A short time later, the aircraft was already flying over the mainland. Mighty glaciers on an almost completely frozen island, the

The glaciers, the largest on earth, towered into the pale sky like the mountains of a home of giants. The glaciations formed a grandiose relief, such as hardly any glacial landscape had ever shown before. The last magic castle Utgard of the Nordic Thursen, the picturesque boundary lines jutting out of the ever-advancing horizon. It seemed almost inconceivable that people had already travelled through this infinite white realm of Hrymthur, the frost giant. Peary, Rasmussen and Lauge Koch had diagonally crossed the eightieth parallel here and triumphed over the hostility of a defiant nature.

The machine relentlessly pursued its course, which would lead it from a sphere of eternal silence back into a blazing turmoil of humanity. As far as the eye could see, ice and more ice. Almost two thousand metres thick, the ice shield weighed down the realms of a prehistoric paradise. It was not to be called Green Land, but Hvidland - White Land.

Another change of scenery. The coastline dropped away and once again the sea was covered in drift ice. Large and small floes, icebergs ranging from the purest crystalline white to the most improbable blue colour and entire ice fields drifting across. In places, it was as if you were looking at a fairy tale in Nephrite.

Later, the ice thinned. The density of the floes loosened, blue-green areas of open sea increased and then - the open sea!

Isolated white patches were still drifting along.

Then in the distance, eastwards ahead, an island. Jan Mayen. Now the aircraft deviated further to the south and took

Course into the North Sea. Juncker's intention was to fly into German territory within sight of the southern Norwegian coast and reach Prague without a stopover. After just over two hours, the archipelago around Aalesund came into view.

Following the protruding curve of the coast, the Dosthra flew just south of Bergen to Stavanger and changed direction at high altitude over the open sea towards Esbjerg in Denmark.

"If we maintain this speed, we'll reach the mouth of the Elbe in about an hour," Juncker said to Recke. "Now we all have to watch out! - It's possible that we could run into an enemy bomber group at any time. Or worse still - into a swarm of fighters!"

"I thought our miracle machine was immune," joked the man from Kassel.

"I'm not particularly worried about that. But we've got other things on our minds right now than just curving around in the air!"

Darkness fell. The land to the left in the German Bight showed no sign of life. Neither a warship nor a returning fishing boat could be seen on the vast expanse of sea. It seemed as if a spell of loneliness lay over this part of the world.

Doggedly and silently, the men of the

aircraft crew through the windows. They deliberately avoided saying anything or looking at each other. They were depressed in their thoughts. Van Huis was no exception.

Home lay ahead of them!

Coming from the depths of their souls, the men felt a deep sense of foreboding, like an inner vision. The dawning night had spread a dark shroud of compassion over the bombed-out land to spare the men the sight of rubble and endless despair. The night was merciful, but the men's bright knowledge was stronger. Their eyes were burning and their hearts were beating up to their necks.

The men of the Dosthra were all soldiers. They could not choose their fate, but were placed by fate in a place of duty that made harsh demands on them. They had experienced war in all its dreadfulness in various theatres of war and had faced death without trembling. But none of their previous experiences had shaken them as much as the area of their homeland, which could no longer be protected despite their heroic deeds. Just a few hundred kilometres to the west, German villages were burning and to the east, people were being hunted down, martyred and massacred. Tanks drove into refugee trains, women were raped and children were speared.

Their hearts were heavy when they thought that at the same hour, while they were behind the

The people on board had to lurk in the air, countless defenceless people were at the mercy of an inhuman fate from which no one could save them.

Juncker pulled on the elevator controls and let the aeroplane make its way high above the cloud banks. Bathed in the pale light of the moon, the clouds shimmered like ghostly mist. Even the mother-of-pearl-coloured contrails iridesced in the glow of the Earth's satellite.

In the Magdeburg area they received weak anti-aircraft fire. A few clouds of explosives fizzled out at a distance, then the firing stopped again. The silver finger of a searchlight suddenly broke through a hole in the cloud cover and twitched around searching. After a few seconds it went out again. Apparently they were no longer paying attention to individual aircraft.

"They used to shoot out of every buttonhole when a suspicious aircraft appeared," Recke noted with resignation. "You can tell that the people down below are running out of breath and ammunition!"

Juncker just nodded. He controlled the aircraft's course with suppressed movement. After a short while, he added with feigned equanimity: "We'll soon have reached Prague. Then we'll see trees again after a long time. Real trees! ..."

"And somehow even rainy weather," said the man from Kassel mischievously. "Not just snow ..."

As the cloud cover receded, the men saw the matt silver ribbon of the Elbe. Juncker compared the twists and turns

of the river with the aeronautical chart. "We have

Leitmeritz ahead of us. - Beer, radio the aerodrome! - It's time for us to report in."

"Yes, sir!" came the sergeant's voice back through the headphones.

"Say the keyword 'Arctic fox!'" Juncker added to his order.

"Yes - Arctic fox!" -

From Raudnitz they headed for the Vltava. Prague would soon appear. The plane descended.

"Radio link established with the airfield," reported Beer. "We can land!"

"Good!" Using the map, Juncker headed for Gbely airfield in Prague. Beer liaised with the airfield management.

After a few minutes, an illuminated runway suddenly flashed into view. The Dosthra began to land, describing an arc, and rolled out onto the runway. Immediately afterwards, the lights went out again and the airfield lay in darkness.

"Everything stays in the box!" the major ordered. "Only Captain Recke and I are getting out for now. You can come out with us, Jensen, but you have to stay with the machine. Is everything understood?"

"Got it!"

The officers climbed outside. A cool night air greeted them, but it felt like the warm caress of a hairdryer. The harshness of the Arctic climate no longer had any power here.

Men from the ground crew rushed over. A

officer approached the disembarked passengers. They could only vaguely make out the insignia in the darkness. "Gentlemen are asked to stay with the aircraft! A major from the air force staff in Berlin will be here in a few minutes."

The dark hangars in the background of the square looked like huge humps. In front of them stood a number of knife-edge machines, their indistinct contours blurred by the darkness of the night. A familiar image that made everything he had just experienced seem like an almost unreal dream. The sensitive warrior ran his hand over his face as if to check that he was awake.

"What's the situation here, mate?" Juncker asked the foreign officer.

The interviewee took his time. Then he said sluggishly: "The Soviets are pressing on Prague from the east and north-east. The Czechs are restless and are already carrying out small raids. North-east of here in Kummer near Niemes lies the Immelmann fighter squadron under Colonel Rudel, who is constantly flying his tank-hunting missions. So far he has destroyed over five hundred enemy tanks alone! He is still keeping the Red Army somewhat at bay, as he is constantly coming up against their armour. On the other hand, the Russians in the north are already pressing on Dresden and will soon have us pinned down. It's all a rotten spell!"

"It's really not rosy," Juncker admitted. "Although I wasn't expecting good news ..."

He was interrupted. A Wehrmacht car approached at high speed and braked, screeching, in front of the Dosthra. The fine streak of light from the slits in the headlight caps was dimmed, then one of the two men sitting in the car jumped out and rushed towards the group. "Who is the leader of the machine?"

Juncker confronted him and spoke up.

"Juncker? - Ah, that's excellent. We already know each other. I'm Küpper!" They shook hands. Then the major approached the man from Kassel and tried to recognise his face in the pale night light. "We already know each other. You're one of the group that left Vernäs under Gutmann?"

"Yes, sir, Major. Captain Recke!"

"Oh - that's right! I remember." He grabbed the two officers in front of him by the arms and pulled them a few steps away. "High time you came! It'll only be a few more days before this whole mess is over. I'm afraid I can't allow you to rest, but must get you to your assignments. I already know your missions and am here to support you. Above all, however, you must not stay here with the machine. When daylight comes, I don't want anyone uninvited to see the aircraft's licence plates. In addition, the airfield is in extreme danger, as the Americans control the entire airspace and are constantly worrying us."

"Where should we go?" asked Juncker.

"A bit away from here." He walked back with the two officers of the Dosthra to the group of people still standing waiting in front of the machine. "Are you also part of the crew?" he asked Jensen. When he replied in the affirmative, Küpper continued: "Then be so kind as to let the driver of my car drive you to my quarters. I have to get into the plane instead of you to take her somewhere else!"

"Yes, yes!" Jensen replied when he saw that Juncker did not disagree. Without delay, he trudged towards the car in his fat combination.

Küpper gave a few brief orders to the ground crew, then climbed into the Dosthra with Juncker and Recke. The airfield soldiers cleared the runway, the engines roared again and the aircraft lifted off the ground once more.

The major must have known the aerodrome and its immediate destination with complete certainty. He had taken Juncker's place and explained in a few words that he had flown a Dosthra before. So it was understandable that the Berliner could take the risk of a night take-off under such dangerous circumstances without hesitation. With night-time ingenuity and calm, the major and the aircraft he was flying arrived at an emergency landing site not far from the capital of Bohemia. "We're still reasonably safe here for the time being!" he explained as the roar of the propellers died down. "And now get out of the box. Don't forget your handguns!"

After the officers, the rest of the crew emerged from the aircraft. They stood somewhat stiffly in a circle. A call from the darkness of the nearby forest startled them.

"Who is it?"

"Laughing gull!" the major shouted back immediately.

A line of people emerged from the dark wall of the nearby forest and ran towards the aircraft. They were soldiers with assault packs who immediately surrounded the aircraft, while a first sergeant reported to Küpper.

"Our protection team," said the major to the airmen. "Yes - and then we have to take the aircraft to the edge of the forest and camouflage it against aerial reconnaissance. We are protected against ground surveillance by a guard cordon. We have to hurry!"

Having landed in Prague, the men from the base were to 103 could no longer rest. Heavy fighting was raging in Berlin, the Russians were advancing rapidly everywhere and it was only a matter of days before the Allies would join hands from East and West. Küpper had lost all contact with Berlin and found himself completely on his own. He acted accordingly.

When Juncker and Recke demanded instructions from him about securing the gyroplane and its plans, he waved them away. "I already took care of that before the Dosthra arrived. The apparatus is about to be completely overhauled, as a

small imbalance caused some changes. The designer himself is responsible for ensuring that the gyroscope does not fall into the wrong hands and always has the plans close at hand. We don't need to worry about him."

Juncker furrowed his brows but remained silent. He secretly wondered whether the designer would find better security for his plans than in the Dosthra machine. When he later spoke openly to the man from Kassel about this, he immediately shared his opinion.

The major never seemed to get out of his uniform. Day and night, he popped up everywhere unexpectedly and dealt with reports or took important file material. So far, he had mostly done without the help of the base officers. Juncker and Recke flew reconnaissance flights in a limited area with his authorisation. Above all, they informed the Major about the location of the nearby Vlasov units, which the Higher Police Leader in Prague distrusted.

The flights always lasted only a very short time, as there was already a severe shortage of fuel. During one of his reconnaissance missions, Recke discovered that Vlasov's first division was moving towards Suchomast. At this time, Czech partisan activity was increasing in the countryside. He repeatedly noticed crowds of people dispersing in the squares of smaller towns in the Prague area as he flew low over them.

On this day, shortly before landing in Gbely

on a foreign aircraft that bore no national insignia. He tried to approach the aircraft from the front, but it evaded his manoeuvre with increased speed. It proved to be more manoeuvrable and superior. As it was not behaving in a hostile manner, Recke did not dare to attack it directly. He was only surprised that there were any other aircraft in the area apart from him, as he always had to be prepared to avoid an enemy group or squadron.

When he landed at the airfield, he first tried to contact Major Küpper to inform him of the strange aircraft. At the airfield control centre he was told that Küpper could be found at the office of the Higher Police Chief on the Vltava.

At his request, the officer on duty provided him with a bucket lorry. "Don't drive alone," he warned. "I'll give you two more soldiers. The air is thick in the country!"

Ten minutes later, Recke himself was at the wheel of the car and drove towards the city centre. He stopped the car at a major junction and asked the Czech police officer on duty for the German police station.

"To nevim!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. With a provocative gesture, he showed the Germans his back. One of the two soldiers cursed. "He wouldn't know," he said. So far, almost every policeman understood German. They'll be surprised what follows ..."

Recke called an army patrol that was coming along.

told him immediately. "Just after the big bridge
..."

A double guard with machine guns and steel helmets stood in front of the police station. Recke learnt from the guard in the hallway that Küpper had already left the house and had driven away accompanied by an SS major. The information was given briefly and hastily. The whole house was filled with unrest and hinted at the immediacy of eventful days.

Recke got into the car and restarted the engine, which had been switched off. Just as he was about to put his foot on the accelerator, a man came running out of the house and called him;

"Captain Recke?" The
man from Kassel
replied in the
affirmative.

"Call from Major Küpper asking for you! Captain, you are not to leave our office until you receive further orders from the Major. There's something going on in the city and you won't be able to get to the airfield safely!"

Recke whistled. "Is that how it is? - That's quite a mess!" As if to illustrate his thoughts, a few shots rang out from somewhere.

One of the gate guards shouted out the guard. Almost at the same time, the guard commander came out of the guardroom. Shots rang out again, merging into an irregular rattling. The guards snatched up their submachine guns and peered towards the two ends of the street.

"Drive the car in at once, Captain!" The guard jumped to the side to clear the entrance. Recke felt bound by Küpper's instructions. He immediately reversed the car, then shifted into forward gear again and drove into the courtyard of the house. The heavy gate was closed behind him. As he jumped out of the car, the two accompanying soldiers also jumped out and awaited his order.

"Stay at the station until the coast is clear. If necessary ..." The man from Kassel looked meaningfully at the two men. "Yes, sir, captain!" Both ran into the driveway with their rifles. They arrived just as the gate was opened a crack again after a heavy thump and three soldiers staggered in. One of them had a head wound that was bleeding profusely.

"Uprising in Prague!" shouted the wounded man. "The Czechs are armed!"

Recke also heard the man shouting and stopped on the staircase. As the men rushed past him to report the incident, he joined them.

In the corridor on the first floor, they encountered several police and SS officers who had come out of their rooms and wanted to see the boss. The soldiers were immediately asked what was going on.

"We were walking through Ulica Karoliny Světlé," they reported breathlessly, "when we suddenly heard shots. We immediately ran towards the nearby bridge, when we ourselves

We came under fire unexpectedly. Armed civilians were shooting at us from the opposite bank of the Vltava as we hurried along the short stretch of Františkovo nabeži. At the same time, we heard the sound of fighting from the railway station area. We immediately sought shelter here and -"

A door opened and a police major came rushing out. "The telephone lines are down! I can't get through to the city commander. I -" He was unable to continue in the tumult that broke out.

"Take up arms immediately!" shouted a lieutenant colonel in a commanding tone. "The spook will soon be over. Our forces are strong enough to bring order here. We can easily hold on for the few hours until then if we are attacked here!"

After a few minutes, Recke himself was standing next to the orderly at a window, holding his submachine gun, which he had retrieved from the car in the courtyard. Behind quickly improvised cover, the entire crew of the office stood ready to defend themselves. Roof gunners had also taken up positions.

A few scattered people turned up and were let in. They unanimously reported that the Czechs were gaining the upper hand in the whole town. "They hunt us like dogs! ..."

According to the latest reports received, it became clear that the insurgents had taken away weapons and food caches and were in possession of the radio and television stations.

station. The railway stations, the telephone exchange, the city centre and most of the Vltava bridges were in their hands. The situation undoubtedly looked very serious.

The sound of heavy fighting could be heard from Hradčany, where the government offices were located. Here the waves of Czech attacks came to a halt under fire from the defenders. According to the radio station, the security service office in Bubene also held its ground.

"They're coming! ..."

Czechs carrying rifles could be seen running along the street. The rooftop marksmen opened fire and drove the attackers back. Two men were left lying on the pavement. Their armbands identified them as irregulars.

A little later, the insurgents repeated the attack. They came from all directions and tried to drive the defenders of the German office away from the windows with machine-gun fire. Clouds of mortar dust and splinters of stone flew from the wall of the house, where the machine-gun shells struck with short, hard hammers. Every now and then a piece of glass shattered from the open windows on the floors.

Under the cover of fire from high sheds, several squads advanced. The German roof gunners concentrated their fire on an enemy machine gun group that had ventured too far forward and temporarily silenced the weapon. The other guns were unable to do much damage to the defenders, as

They were mostly positioned at an acute angle to the rows of windows. The Germans were immediately at the windows and pointed their submachine guns at the groups rushing towards them. Shouts rang out, men staggered and fell. The Czechs retreated again with heavy losses.

"That should be enough for now," said Recke to the orderly. "The blokes have had enough for a while!" He wrinkled his nose as the air reeked of gunpowder. "I've already shot two magazines. Can you grab some more?"

"I'll get some right away!" said the orderly.

"I know better in the house." He ran out of the room and came back in a few minutes.

"Here!" He threw a whole box of magazines onto a table. "There'll be enough for the next few hours."

The fighting continued throughout the day. The police station came under fire several times, but there was no concentrated attack. The rooftop guards reported that the insurgents had sealed off all entrances to the station and were lying in wait. It did not seem advisable to break through to Hradcany as a combat group,

As night fell, things quietened down a little. Only a few shots were fired, but the Czechs roared and shouted all night long.

The men at the station slept little. The events of the previous day and the incessant noise during the night meant that only a few of the men could really get to sleep.

Rest. One of the few was Recke, who lay wrapped in a blanket on a large desk and fell into a deep sleep after the tension of the last two days. Only a new series of shots fired nearby brought him awake in the morning.

The renewed fighting in the town suggested that the insurgents were now trying to fight off the individual German defence blocks. That morning, enemy rooftop snipers also attempted to hold down the police station from above with fire in order to make an assault from the street possible. However, their plan was thwarted by the German snipers. Several of the irregulars were shot down, whereupon the others retreated.

Hours later, all hell suddenly seemed to break loose. The bright bangs of rifle fire and automatic weapons were joined by the muffled firing of guns. A distant scraping and rattling sound suggested tanks.

The increasing noise of the fierce street fighting on all sides stopped quite suddenly. Shortly afterwards, German tanks were already rolling through the streets, followed closely behind by assault squads of Waffen-SS units. By the evening, most of the uprising had been temporarily suppressed. Before surrendering, the Prague radio station made urgent calls for help to Vlasov's General Bunichenko, who had joined the majority of the first

Vlasov Division was still in the Sukhomast area.

At the same time, the office of the Higher Police Leader and Chief of the Stapo Control Centre began interrogating prisoners brought in to determine the leaders of the uprising, and reports were received that the Czechs had committed inhumane riots and had also hunted down the German civilian population. The arrival of external SS units and, above all, the alerting of the SS replacement battalion of the "Das Reich" division in Prague-Rusin and the replacement unit of the SS artillery in Beneschau put a temporary stop to the continuation of these activities.

Recke decided to wait for the time being until he was informed by Küpper. He sent the two Luftwaffe soldiers back to the airfield by motor vehicle and told the operator which telephone he could be reached at.

Instead of a phone call, a light tank drove up in the evening to pick up Recke on the major's instructions and take him outside the city to the Dosthra aircraft. Küpper wasted few words, but acted without further ado.

As the tank rattled through the streets of Prague, the turret gunner told them that just a few hours ago they had seen Germans massacred in a way they had not thought possible in the long years of war on the various fronts of their operations. Even women and children were among the victims

of a fanatical crowd whose hatred of Germany knew no bounds. At Bubna railway station, weapons had been handed out to the insurgents, who had immediately fired on the hospital train carrying German wounded. Furthermore, a large number of Germans were missing, but the German relief forces were not sufficient to carry out a systematic combing of the town.

Undoubtedly, some of the missing had been dragged along by the retreating Czechs into their hiding places.

As the tank gunner described what he had seen and heard, he constantly peered through the slits in the turret, ready to fire at any moment. Now and again he cursed in between.

The sun had already set behind the White Mountain and purple veils sailed across the hazy sky of Prague. The tank drove along the country road leading out of the city, passing between houses and farmsteads that all seemed to be deserted. Occasional shots still rang out from somewhere. "We should be able to drive round behind the houses," said the driver. "But we have neither time nor petrol! ..."

After a long journey, they stopped in front of a wooded area. "I think we're already here!" muttered the driver, waving to the shooter.

He flipped back the tower cover and slowly jerked upwards, cautiously looking round on all sides.

"Bloody neighbourhood! Every forest has the same trees and there's no number board anywhere. Plus this approaching darkness ..."

The tank rumbled a little further, then the man in the turret opening was called from the edge of the forest. "Are you bringing the air force captain?"

"Yes!"

"Name?"

"Recke!" shouted the man from Kassel and squeezed up next to the armoured man before he could ask him.

"That's right!" Some soldiers jumped out of the bushes and a non-commissioned officer reported to Recke.

The man from Kassel left the vehicle to follow the men. He was mistaken, however, when he assumed that the tank would immediately turn round and drive back to Prague. He was astonished to hear the sub-officer relay an order from the major to the tank commander to pull in sideways and take up a camouflaged waiting position. Küpper's special mission became more and more apparent thanks to the aids he had been given.

A soldier led Recke into the forest, while the group with the sergeant remained at the edge as a field guard. The two men stumbled over the roots and uneven ground in the darkness, the branches of the bushes hitting and scratching their faces. The man from Kassel held his submachine gun in front of him for protection and ducked his head.

Then the trees parted a little and a

A larger clearing opened up. There could also be detectors stretching as far as another part of the forest, but Recke could not see this clearly. About twenty paces to the left, the dark outline of a strange shape cast deep black shadows. It was the dosthra draped in camouflage netting. A few wandering shadows showed that it was closely guarded.

One of the nearest guards uttered a half-loud call, which was immediately answered by Recke's companion. "... here safe and sound!"

The major came out of the darkness, followed closely by Juncker and Jensen. The three officers surrounded the man from Kassel and shook his hand. Küpper's tone was almost cordial when he said: "I'm really glad, Captain, that you're back safe and sound. You were looking for me, but you didn't reach me in time. The main thing is that ..."

Recke defended himself. "These days, you have to be prepared for anything possible or impossible! I actually had an important report from my last flight."

"That's probably already outdated," the major tried to cut him off. "You'd better tell us straight away how things went for you!"

The man from Kassel was not deterred. "I do believe that my report is still important. On the return flight of my short reconnaissance ..."

"... you have large gatherings of people

observed from the air. Of course - those were the gatherings for the uprising!"

"No, Major, I came across a machine that was vastly superior to mine and bore no markings whatsoever. It did not attack ..."

Küpper grabbed the man from Kassel by the arm. "How was that? - A machine without a licence plate? Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"- Hm. - The machine swerved, so to speak?"

"Yes!"

"Very interesting. Can you describe the construction or at least its approximate appearance?"

"Only superficially! It all happened very quickly. The most striking thing was probably the wing structure. They were relatively short, wide at the fuselage and pointed slightly backwards. The machine looked like a triangle with a tail. If I wasn't deceived, it was a turbine aeroplane."

"Very nice. You can already imagine a lot." However, Küpper's expression was unrecognisable in the darkness. "But the most important thing is the origin. Where no distinguishing marks can be made out or are present, all conclusions are just guesswork."

"And the behaviour?" asked Recke insistently.

"It's strange, but not unambiguous!" replied Küpper. He also turned to Juncker and Jensen. "Now you have to be very careful in the air, gentlemen!" Talking to himself, he added: "I'll probably take care of the gyro designer after all

have to. Maybe the bat bird was looking around in the air because a little bell rang in the BMW car park."

The officers spent the night inside the aircraft. The major had left a small hut in the immediate vicinity as quarters for the guard crew.

The next morning Küpper received a radio report from Gbely airfield that, according to reports received, the Bunichenko Division was marching on Prague and disarming smaller German units en route. Furthermore, an organised hunt for Germans by rebellious Czechs was beginning in the countryside.

Küpper immediately called the three flight officers and the first lieutenant of the guard crew together for a briefing. He bluntly told them the news in short words and concluded: "I don't think I can justify leaving the guard team behind after the Dosthra has taken off, cut off from all communications. Mr Oberleutnant, otherwise you would fall into the hands of the Soviets, if you could fight off the Czechs first!"

The leader of the guard smiled thinly. "I believe we only have a few days left before we ..." He drew the index finger of his right hand across his throat with a meaningful gesture.

"God forbid!" cried Küpper. "Do you have any suggestions?"

Gentlemen?"

An embarrassed silence was the only answer to his question.

The major looked at the men standing in front of him in turn. "Yes, it's a tricky business," he confirmed to them. "So let's keep it short: I'm ordering you, Lieutenant, to leave for Prague immediately with the guard so that you can withdraw with your unit if the situation becomes untenable. Our armoured vehicle will accompany you to the city limits. Get ready to march immediately!"

The first lieutenant raised his hand to his cap.

"Anything else, Major?"

"Yes," Küpper said slowly. "Leave me six bazookas. I think we might still need them urgently. You can follow up in Prague! - There, that's all!"

While the first lieutenant immediately called his men together and ordered the field guard to move in and secure the roadside, the major turned to Juncker: "Now our task begins. As I can't do everything alone, I must ask you to take over the command of the tank and, after the guard team has joined up with your own units in or outside Prague, to make an additional attempt to return here with as much fuel as possible. Don't stay away too long, because we are now dependent on the protection of the tank!"

"One question, Major!" Recke interjected. "What happens to

the men in the tank when we take off?"

"That's already clear too," Küpper replied promptly.

"The tank stays here because it is essential for our next tasks and our protection. If there's no other way, we'll blow it up with our bazookas. The people, on the other hand, will be dropped off in the west with the Dosthra today or tomorrow!"

"Without papers?" Jensen asked somewhat naively.

"These people are under my command for special use," the major instructed him. "I issue them with OKH marching orders so that they are not picked up as deserters. as deserters. Because on the few remaining airfields, of course I can't land!" The first lieutenant of the guard crew came back.

"Do you still want me to report, Major?"

"No!" said Küpper briefly. "We don't all have time for Larifari, just make sure you get on. And all the best!"

Immediately afterwards, the men of the guard marched off. Under a bush near the Dosthra lay the six requested bazookas. The sand-coloured warheads of these dreaded anti-tank weapons lay in the greenery like giant Easter eggs.

Juncker climbed out of the dosthra. He had grabbed his submachine gun and hurried after the retreating crew to take over the tank standing at the field guard. "Hurry back!" Küpper called after him.

Recke scratched his head thoughtfully. It was more

a gesture as a need. Then he said: "Major, now the Dosthra crew must stand guard. We must be prepared for all possible surprises!"

"That's right! - Have the four men come here immediately!"

The man from Kassel shouted for Sergeant Beer and the other men. When they approached, Küpper immediately took them in front of him and made them realise that they all had to go to their posts, regardless of their rank. The men grinned even as he explained. "Why are you bleating like hat-horses?" he asked.

"We're even enjoying it," said Beer calmly.

"Maybe we'll find lilies of the valley ..."

"Silly jokes," grumbled Küpper. "One of you has to head for the road to guide the returning tank, the others will protect our bird from the other wind directions. Get out of here now!"

"Yes, sir!" The four men were gone in a flash.

The major said to Recke: "Wait a moment!" He walked towards the aeroplane and took out a briefcase from inside. When he returned, he opened it in front of the man from Kassel and took out what looked like a wallet in size and format. When he flipped back the lid, it revealed a fine device with a row of small buttons. "A new walkie-talkie!"

The man from Kassel marvelled. "It looks cute."

Küpper sat down on the grass without any fuss and invited

Recke next to him. He then began to explain the device in detail and instructed the man from Kassel how to use it. After he had tried out the few handles, the major said: "Keep the device now! - I have secured a few pieces of it and we will have to rely on the use of the small apparatus over the next few days. As far as I know about the overall situation, the Red Army will enter Prague in the next few days, while the Americans will stop in the west shortly before that. This will bring a dramatic period of history to a temporary end and at the same time mark the beginning of a terrible tragedy. Our own fate depends mainly on our vigilance!"

"Then it would be time for us to leave as well," Recke interjected. He was dismayed by the situation.

"We'll let the tops of the Soviets roll past us," the major said calmly. "If it gets queasy, we can always fly out of the loose trap." Reaching for a map of the protectorate, which he took half-opened from his leather portfolio, he sketched the current course of the front.

"Undoubtedly all our units in the area between Bunzlau and Budweis will go towards the Americans and surrender to them in order not to fall into the hands of the Soviets. The Vlasov Division under Bunichenko will therefore also have to evacuate Prague, as they are in a double hurry,

if they do not want to be liquidated immediately on the orders of the Red commissars. Vlasov's second division under General Sveryev will already be on the westward march from the Budweis-Strakonice area. Details about these Russian volunteer units would be extremely important for us, but we must leave it to developing circumstances to find out more. We also need to find out what is going on at the BMW square. Hopefully the roundabout will still be afloat before the enemy bursts in and inherits the toy. That must not happen under any circumstances!"

"Hm," said the man from Kassel, lost in thought. He looked out of narrow slits in his eyes at a small beetle crawling slowly up a bobbing stalk. A physical tiredness paralysed his thinking. He was shaken by the looming end, which looked very different to what the victories of recent years had led him to expect. If he nevertheless managed to fight down the emergence of despair, it was partly due to the example set by the Major's display of calm.

"Are you already moping?"

"No, Major, I'm just wondering about the course of things that make up life on this earth." He gave a somewhat forced laugh. "The planet is constantly turning at the same pace and on its ponderous round it is constantly causing fates to tumble, triggering blood and tears. And it's all so

of course ..."

A strange expression flashed across the major's face, which Recke was not quite able to interpret. Then, standing up, he said: "If you want to philosophise, just remember one sentence, Captain: life is a game of rings!"

"That's military, Major, Barras philosophy!"

"It's the healthiest at the moment!" Küpper brushed a lump of earth off the heel of the other with the tip of his boot.

"Come on board the aircraft; I want to radio the aerodrome!"

Before the Major could get to the top, Beer emerged from the bushes, having taken over the observation of the road himself. He gasped for breath and was out of breath. "Herr Major - !"

"What is it, Beer?"

"I think it's starting again in Prague. An armed troop of Czechs has just marched towards the city, singing songs. Ivan will probably be in the immediate vicinity or pushing past from the side."

"So what!" Küpper thought about it for a moment, then handed the sergeant a walkie-talkie from the folder he had tucked under his arm. "Stay at your post under all circumstances and take the device with you! You've known it since yesterday. It will make it easier for you to pass on your reports to me. But you may only leave your post if there is direct danger to you and us. Understood?!"

"Jawohl, Herr Major!" The sergeant took the small

apparatus and made his way back into the forest.

Küpper now tried to get messages from Gbely airfield by radio. Strangely enough, the radio station there did not answer the call. Worried, the major came back outside and called out to Kassel, who had remained outside: "There's already some kind of devilry going on! Not a single tail is answering in Gbely."

"What do we do now?"

"Wait and see," growled Küpper.

The tank returned in the afternoon. Jensen, who was constantly on the lookout from the aeroplane, received Beer's transmission and reported promptly. Küpper and Recke immediately rushed to the road and waited until Juncker had driven the vehicle into a small lane and climbed out. When he saw the two officers, he immediately rushed towards them. "No turning back to Prague!" he reported.

"Why?" Küpper wanted to know.

"The Czechs have resumed the battle for the town with the support of the Russians. They are slaughtering our wounded and hunting down all German civilians. Gbely airfield has been taken and forty-six aeroplanes have fallen into the hands of the insurgents. The SS units and small parts of the Wehrmacht are fighting fiercely, but are barely able to cope with the situation. Our guards immediately set up the defence of a

hospital, which was about to be stormed by the Tchechen."

"Bloody bunch of pigs!" Küpper cursed.

"When they saw our tank," Juncker continued, "They piled up like rabbits. By the time I had to turn off, they were already peppering out of holes again."

"And what about petrol?" asked the Major.

"We captured a lorry full. The Czechs abandoned a convoy of lorries they had taken when we rumbled past and an SS unit appeared at the same time. We loaded up our tank with canisters and the men from the unit took the rest."

"Excellent!"

"What now?" Juncker looked at the major, waiting.

Küpper thought for a moment, then said: "Leave the Tank to the Dosthra in a roundabout way, Juncker!"

While the tank started up again, the officers took the shortest route through the forest back to the machine and took Beer with them. "We don't need a Dosthra guard," Küpper had said. Juncker and Recke looked at each other but said nothing.

"I'll fly the armoured men out at once!" the major said afterwards, noticing the looks.

On Dosthra Square, the major had all the men assemble. After a few words about the recent events, he presented the armoured commander with a

Marching orders for home. He wanted to fly out himself together with Juncker. "Get your things," he ordered the armoured men, "and get them on the plane immediately!"

The people were clearly happy to get out of the witches' cauldron without risk. They immediately followed the staff officer's instructions. Küpper continued:

"I have made the following arrangement for you gentlemen: you, Comrade Juncker, will take over the tank with Captain Recke! I will also assign one man from the Dosthra crew to you. The rest of us will take over the aircraft to fly out the armoured men and meet in an approximate south-south-west direction from Prague. The way I see it, you'll be travelling through the Vltava valley, which is still relatively the safest because of the underground operations there - at least for the next day or two - and from seven twenty in the morning we'll start our ultra-short wave connection at half-hourly intervals. From that time onwards, I will fly over the south-west of Šumava until we have a connection. Is everything clear?"

Juncker replied in the negative. "I have been given command of the Dosthra on the instructions of the base commander on One Hundred and Three and do not wish to hand over the aircraft without express orders from my immediate superior!"

"My dear Juncker," said the Major gently, "you know exactly what my duties and powers are.

have. It is not so much a question of competences now, but solely of completing a task that has been started. We have every freedom within our action group and should not be petty. Don't you think so?"

"If you take full responsibility, then I will comply," Juncker agreed. He chose Krammer as his passenger, as the man was somewhat slight and would take up little space. The groups were now fully organised.

Krammer fetched rations from the Dosthra and, on the major's instructions, stowed three of the bazookas inside the tank, loading the rest into the aircraft. Some of the fuel was also refuelled into the Dosthra, to which Küpper added some additional chemical cartridges, the composition of which was just as much a secret as many other details of the flying machine.

At seventeen forty-five, the Dosthra took to the skies, quickly gained altitude and flew after the setting sun. Best wishes for the tank's journey came over the radio, which at the same time set its tracks in motion towards the Vltava valley. Juncker thought it wise to drive straight through the terrain. Above all, he shortened the route and avoided any surprise encounters with Soviet armoured columns, which could appear in the area at any time. Past individual farmsteads and small villages

the three men reached the Vltava after about an hour and a half at the confluence of the Beraun River. Travelling along the left bank, they came across some armoured personnel carriers stopping on the road. Juncker learnt from a first lieutenant that they had orders for Prague, but did not want to continue because of the unclear situation. The Czech capital was largely in the hands of the insurgents. The two officers in the tank were also unable to provide the lieutenant with any information.

These were the first signs of the disintegration of organised operations and fronts. The gears of a previously unsurpassable war technology began to fail.

They drove around Königsaal and were overtaken a little later by a lorry convoy, which was secured by an SS unit and was apparently transporting material westwards. There was lively movement all along the road and various lorry crews were busy loading various things that were to be taken from the factories underground to safety. As far as Czech loading labourers were **also** helping, they seemed willing to work. The German weapons were still respected here at the time.

However, a short distance from the riverside road they came under fire from ambush. The men in the tank immediately realised that the Czechs were just waiting for the German units to withdraw so that they could attack the rearguard or the German civilian population. At

Mirowitz they turned off, while a Wehrmacht convoy with loaded civilian refugees continued southwards.

The dawning night was bright and made it easier to get ahead. A woman called them from a detached house they were passing. It was a Sudeten German woman who, despite all warnings, wanted to stay on the small farm. She told the men that refugees had said that the insurgents who had captured Vlasov's chief of staff Trukhin and his adjutant Romashkin two days ago were in nearby Pibram. The Soviets had already pushed through and taken Truchin away from the village immediately.

Recke, who had spoken to the woman from the tower hatch, thanked her for the message. She declined his offer to travel with them for some of the way and get to safety.

The conclusion drawn from the woman's statement was that there was no longer a firm front and that the Soviets had already got behind the rear of the Moldavia Valley units on several occasions. Juncker therefore decided to drive around Strakonitz.

They were crossing the road to the western end of Blatna when they heard shots being fired in the immediate vicinity. Juncker stopped immediately while Recke carefully surveyed the area.

Half right behind them on the country road

a group of people whose screams and jeers were clearly audible. Then two more shots rang out between them. A woman gave a shrill cry.

"Go on, drive up!" urged Juncker from Kassel. "There's a mess going on ..."

"We can't," came the driver's voice, hollow and pressed, from inside the car. "We can't ..."

"Don't talk rubbish!" shouted Recke overloudly in despair, "do it or I'll jump out and run there alone ..."
Before he could say any more, the woman from the dark crowd of people could be heard screaming again with a bloodcurdling scream. "Helpeeeee! ..."

Recke dived abruptly, swivelled the gun barrel and fired a shot.

"Fool!" cursed Juncker, "now it's all about the sausage! ..."
He started the tank with a roaring engine and pulled up to the crowd, which immediately scattered.

There was a car on the road that had been stopped by the Czechs. Two dark bundles lay on the road in front of it, while a woman ran towards the tank without being hindered. The fleeing insurgents took cover in front of the tank and only after a few minutes did a few shots ring off the armour of the car. However, they did not prevent Recke from remaining in the open turret hatch. The figure rushing towards them was a young girl, her blouse and shirt hanging down in tatters. She held her arms crossed in front of her bare breasts and

plunged to earth a few steps in front of the tank.

Juncker had opened the viewing flap fully and stopped immediately. "Get the girl in, Krammer!"

"No longer necessary," Recke shouted back. He jumped out of the tower, rushed towards the girl and picked her up. She was completely distraught and let herself be picked up like a helpless creature and carried to the vehicle.

Kramer was already waiting and helped to get the girl into the car. As soon as the men had climbed in, the Czechs began to fire furiously, but they were unable to harm the tank. Tongues of fire snapped out of the nearby undergrowth. Exciting shouts followed.

"Nenechte nênce startovat - Don't let the Germans start!
Usmrt te nênce - Kill the Germans! - Napred - Forward!
..."

Despite mutual encouragement from the cover, none of the rebels showed up. Recke fired two shots from the turret, while Juncker drove to the stopped car and stopped again next to it. In the pale light of the rising moon, the two bundles lying next to the car's radiator turned out to be German air force officers who were no longer showing any signs of life.

Krammer jumped into the open and in two steps was at the car, whose door he pulled open. With a quick glance he saw that it was empty. He grabbed a small suitcase and dashed back into the armoured car just as quickly. While he was still getting in, another shot rang out.

The man squeaked. "Heavens arse! ..."

Recke took the suitcase from his hand and put it down. "Got something?"

Krammer merely mumbled. "I think I have a small scratch on my thigh..."

The turret cover and front flap closed abruptly, the tank's caterpillar tracks scraped across the road surface and then ground forwards in the soft earth of the terrain.

T h e r e were still screams.

"Zabite nênce - Slay the Germans! ..."

"Shoot, Captain, shoot!" shouted Krammer, completely beside himself. "I took a look at the dead officers. The Czechs shot them in the neck! I saw it clearly ..."

"Calm down, Krammer. Look after your leg!" Nevertheless, Recke peered out into the bright night as he spoke. Two Czechs jumped up from a nearby row of bushes towards which the tank was heading and tried to flee sideways.

The man from Kassel immediately swivelled and fired. One of the men jumped up and fell to the ground, half rolling over. The second ran on instead of taking cover. Despite the darkness, Recke still caught him. With a yelp, the man hit fell down like a piece of small game.

Again there was shouting all round, but nobody showed themselves. Even the shooting had stopped because the Czechs must have realised the futility of their actions. The

Panzer was invulnerable to them. Only incomprehensible curses followed.

Whilst Juncker drove on with his eyepiece open again, Recke looked after the girl and Krammer. The latter was leaning against the wall on the floor, had pulled down his trousers without a care in the world and was in the process of bandaging his injured leg.

The man from Kassel took the bandage pack from his hand and examined the wound with the help of a torch. It appeared to be a simple flesh puncture. He unwound the bandage over the thigh and placed two more packets over it, as the first roll was still bleeding through while he was bandaging it. "Lie still for the time being, Krammer!" he warned.

The girl was also sitting on the floor and was completely apathetic. When she touched Recke carefully, he felt a continuous shiver run through her body. So he reached for a blanket and threw it over the girl. "Wrap yourself up tightly!"

Instead of an answer, she suddenly sobbed out loud. "Oh my God! ..." She pulled the blanket over her head and the sobs turned into continuous whimpering.

Recke went over to Juncker. "What are we supposed to do with this poor creature?"

The Waffen SS officer stared steadfastly into the night.

"If we come across a column, we'll hand it over. Maybe we'll meet a unit behind Strakonitz that's heading home to Bavaria." Slight regret resonated

in his voice.

The tank ate its way through the wooded hills for kilometre after kilometre. In Strahl-Hoschtitz they crossed a watercourse, rattling over the small bridge regardless of any load-bearing capacity.

Immediately behind them, they were stopped by a strong group. They were soldiers of the Second Vlasov Division, who had not yet marched off to Krumlov with the bulk of the unit. When questioned, a Russian staff officer, who spoke fluent German, explained that the Americans in the south had indicated Krumau as a prisoner collection point. However, he himself and some other officers were of the opinion that they were not safe from the Red Army there.

"I have no desire to fall into the hands of the Americans so quickly," Juncker said to the Russian. "I wouldn't like to be in the immediate vicinity of the Soviets either!"

"We have our doubts too," replied one of the Vlasov officers who had joined them. "If the Soviet commissars take us from the Americans ..."

"Where are you going now?" enquired the SS officer.

"Straight ahead to the west. Far to the west!" The Russian staff officer waved his arm wide.

"It may be that we will meet during the coming day," said Juncker. "In any case - good luck!"

The Russians lined up in front of the tank and gesticulated animatedly. "Now, don't you go getting mad! With us, with us ..." Juncker feared an attack on the vehicle. "Make way!"

The staff officer brought his face very close to the viewing flap. "Germanski - good comrades! - Stay with us for a while! - We leave in a few hours. Protect our rearguard!" Some Russians repeated: "Germanski - good comrades!"

Recke leant towards Juncker. "I guess we'll have no choice! It actually suits us because it makes our observations easier. If the head of the organisation comes into contact with Americans, we can still slip away as the rearguard!"

Juncker nodded. "Good," he said to the Russians. "We'll stay with you for the time being!"

"Gutt, gutt!" The staff officer shouted a few words in Russian to the nearest soldiers. They ran off and came back a few minutes later, dragging a few cans of petrol with them. "Here's some petrol! - We're not driving any more. Everybody march! ..."

Recke got out and gratefully accepted the canisters. Juncker immediately refilled the tanks and threw all the empty containers out into the ditch. He then steered the tank into a field, while Recke remained standing with the Vlasov officers.

When the SS officer returned to the group after the vehicle had been parked, leaving the wounded Krammer behind as a guard, the

staff officer analysed the American handover negotiations in more detail. He and the other officers expressed reservations about accepting the Americans as a protecting power in the immediate vicinity of the Soviets. "They will hand us over if the commissioners make the demand. And they will certainly make the demand! ..."

The man from Kassel doubted this,

"Yes, they do!" claimed another Russian. "Americans don't know anything about Russia and Europe! - I was at the delegation and heard Americans talking. They don't know anything about the liberation army and are stupid friends of the Bolsheviks. You will see!

..."

"So what," said Recke. "But to deliver? ..." All the

Russians nodded briskly. "They will ..." The

The second staff officer informed the Germans that parts of the second division were already beginning the march to Kramau. However, parts of the replacement brigades and the officers' school wanted to continue westwards. He himself was also leading two battalions westwards. His mistrust of the Americans was too great here. However, he also complained that the Germans themselves did not have complete confidence in them. Nevertheless, he impulsively reached out his hand to the Germans. "We good friends!"

In the darkness of the fading night, the unit set off. Half-loud Russian commands brought the soldiers to their feet, who immediately

formed into marching columns in a disciplined manner. The leader of the rearguard and another officer asked to be allowed to sit on the tank.

The hustle and bustle that began, which was not without noise, had also woken the girl. Tiredness after the shock of what she had experienced had caused her to doze off despite her uncomfortable position, while Krammer had kept constant watch. As the two officers climbed into the tank, they looked after the girl. "Are you cold?" asked Recke.

"It's not bad," she replied. Her voice was husky and brittle. Shortly afterwards, she tried to say a few words of thanks for the help.

"Where are you from?" Juncker wanted to know.

"I was an intelligence officer in Prague. Two officers took me with them when we had to leave the city in a hurry. We got through the country quite well by taking detours, and at first we were several cars and armoured personnel carriers. Only when we turned south alone ..." As far as could be seen in the darkness of the combat vehicle, the girl had once again put her hands in front of her face. "Oh - it was terrible!"

"Cheer up, girl!" said the man from Kassel gently.

"They weren't people anymore!" she suddenly cried out. "They dragged us out of the stopped car, kicked the two officers and hit them in the face with rifle butts. And then - then - all I heard was the crack of gunfire. They tried to tear my clothes off and inflict violence on me.

They were like animals - like beasts! - Oh, there is no more God ..."

Krammer remembered: "Who did the small suitcase in the car belong to?"

The girl swallowed a few times, then she said: "That must have been my luggage. The officers couldn't take any more with them."

"Here he is," Krammer said simply.

"Oh - thank you." After a few seconds, she added: "At least I can put on a shirt and a blouse ..."

"You can do that now!" said Juncker. "We're already moving on again and we'll all have to look out of the tank into the open anyway."

Juncker squeezed himself into the driver's seat and pressed the starter. While Krammer limped after him, the tank started up again and headed for the road. The humming of the engine drowned out the patter of the marching soldiers' boots. Company after company moved in order into the gathering dusk. The tank rattled along with the last one as the rearguard.

The Russians sitting on the ground were talking half aloud to Recke, who was peering out of the open tower into the forest. They openly admitted that they were all possessed by a tremendous fear.

Recke himself could not escape the spell of this collective fear of death of the harried and desperate men.

The whole atmosphere was charged with the tension of a parallel mindset. Everything around the tank shrank into a limited mystical dome.

On both sides of the road, the black, threatening walls of old forests grew high, while the sky arched like a pale grey blanket. The columns of companies marching ahead looked like a snake of shadows, sucked in and swallowed up by the receding night. Only now and then did weapons clink or some cooking utensil rattle against the stock of a rifle. When the tank temporarily switched off the engine so that you could listen for the noise of other engines, you could clearly make out the small background noises in the almost unreal silence.

As the morning mists rose and the coolness made the men shiver, the ghosts of fear and trepidation marched alongside each of the Vlasovs as invisible companions, summoned as it were by the unison of emotions.

Keeping exactly south-west, the formation left the larger road and continued along narrow footpaths. As the marching columns spread out, the pace slowed temporarily. They passed another small, unsightly village whose inhabitants remained invisible. The dark crest of a large mountain of considerable height loomed in front of the head of the procession.

The Wlassow people moved along in a silent, hasty trot.

The path began to ascend and the forest drew closer to the path. The undergrowth became denser, large ferns adorned the edge of the path like a primeval magic garden and the broad branches of ancient giant trees swayed gently in the cool morning breeze, which also set the wafts of mist in motion.

The sound of the rattling armour at the end of the long train was an ugly scraping sound in the oppressive silence of the gloomy surroundings. The Russian officers crouched like gnomes, shivering on the steel hull of the armoured car.

The leader of the rearguard troop turned to Recke: "There are forests like this in our homeland too." His melancholy eyes travelled all around. More to himself, he said: "Will we ever see them again? Oh sswiataja Rossija - Holy Russia ..."

Suddenly the train came to a halt. Arm waving continued from column to column until the rearguard also stopped. Scraps of words buzzed through. "Engine noise from the side ..."

The rearguard leader, who translated the message, asked for the tank engine to be switched off. The men listened intently. Some of the Russian soldiers had thrown themselves down and were listening to the ground for the sounds of the earth. Nothing. Just incessant silence. Not even the twittering of birds.

The stop was also used for a short rest,

while soldiers at the top swarmed out. As the Russians only had very meagre rations, the Germans shared their morning snack with the two Vlasov officers.

The girl was also a little more composed now in the morning and was not coy when she was offered breakfast. When she stuck her head out of the tower hatch, a little hungry for air, and was greeted almost humbly by the Russians, a trace of a friendly smile even stole across her face.

In the dawning light of the early day it was apparent that she must have been about twenty-three years old. Her tousled blonde curls could not disguise the fact that she was undeniably pretty. With a somewhat tired movement, she brushed her hair back from her face. She had large blue-grey eyes that were still red from crying.

"It's good that the girl is coming home with us," said the rearguard leader. "Otherwise we won't get through alone. Ceski like animals. Nothing good!"

Recke described the night-time incident to the Russians in a few words. Tears ran down the girl's cheeks again.

The Russians nodded seriously. "We've seen a lot in the last few days. But couldn't find anything. It was already too late!" The second officer added: "Ceski chabben beat the wounded to death in the military hospital, gouged out eyes, cut off ears and other tortures ... Chabben in a village

German women found. Naked, bellies cut open, breasts gone and babies thrown against the wall. We saw it ourselves, so help us God! ..."

The girl groaned. "My God, can people even do that? ..."

"No shit," the rearguard leader dismissed the question. "Ceski nix people!" More arm waving and half-loud shouts. The columns slowly started moving again. After a short stretch of road, the forest receded a little and overlooked a wider road that intersected the path of the Vlasovs. Behind it was the black-green curtain of a mighty forest, which in places stretched steeply up to the high crest of the mountain, which was now rising hard against the road.

"Bavaria begins behind this chain!" Juncker shouted from inside the car. He had glanced at the map for orientation.

The formation crossed the road and turned into a dark hollow path leading up the mountain. Juncker expressed his doubts to Recke as to whether they would be able to follow the formation along this path.

Before Recke could talk to the two Russians about it, a scream from several hundred throats rose into the already bright morning sky. Immediately afterwards, the crack of a grenade shattered the silence of the seemingly vast solitude.

The Vlasovs' hitherto muffled fear increased to an almost maddening horror when the mighty hulk of a

Soviet T34 with its wide caterpillar tracks appeared. Its long gun barrel swivelled in like a threatening finger and another shot was fired. Howling, the projectile travelled over the heads of the rearguard and burst with a bright thud a little way ahead.

The German tank had just reached the road and offered the approaching enemy a good target. While the Vlasov men broke into the high forest in a wide line to seek shelter in its rising depths, Juncker first had to turn round so that he too could drive into the undergrowth. The Vlasov officers had jumped off and hurried after their men.

Recke swivelled the tank's turret backwards, even though they were outgunned by the Soviet tank. Before he could get a shot off, an enemy grenade hit the track of the German tank and caused it to circle, preventing the tank from escaping.

One chain of the armour ground into a hollow in the ground next to the road and sank down. In a flash, Recke had knocked back the tower cover and pushed the girl out into the open. Despite her fear and horror, she clutched her small suitcase to **her**, and after a few jumps she fell behind a bush.

At the same time, Krammer had crawled out of the back of the tank, dragging a bazooka with him. Standing there uncovered, the barrel under the

Arm clamped and pull the trigger was the work of a few seconds. The red-hot firing cloud shot hissing out of the rear end of the weapon's barrel, while the mine head hit the ring between the tank's massive hull and the mighty turret at close range. A bright flare shot up and splinters and chunks flew around with a deafening crash. Then - a mighty jet flame, bright yellow, turning into a billowing red and an all-enveloping brown-black cloud of smoke - that was the end of the T 34.

"There, we've done that," said Krammer. Then he knelt down as if something had slipped his mind. The barrel of the bazooka clattered to the ground.

"What's going on, Krammer?" Recke and Juncker jumped in. As they stood by him, they saw that his face was white as lime. Krammer's mouth twisted into a grin. "It was all in one hair. But we're not so cheap yet!" He slumped further and propped his upper body up with obvious effort.

"Blimey, you've had it!" Juncker tried to subdue him, but Krammer fought him off. "Please don't - it would hurt me unnecessarily ..."

"So speak up, Krammer! Where did you ..." urged Juncker.

"It's just a little thing. The colossus gave me a few more beans from his MG sheaf. It's just enough for a free ticket to the kingdom of heaven or the devil's grandmother's kitchen."

The two officers looked at each other helplessly. The sound of exploding ammunition came from the burning Soviet tank and the stinking fumes spread out like a billowing wall. Another roar could be heard behind them. Krammer's face contorted. "Give me another fist! Quickly, quickly - they're coming!"

"Don't be silly, Krammer! We're taking you with us!" The major called out to Recke: "You take him by the legs ..."

"No, no!" cried Krammer. "I don't want to. Give me a fist! ..."

The men had not noticed that the two Vlasov officers had also joined them. The rearguard leader himself brought the two remaining bazookas out of the German tank without saying a word and placed them silently next to the seriously wounded man.

"Germanski brave!" said the Russian to Krammer. He knew that no more help was needed. He hurriedly said to the German officers: "Make haste - up into the forest! - Listen out! - The Bolsheviks are coming there ..."

"Please go!" asked Krammer, who had understood the words. Juncker jumped back to the tank and took out a leather bag and two submachine guns. In the bag was ammunition, some maps and the VHF radio. As the men jumped into the nearby bushes, a second T34 emerged from the smoke of the burning tank.

They heard him shout as he was walking: "Unterscharführer Krammer is signing off! Greetings ..."
Then again

a detonation accompanied by a prolonged crash and rattle. Looking back, they saw that Krammer had also finished off the second colossus. He himself was lying face down in the dust of the road, not moving.

After a few steps, they came across the girl, who had been watching the whole scene with wide eyes and waiting to be taken away. She had felt unable to escape on her own.

It was high time the men had left the road. Despite two burning tanks, more were already rattling along behind the thick wall of smoke and gunfire could be heard.

The four men and the girl hurried uphill. In front of them and to the side, other groups of men broke through the matted thicket. As they ran, the rearguard leader shouted to the Germans: "We've already got a few dead too! First grenade - three men dead ... Behind us Bolsheviks - now many more will die! ..."

Sweat poured down the faces of the fugitives. Whistling, they pressed their breath through their noses, rushing on undeterred. Again and again, rifle shots rang out through the semi-darkness of the forest.

In mad fear, no longer able to mount a coherent defence, hunted by superior forces, the pursuers pushed closer and closer together and continued up the mountain in groups and squads. A high column of smoke in front of them magically attracted them.

Apparently, the Soviets had an advantage from the side

had a more favourable ascent, because suddenly troops of them broke out at the same height on the flank.

"Wperjod - forward!" their shouts rang out. "Urrä, urrä ..." Some of the Vlasovs fell to the ground. Their screams pierced the forest. Infected by the screams in the beginning tumult, the girl also began to scream.

The officers around them cursed and tried to silence them. Only a harsh order from Juncker was successful. Bullets were already whistling through the rows of trees near them, and some of the Vlasovs who tried to resist fell immediately.

They were still running, following an unconscious compulsion, towards the high finger of smoke that seemed to be coming out of the ground like a signal.

A clearing opened up in front of the fugitives. Behind it towered a weathered rock face, criss-crossed with cracks and crevices. Like a broad wave, the Vlasovs stumbled over the scrub-covered surface. Hundreds of them ran towards the rocks, as if they could find shelter in the gaping crevices.

"This is madness!" shouted Recke, holding Juncker and the girl back. The one Russian stopped and the rearguard leader also ran out into the clearing. After a few minutes, he collapsed after being hit.

"Over here!" Juncker pulled his companions along with him. They squeezed behind him through a thorny bush that grew at the foot of a huge boulder. A

The cavity at the bottom of the rock was just big enough to provide shelter for the four people huddled close together. At the last moment, the Russian tore himself away from the group, broke back into the open and tried to catch up with his comrades, running zigzag after them.

Juncker and Recke peered between the branches at what was happening. The first few earth-brown Soviet soldiers were already running across the clearing, mercilessly spearing the wounded Vlasovs with their bayonets. At the same time, the wave of desperate men, possessed by the fear of a terrible end, surged against the rock face.

And the two Germans suddenly saw a strange figure standing in front of them and raising both arms towards the sky with an imploring gesture. A Mongolian, dressed in the strange costume of his country and with the characteristic cap on his head. There was a tension in the air that was almost paralysing and undoubtedly emanated from the man who stood like a statue in front of the advancing Russians. A hypnotic effect was palpable.

The smoke coming from the crevice thickened and became a wall of fog that drifted towards the Soviets. At the same time, as if following a call, the pursuers rushed towards the largest crevice in the wall and disappeared inside as if they were being swallowed up. Behind the wall of smoke, the rocks danced in the flickering of the descending veil. And suddenly

the Mongolian has disappeared.

A short time later, the smoke had completely cleared from the ground. The Soviet soldiers let out cries of anger and surprise. The majority of the two Vlasov battalions had dissolved into nothing and had escaped the Soviets.

Recke and Juncker cautiously drew their heads back as the strange Mongolian disappeared just as suddenly as he had stood surprisingly in front of the rock.

The girl had pressed herself against the boulder and held her clenched right hand in front of her mouth. Her eyes were widened in horror ...

The officers glanced at their watches. The same thought had inspired them. It was around seven. Recke took his walkie-talkie out of his pocket and beat Juncker to it. Although the agreed time had not yet arrived, he was already signalling.

Nothing. The men had no choice but to lie flat in complete silence. Minute after minute passed. The dewy ground was unpleasantly cold.

After a while, Recke tried again. This time he got an immediate response. The Dosthra was already in the air and must be circling somewhere nearby.

Küpper's first enquiry was about her location. "We can't say exactly," Recke replied. "We're at mid-height on a high forest mountain, right next to a rock face!" Juncker took the Kassel man's

device out of his hand. He reported very briefly that Krammer had fallen and that the armour was unusable.

"Break out south immediately and maintain contact!" was the order from Major von der Dosthra.

However, it did not come to that. Thinking that the Soviets had already pushed on, the two officers crawled out of the undergrowth and told the girl to come with them. Holding their submachine guns ready to fire, they stalked forward a few steps when they were suddenly shouted behind them: "Ruki werch - hands up! ..."

Juncker and Recke dropped their weapons. The girl tried to run a few more steps, but a sharp "Stoj!" made her stop.

"Cursed and sewn up," Juncker half-raged.

"Such a situation ..."

In an instant, they were surrounded by a troop of Soviet soldiers. One of them picked up the lost weapons while another reached for the girl. "Oh girl - choroscho ..."
A Russian sergeant pushed the butt of his assault rifle into Recke's side.

"Dawai, dawai! ..."

They stumbled forwards and were still glad that the Russians tolerated the girl in the midst of the captured officers. Making a small turn, they returned to the clearing where the dramatic action had taken place. They were immediately led to a group of officers.

A Russian captain turned to the prisoners. "Where Vlasov's soldiers, hey?"

Juncker looked at him. Then he pointed to one of the twisted figures lying there. The dead man was lying about ten paces away and still had one arm raised with cramped fingers. The white shield with the blue St Andrew's cross was shining on the upper part of the left sleeve.

"Pjos - dog!" roared the captain and hit Juncker in the face with his fist.

The SS officer stood stiffly still and did not flinch. A stream of blood shot out of his nose and stained his blouse. Only his gaze took on an aloof, haughty expression. It was as if he could see right through those standing in front of him.

The Russian grabbed Recke by the blouse. "You say - where Vlasov people?"

The man from Kassel pointed to the rock face. "There!"

The Russian raged: "Nothing there - you come with me! - Show me!"

The prisoners were pushed forwards until they and their companions were standing right in front of the wall. In fact, there was no trace of the missing men. Even to the Germans, nothing had ever seemed as mysterious as this event. For just a moment, it seemed as if a glimmer of secret knowledge flitted around the deliberately arrogant, angular features of the SS officer.

While the Russians were still shaking their heads, the group came across a man lying on the ground moaning with his hands on his stomach.

held pressed. It was the rearguard leader of the last Vlasov company who had been hit by a bullet.

One of the Soviet officers went up to him and kicked him. The Germans could not understand the questions asked in Russian. The Vlasov officer rose slightly from the ground and only looked at the Germans. "Germanski - brother! - We will see Russia again - through the womb of Mother Earth ..." A bang - and his head fell hard to the ground. The Soviet officer had unceremoniously put a bullet through his forehead.

Disgusted, the Germans turned away. Although their own fate was now completely uncertain, they were both worried about the girl, whose fate was certain in a few hours. Escape was impossible here.

"Dawai!" On an order from the Russian captain, they were led downhill with their original escort, who were still carrying the Germans' weapons and had even left the girl the suitcase.

The two officers deliberately faked a quick stumble and slide down the hill so that the accompanying soldiers would not come to rest. They had noticed the eyes that roamed the girl covetously.

Shortly before they reached the road from which the tragedy had started, they heard the low hum of a large aeroplane nearby. A brief exchange of glances confirmed the assumption that the Dosthra was searching after the connection had been broken. Resigned, Recke shrugged his

Shoulders.

The surprises of the day had not yet come to an end.

They entered the road a few hundred metres below the two still-smoking Soviet tanks and were taken to a column of wagons that were empty as transport vehicles for the soldiers swarming in the forest. The sergeant of the escort pointed to a small open wagon at the end of the procession. Again:

"Dawai!"

Some of the soldiers shouted at the sergeant. They raised their assault rifles and pointed them at the officers. The situation became threatening. Apparently, however, the NCO had a specific order that prevented the prisoners from being liquidated. With two Russians in the driver's seat and three more in the rear with the prisoners, the vehicle soon pulled up, heading north-east away from the nearby German border.

The Russians set a good pace. The hard driving on a bad road really shook those sitting in the car. The guards cursed.

At a bend in the road, the car stopped with a sudden jerk. Halfway across was an open car in which sat Russian officers, all of whom were Mongolians. One of them jumped out of the car and came over to the prisoners, whom he scrutinised closely. He hardly paid any attention to the girl, but he even took a close look at Juncker's black collar mirrors and the

yellow horizontal bar. Then he went back to his companions, with whom he spoke at length.

When the sergeant started up again with the wagon, the Mongols turned round and followed. After ten minutes they came to a small village whose houses were flying Czech flags. Irregulars with rifles and armbands stood at the entrance to the village and waved their weapons threateningly as the wagon with the prisoners passed.

"Zabite nêmce!

..."

They stopped in front of a better-looking house in the centre of the village. The Russians jumped off and pushed the Germans past the raging Czechs into the interior of the house. The sergeant went ahead and walked through a dark corridor that led into the courtyard of the building. While the prisoners had to wait, he paced the courtyard and opened several doors in the stable wing until he found a suitable chamber for the Germans.

"Pascholl - in there!"

The officers let the girl go first. The sergeant made a gesture as if he wanted to pull the girl back, but refrained from doing so. Only a mocking laugh distorted his features. "Abbends!..."

The room was completely dark. Only a fine streak of light penetrated through the cracks in the wooden door and drew a bright line on the opposite wall. It disappeared from time to time when the guard passed the door. The girl cried again and was completely broken. The two men did not dare to

to offer comfort.

Juncker's first instinct was to take off his wristwatch and empty his pockets. Recke followed his example at his behest. They then asked the girl to stow the small VHF set and her personal effects in her suitcase. Juncker's VHF set was unfortunately in his leather bag, which had remained with the Russians. They had been incredibly lucky that the girl still had the suitcase and that the officers had not been plundered immediately. They put this down to the hustle and bustle of the morning, which had brought the Russians such great surprises.

The two men talked in whispers. The most obvious thing was their fate, which at best meant deportation to the East. In the other case, their lives might only count for hours. They deliberately avoided talking about the girl.

A breakout was also completely hopeless. There was no way they would be able to get out of the place once they had finished with the post. Even the latter was just a mental game.

Recke thought about using the radio to send a message, but Juncker categorically rejected this idea. Knowing the daredevil Küpper, this would only jeopardise the Dosthra and its crew, without them being able to get help themselves.

"If we were in danger, we would be shot immediately!" explained the

SS officer. "We already know Ivan ..."

"Then we'll throw the device in the rubbish!" Recke angrily objected.

Juncker reassured him. "Time is of the essence, as the saying goes!"

"And lying in a cool grave is good in summer!" sneered the man from Kassel.

After a period of deep silence, Recke asked a little more conciliatory: "I want to eat a whole broom of straw if I can make sense of the miracle of the fog. Can you explain that, Juncker?"

"It's as strange as it is simple! The strange Mongolian, the personification of the roof of the world, has let his magical powers play out, as the Asians would say. We Europeans can come to terms with the fact that we are all subject to mass suggestion. The Ta-Lamas in particular are very good at it." Juncker stroked his rough chin. "The esoterics would say that Aggartha opened the gates for the persecuted and saved them from a threatening fate. The exotericists: a dazzling work of the gods has blinded the persecutors. To put it even more simply: the Soviets were fooled by a lama!"

The day passed without any attention being paid to the prisoners. Shots were heard a few times in the distance, but no conclusions could be drawn from them. Juncker suggested that they were witnesses to the mountain magic of

are likely to be of temporary value and therefore still have a grace period.

The narrow strips of light on the wall were already pale and went out completely after a while. A new night dawned and made the girl shiver as she clung to the men for protection. "Kill me," she pleaded, "before you leave me to these animals!"

As if to confirm their immense fear, the many-voiced noise and roaring from the village penetrated into the courtyard.

Apparently, intoxicated locals celebrated a cheap victory and fraternised with the Red Army soldiers.

The noise continued uninterrupted.

All at once, the wooden door was pulled open. The dark silhouettes of several men stood in the light-coloured doorway. One of them said in guttural German: "Up! Come with me now!"

Juncker was the first to step outside, immediately behind him the girl followed and Recke brought up the rear. There were four men covering them from all sides.

"Don't speak!" warned one of them.

Crossing the courtyard, the Germans saw the door guard staying behind and staring after them. The men pushed them into the corridor, where they had to wait for a moment. In a few minutes, a second guard came out and handed one of the four the prisoners' submachine guns and Juncker's leather gun.

bag.

"Go on!" said the speaker. In the light of an opening door, through which the second guard had come out with the things, the Germans recognised that they were being picked up by Mongols. They were probably the same people who had stopped their car in the morning.

Stepping out onto the village street, they were immediately pushed into a waiting closed carriage. While the Mongols sat down on the seats and let the girl sit backwards between them, Juncker and Recke had to squat on the ground. Then the carriage started up quickly.

The Mongols only stopped briefly before the end of the village. A few Russian words were enough to clear the exit immediately. As the car continued its journey, the prisoners saw that the armed Czechs at the end of the village were all drunk. Grinning, they stayed behind.

The car drove into the darkness of the night. After a short distance, it turned off the country road and rolled out of a cart track into a narrow forest lane. Recke estimated that the village was now more than ten kilometres away. A few houses at the side of the road had no light.

When the vehicle stopped at the edge of a hedge of bushes and night-black trees cast their shadows, the girl opened her mouth to scream. One of the Mongolians sitting next to her immediately stopped her with a quick

Moving her hand over the lower half of her face, stifling an attempt to scream. "Don't. talk - it'll break!"

The man's threatening tone intimidated her.

One of the men left the group and stayed away for a long time. When he returned, he spoke to his companions in a foreign idiom. Slowly, they continued to bump along in the wagon over the clearing, and after several hundred metres they crossed a clearing with fields. Rocking and groaning, the vehicle rolled over a small ditch and continued along a dirt track until it reached a detached house.

The door was hanging open on its hinges. No animal came forward and no occupant made himself known. The torch of a Mongol showed that the house had been left in great disorder or had been partly looted afterwards.

One of the Asians went back out to the car. The other three entered the bedroom of the house with the girl and the two officers, where there was a bed on each side of the wall.

The German-speaking Mongolian took the girl by the arm and pulled her to a bed. "Here - sleep for a few hours! Don't be afraid!" Then he turned to the officers: "We'll stay here. Until the morning."

"And what happens to us then?" Juncker asked without excitement. The Mongolian looked the questioner full in the face for a moment. A mild ray of the rising moon travelled across his broad face

and let the dark eyes glisten. "Buddha's ears are everywhere! - He has also heard this question and will answer it at the right time ..."

"Buddha's ears ...?" Recke stepped towards the Mongolian. Juncker also seemed surprised by the answer.

But the Asian turned away after the flawlessly spoken German sentences and continued talking to his companions.

As the Mongols remained seated on chairs around the table in the centre of the room, the officers threw themselves onto the second bed without a second thought. The physical and bodily fatigue immediately caused them to fall into a deep, dreamless sleep.

"Open up!" The Mongols were already at the door to the room.

"Quickly, quickly!" Another pale morning. Fog outside the house again and a cool chill. The carriage drove back over the field and forest lane to the country road and then at great speed over land. Juncker and Recke observed that the driver and his companion were carefully scrutinising all the signs at the crossroads.

Turning into a narrow path and after exiting the short stretch of woodland, the car stopped with a sudden jerk. "Get out!"

They all trudged together over soft earth, turned around a forest tongue and suddenly stood in front of a large, strange aeroplane, whose strange design was strongly reminiscent of Recke's aerial encounter in the Prague area.

Over the metal fuselage played the

first rays of the rising sun.

The Mongols hastily moved towards the centre of the fuselage under the short triangular wings. The head of the aeroplane showed two horizontally protruding horns, which gave the construction the appearance of a karbau head. The two German officers could not figure out the purpose of this peculiarity. The most striking thing to them after a hasty look around was the caterpillar undercarriage under the centre of the fuselage and the lack of any markings.

There was no more time to look around. In a few minutes, the men and the girl were stowed inside. Two Mongolians waiting in the aeroplane took the luggage of the four companions from the car, which was simply left abandoned on the dirt track. Then the metal bird lifted into the sky with howling turbines and shot eastwards at increasing speed towards a destination unknown to the Germans ...

SECOND BOOK

SUNSET

The Exalted One said:

Thus I once proclaimed the devotional teaching to Vivasvant, Vivasvant communicated it to Manu, Manu Ikshvâku.

So it went from mouth to mouth, The royal ways knew it, - But through long time this teaching was lost here.

(Bhagavadgita, IV/1, 2)

Germany has capitulated! - The war is over.

While the whole world held its breath on the eighth of May 1945, the men at Point 103 stood in front of their radios and listened to the latest news, away from all the action.

"... Since midnight, the guns have been silent on all fronts. By order of the Grand Admiral, the Wehrmacht has ceased the battle, which had become hopeless, thus bringing to an end almost six years of heroic struggle. It has brought us great victories, but also heavy defeats. In the end, the German Wehrmacht honourably succumbed to an enormous superiority. True to his oath, the German soldier has made an unforgettable contribution to his nation. The homeland supported him to the last with all its strength at the greatest sacrifice.

supported. The unique achievements of the front and the homeland will find their final appreciation in a later just judgement of history. The achievements and sacrifices of the German soldiers on land, at sea and in the air will not be denied respect even by the enemy. Every soldier can therefore lay down his weapon upright and proudly and in the most difficult hours of our history bravely and confidently go to work for the eternal life of our nation.

In this hour, the Wehrmacht remembers its comrades who remained before the enemy. The dead oblige us to unconditional loyalty, obedience and discipline towards our fatherland, which is bleeding from countless wounds!"

That was the final part of the last German Wehrmacht report.

The men's expressions were more withdrawn than usual. The collapse of the empire touched the roots of their attachment to their homeland and depressed them. Their small secret realm and the unshakeable faith that animated their community were the only things that left them with a chaotic world.

For Reimer and Gutmann, the day of the surrender was doubly painful, as a shortwave message arrived at the same time, in which Major Küpper announced that Juncker and Recke were missing.

On the third day after this historic date, a rumour went through the ranks of the men at the base that a woman had arrived last night as a messenger who had left the base after a few hours.

would have left again within hours. The adjutant was more taciturn than usual and no-one from the group on duty at the airfield was willing to give any further explanations.

Towards the evening of the same day, a new radio message was received, announcing the return of the Dosthra aircraft under the command of Major Küpper. Other aircraft were still outstanding and had not yet reported in. The major was therefore the first witness to provide authentic reports from the day of Germany's capitulation and its initial effects.

All the rumours and announcements in connection with the events had triggered unbridled curiosity among the personnel at the base. In addition, the next day two aeroplanes flew in from the Canadian coast from which several American officers and Indians disembarked. Their aeroplanes were stopped and the foreigners remained on the base, locked up among themselves. Shortly after them came the Dosthra with Küpper and another German long-haul aircraft. Despite being visibly exhausted, the major immediately went to the command room to report to the commander.

People outdid each other in assumptions and speculations, but without coming to any credible conclusions. Only the returned Dosthrans made a few comments, but without exception they were pretty much at the end of their tether. They went

They immediately set off for their quarters with somewhat unsteady steps.

Küpper was directed to Juncker's room after the adjutant recalled him to the administration. A member of the staff on duty led him out of the command room after he had briefly reported the most important events and left a number of important papers with the Ia.

It was more a matter of course than coincidence that before entering his quarters, the Major bumped into Gutmann in the corridor, who had just come out of the roundabout and was also heading for his quarters. After the first brief greeting, Gutmann asked a direct question about the whereabouts of Juncker and Recke.

"Come with me!" the major asked him. He let Gutmann into his quarters and told him without introduction in short, sketchy lines about the events of the last few days around Prague. He concluded his account with the last radio communication he had had in the south-western Bohemian Forest and linked it to the assumption that both officers had fallen into the hands of the Soviets. "Under the circumstances, it was impossible to do anything for our comrades." Deep shadows lay around the major's eyes. He blinked wearily at his counterpart and closed his mouth.

"So there's hardly any hope, then?" Gutmann interjected, shocked.

"Hope?" The major made an uncertain gesture.

"As I was able to ascertain, the Russians - and occasionally even the Americans - usually put down captured members of the SS as soon as they are taken prisoner. Only larger groups and units were driven eastwards to Siberia."

"If that's the case ... !" Gutmann's face showed a desperate expression.

"For fuck's sake," rumbled Küpper. "We're soldiers after all! Aren't we?"

"Of course, Major!" Gutmann gratefully put his hand on his cap visor, then left the room with a heavy heart.

Reimer soon learnt about Küpper's landing and immediately set off in search of Gutmann. After asking around in vain, he found him in the room they shared. It was shortly after Gutmann had left the Major.

When the man from Linz entered the room, he refrained from asking any questions. Gutmann's expression was knowledge and answer enough for him. Just as his companion had very recently fallen into the resignation of hopelessness, he sat down on his cot with a feeling of inner emptiness. So he waited, oblivious to the wandering time, until Gutmann repeated Küpper's report in brief words.

After a long silence, Reimer said: "I can't imagine it. At the end of the war of all times ... ?"

"Junckers was clever," Gutmann murmured. "But even Archimedes fell at the hands of a common mercenary after the occupation of Syracuse."

Reimer stared as if he were looking through the windowless room. "The death of our comrades has not been confirmed. That's why I believe they're still alive! ..."

Both men looked at each other. But fate remained silent in response to the silent question of their eyes.

The oppressive calm of the previous week suddenly turned into a flurry of activity when a loudspeaker announcement called all the men at the base into the assembly hall. Apart from the few men on duty at the radar unit, the radio station, the television and steering link and a ground crew on standby, the base personnel made their way to the assembly point individually or in groups shortly before the appointed time. Even without any special instructions, all the men were clear and agreed that their activities would now begin after the conclusion of the latest world events. The announcement made at the Grand Assembly had to be fulfilled now.

"Today's meeting is for the knowledgeable and the ignorant alike," Gutmann had said to Reimer as they both prepared to leave.

"Ignorant?" The Linzer laughed somewhat mockingly.

"Certainly! - Knowing a goal still doesn't mean having fundamental knowledge," he was instructed

Gutmann. "I also believe that we will all be more ignorant than knowledgeable today, as we are facing fundamental changes. That's what I learnt from some of the aide's hints this morning."

"You think of everything but one thing: the end!" Reimer was in no hurry to leave. "We no longer have any authority. It used to be said: le roi est mort, vive le roi! Now there is no one left who could or should represent our people and our state!"

"As if that was the point," Gutmann said. "You have to be able to write off what has been lost. Authority and the state are more or less temporary concepts; they can be re-established by a biologically healthy people at the right time.

"Provided a nation retains self-reflection in its biological elite. For the amorphousness of the masses is a given factor due to the general decline of the West, which can only be balanced by superior leadership in order to enable a slow recovery of the overall substance."

"A task that requires a lot of patience; but it is the only way that leads to a lasting existence. Incidentally, authority and the state are not represented by the masses, but by those appointed from among the people. These appointments must come from the biological elite in order to ensure not a constructive, temporary development, but a natural development for a long period of earth's history. Only healthy

Peoples outlast times of fate. They always outlast the biologically and physically weaker ones!" Gutmann took his peaked cap. "Let's go now!"

When the two officers entered the assembly hall, most of the seats on either side of the centre aisle were already occupied. They found a few empty seats in one of the last rows of benches.

In front of them in the first row sat the American officers and Indians, whose special mission was still a secret.

"Watch out!"

A flight lieutenant posted outside the door of the hall had shouted the call. The men immediately stood up, took their positions and turned their attention to the incoming chief of staff, who, accompanied by the commander's adjutant, walked quickly to the dais. The insignia of the collapsed empire was missing from his left upper arm and cap.

His figure tightened as he turned to face the assembly. A quick survey of the men, then he began to speak:

"The falling rune bars of history have decided: Germany has ceased to exist at this time! There is no longer any state authority and four military governments have taken power in the quartered empire. I hereby inform you of the decision of the commander of our base: Point 103 applies from

immediately as detached from the Reich and is not subject in its military unity to the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht. All national insignia of the German Reich are to be removed from uniforms immediately! For the time being, the sign of the Black Sun is the sole symbol of our secret, independent Reich.

Only the German Wehrmacht surrendered! - There was expressly only a military surrender. The Dönitz government is and remains - irrespective of whether or not it can exercise its legal power to govern - the only legal government of a German Reich within the borders before the war under international and constitutional law. However the Allies in the East or West may act, nothing will change in this international and national legal situation. It is possible that the Allies will disregard these rights, use their power to set up satellite governments by force and try to keep Germany in pieces on the ground. But they can never eliminate a legal situation. A normative power of the factual can never override a right!

But we are building on the past:

In the geological period of the Older Quaternary or Diluvian, a cultural circle extended over a long epoch, which encompassed a large part of the then differently shaped continents. The bearers of this were the people of the then Arctic-Nordic and later branching off Atlanto-Nordic race.

Ancient finds, such as the twenty-five thousand year old inscription, the oldest in human history to date, on Monhegan Island on the coast of Maine, as well as the similar, almost identical characters of archaic Chinese writing, the sign stones of the Hedschra Mektuba of the Sahara Atlas, of Carisco-Rock and Desert Queen Well in California, of Tanum in Sweden and Hodein Magol in Nubia, are all the oldest witnesses of this enormous circle of the megalithic age. The continent of Gondwanaland, which encompassed the east coast of South America, Africa, Arabia, India and Australia, was separated from Arctic land, which consisted of East and North America, Greenland and Scandinavia, by the broad Tethys Ocean, of which the Mediterranean is a remnant sea. Two arms of this Tethys Ocean formed the later Atlantic Ocean. The face of the Earth was therefore significantly different in the Late Palaeozoic and Early Mesozoic. Similarly, the now submerged floe area of Atlantis can be assumed to have existed in the late Tertiary and Quaternary periods, north of forty degrees north latitude. The only remaining fragments of this continent are Greenland, Spitzbergen and Franz-Josefs-Land. Iceland also rests on a Miocene basalt floe of the old Arctic-Atlantic continent, which connects Greenland with Europe at a depth of four hundred to five hundred metres. Part of the large continent was also formed by the mighty North Atlantic Threshold, which extends from Greenland, Iceland, southwards over the Reykjana Ridge, the Faroe Islands, Rockall Island and

The telegraph plateau extends over the entire area and could only have sunk in the course of the Diluvian.

The Doggerland was also an area that sank in a more recent geological period. The subsidence of this area around the middle of the last millennium before the turn of the millennium is a historical catastrophe that still directly affects us!"

The chief of staff paused for a moment. Then he continued urgently: "This Doggerland was the main part of the old Forsete country, also called Polsete country. And this land was a heartland of the old Tuatha Empire, the oldest empire of the Germans! It was the homeland of the Ingvaeonian peoples, whose ships with swan-necked prows or swan spirals are still recorded in the images of the men of the foreign boat type in ancient Egypt and ancient Iran. These are the Pulsata people who, in biblical history, fought their battles as Philistines with the advancing tribes of Judah. The Tuatha were the bearers of the Neolithic culture of large stone graves and their name means the Germans! German means 'tuath' in Old Irish, 'thiude' in Old Frisian and 'tiutisch' in Middle High German. The past shows that the term 'German' extends linguistically and historically from the Baltic region to Scotland, Ireland and southwards to the pre-Roman Italics. This includes the later Stone Age or the period from six thousand to two thousand five hundred years before the turn of time. The sites located in this area

The large stone tombs, the megalithic tombs, dolmens and barrows in northern Germany, Scandinavia, Scotland, Ireland, Holland and north-west France are still existing witnesses of the unified cultural area, the North Sea culture. It encompassed the whole of Atlantic Europe in a cultic, religious and ideological commonality.

After the fall of Doggerland, the remaining Tuatha peoples were defeated by the Celts in fierce battles in the last millennium before the turn of time and the great traditions of the Tuathha empire were largely destroyed. The Ban Tuath, the folk mothers or the wise women of prehistoric times, the bearers and guardians of Uro-Nordic ethics and folklore, were replaced by the druid shamans, of whom the writers of antiquity reported that they worshipped a bloodthirsty superstition. Nevertheless, high ideological values from the megalithic tomb period of the Tuatha have been preserved, above all the concepts of their wise godly behaviour.

A common feature of their godly life was the belief in a god-father, the 'Great Spirit'; the world spirit beyond time and space. The great world law, the world order revealed itself to them in time and space through cosmic circulation. This was the 'Son' of God! Thus God the Father acted and revealed himself through the 'Son', the epitome of the cosmic world order, the eternal return, the year as cosmic law. This is the great, the world

The ancient Indian scriptures refer to this law as the order of Varuna, the will of the highest heavenly god. It can therefore come as no surprise when the old Irish sagas report that Patrick and his companions, who proclaimed the love doctrine of a 'white Christian', were not only greeted enthusiastically by the Irish as saviours of the blood rites of the Druid shamans, but also as returning hill people! It was not the oriental Christian with the strange guttural sound of the two initial letters who had come to them, but the old Nordic Krist, the god-son of the world spirit from the legendary Avallon.

This son of God in primal belief, whose runes appear in the prehistoric Scandinavian rock paintings and in those of North America, is none other than Thor. The Thor of the later Edda, the son of All-Father and the Earth; the hammer and year god of the Scandinavian peasant staff calendars. He appears in the prehistoric rock paintings in three symbolic arm positions of his annual cycle. Resurrecting at the winter solstice, reborn, as a figure with uplifting arms. The man-rune of the staff carving! This is also the great sign of salvation of the North Atlantic world mission.

At the beginning of the waning half of the year after the summer solstice, the Son of God descends and becomes a human being who must suffer and die in order to then enter the womb of Mother Earth in the winter night of his annual cycle so that he may be reborn.

The Tyr rune symbolises the figure with the sinking antennae!

Entering the Mother's Night - having arrived at the July or Consecration Night of the year - the Son of God reappears in the form of a cross at the winter solstice. As the primordial, reborn one, he begins his annual cycle. It is the old Nordic cultic cross, the spokes of the world wheel pointing in all directions in the form of the bond and the eternal sign. The bond itself, the primal religion expressed as realisation.

The worldwide spread of this calendar cult symbolism of the primal beliefs of the Nordic-Atlantic people was proven by the temporal and spatial coincidence of the same signs. To paraphrase the Italian philosopher Evola: The Uro-Nordic tradition is not a myth, it is the truth of the ancients. Even in the oldest prehistory, where positivist superstition until yesterday suspected the ape-like cave dweller, *t h e r e w a s a* unified and powerful primeval culture, an echo of which can still be heard in everything that the past has to offer us as an eternal symbol.

Examples of this extent are the petroglyphs in Owens Valley, California, of Umari Cachoeire on the Rio Caiarý - Vaupes in Brazil, in the Chicama Valley of Peru, various in Spain, such as those in Bacinete or the Cueva de las figuras, in Brastad, Sweden, the stone

Ingelstrup in Denmark, Retlo in the Caucasus and the previously mentioned archaic Chinese and Nubian and North African finds. It is to the great credit of the German-Dutch scholar Herman Wirth and the German Wegener that their research has enabled a clear look back into the past of human history. Laurence Snyder's blood seriological studies confirm the developmental picture of prehistoric times. The linguistic and written historical findings of the Frenchman Terrien de Lacouperie and the parallel conjectures of Gobineau, the archaeological results of Hubert Schmidt in China and the work of Röck on the ancient cultural relations of the Toltecs with the Old World in the *Mitteilungen der Wiener Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, all round off and confirm the great work of the first two scholars mentioned, which Julius Evola also approves of in his historical-philosophical structure.

To stay with Herman Wirth: The further back the layers of the cultural religions of antiquity lie, be it the ancient Sumerian, ancient Persian, ancient Indian, ancient Egyptian and ancient Germanic traditions, the more a fusion of the deity figures becomes apparent as specialisations of an originally uniform, cosmic concept of God, in order to finally dissolve completely into it.

The revelation of God through his Son in the cosmic and worldly year is at the same time the law of the

eternal change and eternal return. The moral world order is based on coming into being, passing away and being born again. The Son of God bears the light of heaven without being the sun himself. It is only his substantial manifestation as light and warmth, as a life-awakening principle.

The ancient Iranians also knew the god-sole with the light from the airyanem vaêjô, which lay in the far north and was not only the origin of their race, but also the seat of splendour. That mystical power which characterises the Aryan races and above all their divine kings. It was the place where the warlike religion of Zarathustra first manifested itself. The Island of Splendour, where Narayâna, who is the Light, has his seat in the North. The Son of God who stands above the waters, above the chance of events. They also tell of a Nordic primeval race, the Uttarakara. On the basis of the Stone Age written and cult symbol monuments of the Atlantic West, it is clear that the course of cultural development went from the north and west to the east. Only the lack of knowledge about the oldest documents, the Atlantean linear writing and symbols, was the cause of a previously contrary assumption. The light came into the world not from the East, but from the North!

The solar Apollo was adopted by the Greeks from a hyperborean tradition that led back to the oldest root of the Son of God. With the in

Apollo, who had become a native of Hellas, also remained a constant reminder of distant Thule, the mysterious northern land of the immortals, the island of heroes; the island of the sun, where the blond Radamantys reigns. It is the same Thule that the Toltecs knew as the land of origin Tula or Tollan, the ancient sunland and paradise of kings and fallen heroes. The Aztecs also preserved the memory of an ancient homeland in the north; Aztlan, the white earth, the land of light.

These are just a few of the common references that can be found in the most diverse traditions as a reminder of a Nordic primeval culture and origin, in which a transcendent, extra-human spirituality was most closely linked with a heroic, aristocratic and triumphant element. To a victorious form over the chaotic; to victorious superhumanity in Nietzsche's sense, over everything that is human and telluric.

It is remarkable that the pantheistic primal religion of the Urnordic tradition with the Tuatha son of God was not a sun-god religion, but a god-sun religion. That is an essential difference!

It was based on a logical realisation of nature in its entirety and was far removed from the sun god religions in the southern latitudes of antiquity. These only emerged as the end result of a more southerly settlement of Atlantic master peoples and their mixture with darker, lower-lying primitive races, such as in Egypt and Central America. The correctness

These findings are also confirmed by the palette found at Hierankopolis, which depicts the ruler of the kingdoms of Lower and Upper Egypt, Narmer, with purely Nordic racial characteristics, in contrast to the indigenous peoples he defeated. His heraldic animal was the bull, the ancient common symbol of the Atlantean-Nordic race.

Accordingly, the cult of Mithras is also nothing other than a renewal of an ancient form of knowledge of God that had long since been obscured at the time of its creation. Eastern mysticism had already overgrown the old Aryan mysticism by this time. Nevertheless, Mithras with the bull, the ancient symbol of the Tuatha and the ruler of the cosmic year - the Age of Taurus - is a hidden legacy of the oldest human history from its past heyday!"

An ever louder murmur went through the hall. A few exclamations were heard. The speaker commanded silence. "That's not all. The symbolism of Christianity is, after what has been said before, in its core - the death on the cross and the rebirth - nothing more than a profane, humanised repetition of a high culture religion close to nature! Surrounded by the Messiah legend and dressed up with oriental mysticism, the idea of redemption appropriated the subconsciously dormant longing of mankind for the bright heights of prehistoric times. Christ and Quetzalcoatl, both the same symbols of hope and originating from the same root, but in part an abused heritage.

It is remarkable that the conqueror of winter, of rigid death, the reborn and resurrected one, the re-awakener of light and life was depicted in the old symbolism as a horned man. This is the sign of the new divine life force. This also gives rise to the oldest form of Lucifer, the bringer of light, who as such, or as a devil, became the frightening figurehead of a very purposefully constructed show. The horned Son of God, the ancient revelation of God, had to fall because he stood in opposition to the new dogma of an oriental-mystical hierarchy. In his place, the pale fish-headed man was exalted.

Mithras, the Lord of the Sun, in his primordial beginning is nothing other than an attempt to save the Son of God with the bull symbol. He is the bridge that leads back to the sacred beginning. This beginning is eternal, as it is subject to constant renewal beyond time and space. Mithras' bull sacrifice is the conclusion of the Age of Taurus, whose continuation with the end of the cosmic year of Aries gave rise to the Son of God the Lamb. This ended on the worldly cross, the form of a cultic tradition. He ascended to the rebirth in order to end with a timeless promise. The fish symbol is the sign of his reign in the Age of Pisces.

Thus the horned one became Ba-al in the entymological mother house Ba, steadfastly obeying his cosmic destiny, but his worldly re-

waiting for the return. Mithra is the bridge so that Ba-al, the Bal-dr or Baldur of the Tuatha, may rise again with his people!"

A movement went through the assembly again. After a short moment, the learned staff officer continued: "I repeat: with the killing of the winter solstice beast, the bull, the lord of the cosmic year, the age, was defeated; thus the Son of God was able to free himself from the winter solstice house for his resurrection and at the same time begin his annual cycle. After the downfall of the land of Polsete, the people of the fish-headed man later condemned him to hell, the depths, the interior, to his previously declared mother's house. The hands of the world's destiny clock run incessantly. Europe, the old habitat of white people, is facing a spiritual renewal that will determine the Age of Aquarius. If it fails, it will become a peninsula of Asia and the spiritual grave of the Tuatha. It is the great task of the coming age to renew the legacy of the past for a reflective humanity.

With the appearance of the fish-headed man, the
The destruction of the aristocratic principle by the revolt of the slaves, the disinherited, those without origin or tradition, with their resentment against everything that signified power and leadership. The poison of a proselytising fanaticism, with a barbaric Semitic

The wave coming over ancient Rome was at the same time a galvanising substance for all the Asian-Southern factors of decay that had already penetrated the fabric of the pagan empire and the germ of the Western visitation, as Evola also sensed. The collapse of Rome, the last solar bulwark of a bygone age, opened the way to all the aberrations and degenerations that followed, right up to the state of Europe today. This could happen all the more easily because at that time, which was already bound to the fate of the darkening of the divine - ragna rökk - the tribes of the Nordic racial element, scattered in their powers and leaders, allowed themselves to be partially detached from the old spiritual elements.

Evola continues: "In the Hebraisation of the Greek-Roman and then the Nordic world, which is largely due to Christianity, we have in fact the revolt of the lower classes of those races through whose domination the Aryan-Nordic peoples had achieved their glorious cultures. The oriental spirit, which already determined the collective feeling of guilt and atonement, but which emerged above all after the defeat and servitude of the chosen people and buried the remnants of the aristocratic spirit with prophethood, calls up the same inferior forces of Aegean-Pelasgian tellurism to which the Achaean tribes had been subjected; those of the çûdra caste, the so-called dark

In India, the hierarchies of the three higher castes of the reborn - dwija - rose as a form above the chaos, the mingled, up to the type of the brahmâna and the king conceived as the "great god in human form"; finally, the forces of what myth tells us in the form of the Nordic Rinthursi or the hordes of Gog and Magog, whose path was blocked by Alexander the Great with a symbolic iron wall.

The Age of Pisces is the age of rebellion against tradition. However, it is not only an unwavering rebellion against the discipline and order of the slaves and the uncreative, it is above all the irrationalism of this epoch that awakens the chaos.

Eastern man shows the smile of the Sphinx. He knows that the coming millennia belong to him in the rhythm of world events, when the Occident comes together. Western man as a whole senses the decisions. He faces what is to come with a feeling of uncertainty. This is the hour of the descendants of the Tuatha, the Atlantean-Nordic people, who must walk the path with the man- rune of rebirth, as the ancestors did before.

The misery and decline of the Tuatha-Germans had to become so immense that they had to find their way back to themselves through purification and deepest renunciation in order to lead the way for mankind.

can. The death symbolism of the protective squadrons, entering into the cosmic winter solstice, is replaced by the rune of the arm-lifting Son of God and the return to the great light. And just as before the path of the Arctic-Atlantic migration of peoples led past North America to the Old World, so this time the spiritual path of the Tuatha must return to the New World in order to close the circle again. May the people who have migrated to the North American continent for centuries recognise, together with the original race, where they all came from, who they are and where their destiny is to lead them.

Men of the base - The Manis-Isolas, the shining discs, will be the messengers of the Great Mother who guards the Son of God. They will admonish people to reflect and realise. At the same time, it is the dawn of Germanism, which has reached the low point of the national cycle with the end of the Fijian Age and is making a new turn from the southern tendency of its forms to the northern tendency.

The cosmic winter solstice is also the solstice of the Tuatha Germans, who with their rebirth will carry the old sign of salvation and the light of the north into the distance. Over the Midnight Mountain, where the year has only one day and one night, the bridge leads to the Great Year, to the Primordial Light. There is the great gate into the eternity of being and the path of the sun, the Brâhman path. It is the devayâna, the

Sun Gate, which is also mentioned in the Matrayâna Upanishad. From there God the Father bestows the power of vocation - The sign of our base will be replaced at the right time by the colour symbol of the turning point, the sun in silver-white. Some forms will have to change.

Point 103 is in the highest state of readiness for the coming departure and will know how to fulfil its task under a new sign. The dark forces that are aiming for and want to reach the Midnight Mountain will experience the old Luther substitute: ... they have no profit, the kingdom must remain with us!"

The deepest silence followed the words. It was as if the silence of the vast Arctic had been transferred to the meeting. No shuffling, no clearing of the throat was audible.

The news of the surrender of the German Wehrmacht may have come as a shock a few days ago, but it was not entirely unexpected. On the other hand, the Chief of Staff's speech, delivered in a terse military style, was a revolutionary opening that made current world events seem like a passing second on the world clock. It shrank to a bitter but brief phase in the world view of human history, which allowed the descendants of the Tuatha to walk the path of humiliation in order to recognise their great destiny. Thus, out of the depths of dejection, the seedling of hope sprouted in the hearts of those whose thoughts were in the distant homeland ...

Never before had the men realised the importance of their base as much as they did with the simultaneous knowledge of a greater responsibility that arose from the perspectives of the boldest, most far-reaching historical research. The light of a mission rose radiantly above the mists of the past.

The chief of staff tightened up. As if this were a sign, all the men stood up at the same time, obeying an impulse, and took up their positions.

"Men, do your duty - the service goes on!" shouted the staff officer. He put his hand on his cap, climbed down the dais and walked with quick, echoing steps to the exit. The eyes of those gathered followed him until he had left the hall. Only now did the tension ease.

While most of the men remained in their seats to exchange views, the adjutant pushed his way through the eager speakers and took the Americans out of the crowd to lead them out. Only after them did the men slowly follow to return to their quarters or to their duty stations.

Gutmann had grabbed Reimer by the arm and was pulling him along. The man from Linz was silent, his forehead wrinkled in deep thought as he followed his comrade. The murmur of men's voices surrounded the two of them as they made their way to their room through the crowd.

Once there, both men made themselves comfortable.

As if he felt Gutmann's gaze resting on him, he broke his silence. Very slowly, still caught up in his thoughts, he said: "So far, my knowledge of things past has got me no further than Diodorus' report and Plato's Critias book. This recorded the memory of the legendary Atlantis. What the Ia built up today, looking back, was the pulling away of a great veil. The changing of the continental forms is not ultimately decisive for the fate of the earth. The main thing is always man. Everything creatively constructive, everything reprehensibly destructive results from whether man recognises his calling or passes by his destiny. It is not the devil characterised by dogma, but the animal man who is the bearer of evil in eternal conflict with the God-man of good. This is the battle that ethical man has to fight incessantly with the animal-man-devil, the bastard without animal instinct and without human reason. Even if a continent and parts of the original homeland have sunk or been buried under a thick layer of ice, the Nordic mission has remained. It is always the root that gives the tree the strength to return to green again and again. So we too must return to the origin before every beginning."

Gutmann just nodded: "I had known about the deep connections for some time. In the course of time, this Nordic tradition moved from the visible to the invisible; it became a legacy that was reflected in a

secret chain from a few to a few. It was always only the lonely, the strong, who were able to overlook these connections in whole or in part. Even the ethical aspect of tradition requires a superhuman measure compared to the materialistic average of a Macchiavellian epoch. Few people rise like shining comets out of the darkness of time and preach the return to high values or the superman - one of these few was Nietzsche, who collapsed under the force of his own realisation after he was able to ignite the illuminating flash."

"But you could have spoken to me about it earlier," Reimer reprimanded.

"It's easy to be mistaken for a fantasist at the wrong time. That's why I usually keep quiet. Just like other people who have long guarded a part of this great knowledge. There are also Cagots, - Cathar Goths, - who found the previously explained traces and images in the Pyrenees and guard many other secrets."

After pondering for a moment, the man from Linz asked the question:

"Why was the Mithras community created?"

"Mithra was the other force that wanted to force, as it were, a decisive choice for the further course of Western intellectual history when the world of antiquity was on the verge of collapse. It was a martial cult of the Aryan-Iranian tradition, the ruler of the sun, the hero with the old Norse symbols of the torch and the axe. The

Mithra is the symbol of the reborn through power, which a syncretic, but therefore no less meaningful, myth analogises to the Hyperborean god of the Golden Age. Mithra was subject to the Eastern mysticism of the Piscean period. Nevertheless, he was preserved in small communities. Even if it is outdated, it is half the way to the goal, which is to be achieved through military virtues, a cult of soldiers. Only for reasons of expediency is it still regarded as a bridge - as the la already said - into the now open gateway to the ancient truth. This community has tasks to fulfil. Above all, the hoarding of military potency."

"And why the encrypted route?"

"Everything in space has three dimensions, every concept is bound to a dualism. Good can only become the opponent of evil if it takes up the fight on all levels. The nature of the struggle and all its varieties are essential."

Reimer said nothing in reply. He slowly took off his pilot's blouse, took a penknife from his trouser pocket and slowly began to cut off the embroidered silver emblem of the defeated empire. Gutmann did the same. "The collar patches too?" asked the man from Linz.

Gutmann slowly looked up from the separation work he had begun. "The mirrors? - No, they stay!"

"That's strange," criticised Reimer. "It won't save us from being labelled as pirates if we're caught up in some kind of incident."

If the mission falls into the hands of a regular executive" Gutmann smiled. "If, my dear fellow, if ... !"

The service on Point 103 continued in full discipline. A number of aircraft of the most recently built models had been hijacked from the Reich territory, and a naval group had also arranged for two snorkelling submarines to be diverted. This created a lot of work for the base personnel, as a separate base had to be created for the boats far to the south. In view of the ice conditions, a location on the west coast of Greenland had to be chosen. Although this second base was only intended to be temporary, the work was carried out with great care. The necessary material was largely supplied by American friends. The connection was maintained by flying gyroscopes, which had no difficulties with the terrain because they could land vertically.

At this time, Reimer was assigned to gyroplane training. The ingenuity of this strange construction captivated his aviator's heart and he put his heart and soul into it. Within a short time, he had reached the point where he was ordered to join Gutmann on liaison flights to the submarine base. The men he got to know there were old naval officers, rich in experience and all of them were selected. He learnt from them that a number of boats had also broken out southwards at the time of the surrender, but that nothing was known about their whereabouts or destination. The men expressed the

They surmised that one of the boats had been carrying some personalities from the empire, but they did not know the details.

Gutmann had furrowed his brow in concern.

"Antarctica was named among the presumed destinations. That would be a misdirection! ..."

"The high seat of the apocalypse?" the Linzer tried to joke.

"In the esoteric sense - of course!" Gutmann was calm and matter-of-fact. "For the rest, however, the Apocalypse is the symbolic description of the development of mankind in the Age of Pisces. Only the ascending Age of Aquarius, at the same time the great solstice of Tuatha, will replace the time of the Lamb in the sign of Pisces. This means that we too have been assigned the task that our Ia spoke about in the assembly."

"Do we alone have the knowledge?"

"No," Gutmann replied briskly. "Even Rome and the Bible experts have the knowledge. They also know about the fulfilment of time in terms of the revelation of the New Testament. It says in the thirteenth chapter: 'Let him who has wisdom consider the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six ...'"

"That's cabbalism!" Reimer thought for a few seconds. "When we were brought to this base back then, did you also mention the cipher 666 as that of the dark forces in the realm?"

"Yes," Gutmann replied. "In many cases, certain

In some circles, Hitler himself tried to make the subject of this numerical mysticism. However, this did not get to the heart of the matter. On the other hand, the influences of this number were clearly recognisable in the empire. They are the results of cross-connections to the animal that has a number and a name. If one does not read six hundred and sixty-six arithmetically, but correctly sixty plus six plus two hundred plus four hundred kabbalistically, then according to a secret correspondence, which differs somewhat from the usual translations, the letter sequence s r d t and by inserting the corresponding vowels the name Soradt results. This, however, is nothing other than the hidden name of the sun-demon, which becomes effective when the Son of God returns to his mother's house in the south. Decreasing power of the Son of God means increasing power of the demon or vice versa. - 666 was the symbol of betrayal!"

"You know all about the numbers game!"

"You can only understand the thoughts and actions of others if you also know their language. Because one idiosyncrasy is conditional on the other! And when you read the Bible, you have to consider the magic of the Ark of the Covenant in order to understand the ciphers. Nietzsche confirmed these connections to a certain extent in his Twilight of the Idols! ..."

An excellent intelligence service connected the base with the wider world. Slowly the

Messages by, which about the The reports were about the persecutions that the commander had predicted at the Great Assembly. Particularly shocking were the reports that the Americans had large troops of the surrendering Wehrmacht and the Vlasov units and their commander that had been sent westwards were handed over to the Soviets. They also handed over generals and requested Waffen-SS units. The renewed collusion between the Shriners and Japhetites became increasingly recognisable. A small number of men had arrived later. Some from the prison camps in the United States, where they had been released by the friendly American group and flown north. It also became known that a military base had been established on the coast of East Greenland, but it was of no significance and was not identical to the base prepared earlier. According to reports, there were about eighty to one hundred Wehrmacht men there. Connection did not exist.

When Reimer spoke to Gutmann about these people, Gutmann explained to him that the presence of these soldiers was undoubtedly known to the Allies and that it would be in the interest of these men to return home quickly. It could not be foreseen how they would react to a transfer to Point 103.

Gutmann was wrong to assume that he would soon be returning home. He could no more rely on

The fact that these eighty men were only discovered and brought home in 1950 gives us an idea of the location of the base. Nevertheless, Reimer undertook two search flights with the commander's authorisation, but was unable to discover the base. Snow camouflage or fog made the search a failure.

In June, flying became more difficult and visibility was extremely limited. It was the time when the temperatures in the polar region rose and thick fog shrouded everything. It was precisely at this unpleasant time that Gutmann and Reimer were assigned a technician for training at the flight gyro.

The man was very intelligent and knew a lot. To the astonishment of his teachers, he grasped all the details in no time at all. In response to Gutmann's astonished question, he told the two instructing officers that he had already been involved in the creation of discs in the Reich, which were once used as bomber unit explosives. However, he knew nothing about the fact that designers in Breslau and Prague had also worked on flying discs.

He said that the explosive discs, Qualle and later Korkus, had been launched from Rechlin in the late summer of 1944 and deployed over Schweinfurt against a strong enemy bomber group. The explosive discs were fitted with sound detonators, had a diameter of around three to four metres and were attached to their guide planes by means of a winch with a cable length of 1,500 metres, which then carried the

weapons were raised. Behind the enemy formation, the discs were triggered and then set off with heavy smoke. The German squadron flew its attacks with the discs three times, shooting down a total of one hundred and forty-five bombers in the Schweinfurt area. Only when American escort fighters appeared later did the Germans descend steeply and fly off northwards.

However, the technician noted bitterly, the squadron leader had not received any praise for this tremendous success, but had been threatened with a court martial for unauthorised use of a new weapon. And strangely enough, Qualle and Korkus were never used again later, even though they had proved themselves so brilliantly.

Some of the material and plans had now fallen into the hands of the Russians. The same applies to the personnel in Rechlin.

"Is such a thing possible?" The Linzer shook his head at the report, while Gutmann preferred silence.

"Unfortunately," the technician confirmed again. "You just have to imagine it - one hundred and five and forty bombers in a short space of time!"

"And some of the things are now in other people's hands," rumbled Reimer. "Bloody mess! ..."

"There was a system here that was stronger than..." The technician didn't finish the sentence.

Reimer looked at the man. "This system is part of the plan of the great Anonymous. It also broke our

Lieutenant in Vernäs when he desperately put a bullet through his head."

"Hm," said the man from Rechlin. "Such cases were not uncommon ..."

Time passed and the month of June came round. The sky over the Arctic Ocean was constantly cloudy and shrouded the whole scene in a bleak grey monotony. The ice surfaces showed dirty grey wakes and the air saturated with water vapour fogged up the windows of the aircraft. No amount of swearing by the pilots helped. The sky only cleared up over the mainland zones, but the ground was very wet. For the beginning of July, instructions were issued to pilots to exercise increased caution, as shipping in the northern zones increased from then until November. In contrast to the initial period of his stay on Point 103, Reimer could not complain of boredom at Gutmann. After months of working in flight operations, he finally got to familiarise himself with the workshop operations under Gutmann's guidance. It was only now that he really realised why so many technicians and specialists were brought here as workers. In these underground halls, work was carried out incessantly in shifts. Transport machines were constantly flying in raw materials, tools and processing materials. The men at the base called their workshops, in

They processed various materials and formed a small independent armoury, jokingly referred to as the Vulcanos' forge. A large, excellently equipped laboratory was used for analyses and experiments. All kinds of metals and alloys were piled up in the storerooms. There was unalloyed titanium, which was more impenetrable than armour plates unless crushed metals were used for certain purposes, molybdenum to increase the strength and corrosion resistance of the steel, columbium for similar purposes, which was also able to improve the weldability of the steel, vanadium with its high wear resistance, germanium for high-frequency technology, hafnium, zirconium, tantalum and others. Furthermore, semi-metals such as gallium, which was used for special military purposes, thallium, which in a certain compound was infrared-sensitive and already used for night scopes, boron, caesium, tellurium, corium, indium and others.

For Reimer, the entire technical field of these sectors was uncharted territory. It impressed and fascinated him. Gutmann, who was also ahead of and superior to him in terms of knowledge, had a lot of patience for explanations. One evening, he surprised him by asking him to come to the Ia.

At first, Reimer had looked at his companion in disbelief. "Well, what's going on?"

"There will be some questions to answer," said

Above all, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and make requests yourself. I think there will also be a deployment order for us afterwards!"

When Linz entered the command room with Gutmann half an hour later, he was met by the adjutant, who directed him to Ia, who was sitting behind the centre of the large map table and gave him a friendly nod. He cut Reimer's military report short and also waved to Gutmann. At the staff officer's side sat three other officers who were already well known to Linz.

"Captain Reimer," said the Ia, "I have sent for you together with Major Gutmann to give you an honourable commission following the meeting of our small commission! For the time being, my only duty is to clarify your final position on base 103."

The Linzer involuntarily raised his eyebrows, implying a silent question.

The staff officer beckoned Gutmann to take a seat on a chair. Then he continued, leaving Reimer standing: "It is customary at our base to convene a commission from time to time when it comes to enlisting soldiers and other members of our community and testing their suitability. Suitability is generally given when the examinee has gained the realisation that he is serving a good and necessary cause. However, this cause must be

know too!"

This time Reimer didn't flinch when the Ia looked at him enquiringly.

"I'll continue: we've given you time to check out the things that may have seemed strange to you at first and have given you an insight into all the surprises that the base harbours. Comrade Gutmann has vouched for your character and that is enough for us. We ourselves have also come to the conclusion that we have before us not only a good airman and comrade, but also a soldier who takes in necessary things with open eyes and readiness. You attended our last meeting, in which, on behalf of the commander, I pointed out to our men the past and the related high goals for the resurrection of the Nordic peoples. Of course, I had to do this in the thorough manner of a scientist, although I am first and foremost a soldier like you. But it was undoubtedly enough to make the basic point. The men at the base understood me. Surely you too, Captain Reimer?"

"Yes!"

"As I was convinced during a discussion with my comrade Gutmann, he only recently explained the general meaning of Mithras to you. However, he neglected to explain the esoteric meaning to you. If you're interested - I'm ready to make up for it!"

"I'm asking for it!"

The staff officer smiled. "You can never know enough! Listen: the esoteric significance of Mithras to our military potency is based on the aspect of the Lord of the Sun, the initiation as a metal deity. This already emerges from the consonants M - T; accordingly, the Mithra mysteries today represent the path of initiation through metal moulding. They lift metal processing and metalworking out of exoteric civilisation, out of the world economy, out of commercialisation and elevate it to a culture of high esoteric significance. The work in the metals, the production of weapons and war equipment, corresponding to the warlike-heroic Mithras aspect, becomes an end in itself in the literal sense at point 103; for the purpose of gaining the self, of complete individuation and realisation. In detail, this means a gradual readjustment to the working and processing of metals, a mysterious work ethic that is, of course, completely different from the usual manufacturing mindset. Despite the most modern equipment, something of the craftsman's attitude is recovered here - one could even say something of the devotion of an alchemist. It is precisely through the highest possible degree of perfection of the working aids that it is possible to concentrate on the essentials of the work. This gives rise to possibilities of form and design that an industry can never imagine.

This process results in an absolute superiority of the workpieces, which are neither products nor should they be.

The work in the Met-All metal mysteries - i.e. the entirety of the metal world - understandably also includes the rarest occurrences of metals. Difficulties in creating rare species are relatively easy to overcome, as commercial considerations and profitability concerns no longer apply.

Furthermore, the metals, understood in a certain sense as *materia prima*, are naturally subject to the projection of archetypes in the course of the gradual initiation and in correspondence with the individuation process. This explains the fact that a high proportion of the products of the base show the typical forms of such archetypes. These include, above all, the mandalas in the form of flying spinning tops. The great interest of the base 103 in all varieties of such devices becomes obvious and clear for this reason.

The works of the metal adepts are favoured for their autonomous character; this autonomy of works can best be expressed in aircraft! As an independent system, these are almost unrelated and free. This is why aeroplanes of archetypal or runic shapes are the most popular works of creative adepts, who achieve true mastery in them. These works are also characterised by the metallic purple that the adepts under the

Projecting the instructions of the hierophants into the metals as a tincture; sometimes even extracting the opposite from the metals - this purple aura clings to all weapons and devices of the Mysteries. It makes them dominant and unconquerable.

If you want to smile, Captain, just wait a moment! - The dedication of our technicians and specialists in their work or in their experiments has already led to considerable successes at our base, which have yielded more than could be surmised. With the devotion of alchemists, nothing is more obvious than to look at alchemy, which is often ridiculed by the ignorant. Men are currently working in our base laboratory who not so long ago were engaged in secret experiments in the Reich on behalf of the Schutzstaffel Reich leadership. However, it was above all Himmler's wish here - to make gold ..."

The Chief of Staff twitched slightly with the corners of his mouth before continuing: "Basically, alchemy and its processes are of a chemical-physiological-psychological nature. They therefore require the personal commitment and personal involvement of the operator, in contrast to chemistry, where the process is only initiated or initiated. Alchemical work requires a high level of morality and a high-quality ethos on the part of the practitioner, since inner-human processes can be influenced in a suitable atmosphere by suitable

The means must be projected into suitable materials. The actual aim of alchemy is to reproduce and imprint these inner-human processes in the material. The operator redeems matter and thus in a certain sense takes the place of the Creator. In the alchemical process of projection, the purpose of existence of humanity is realised and thus humanity itself. Successful projection requires preconditions and has repercussions. Man and substance become one and are elevated together. The alchemist anticipates the state that will later be granted to the whole universe or at least to the earth. Since the alchemical process has to begin long before its material imprint in the human being, the self-refinement of the human being is not only an essential prerequisite, but the precondition for the work in general.

This involves integration, the gradual realisation and thus the overcoming of the collective archetypes, in short, self-actualisation.

There is an extremely large number of archetypes that need to be integrated. This integration can be carried out within a mystery community, but also in complete isolation. Or during the alchemical work itself, which is correspondingly arduous and can often take a lifetime.

If the alchemist sees lapis as an instrumental target, then

he will naturally endeavour to use it for the benefit of his fellow human beings, be it as a medical or technical means.

There is a special alchemical technique, just as there is a chemical technique. With the help of lapis, for example, it is possible to produce a so-called biomotor machina. The prehistoric flying system mentioned in ancient Sanskrit literature is partly based on this. There are a number of varieties of it. Some of them can be released into free space as autonomous creations. Others operate cult devices. Those in free space also serve as soul companions - psychopompos - as initiation devices and the like.

Incidentally, in classical alchemy, the production of a miniature planetarium was popular as a machina to visualise the solar system. All that was needed to make it was to produce a molten flux from the metals corresponding to the planets and project a little red tincture onto it. This molten flux immediately left the crucible and rotated freely on the ceiling of the laboratory for some time, imitating the natural planetarium. With the help of the lapis, it was thus possible to repeat the entire creation in all its unimagined parts at any time. In this way, the creation of the earth could also be modelled and experienced.

I can see from your expression, Captain Reimer, that this is all new territory for you! That's understandable, because in the

In the common sense of the word, we know no more about alchemy than about the laborious art of goldsmithing with incantations in the presence of black cats and phosphorescent-looking owls in a cellar-like chamber. This is, so to speak, the well-known dream book alchemy ...

You have to understand certain things in order to understand the full commitment of a laboratory technician at the base. And I can tell you, Captain Reimer, that our base has an even deeper space system in which special experts are attempting to analyse vril. Vril is a molecular force and, according to old reports, is hidden in the cave Od or in the solar Od. This force is said to be suitable as a driving force for flying machines and was already used in the ancient Indian flight system. In the Ramajana of ancient Indian lore, flying vimanas are already mentioned, although mercury was also cited as part of the propulsive force. In an English translation by Dutt in 1891, the text states that at Rama's command, a marvellous chariot ascended a mountain of clouds with a mighty roar. In another place it is said that Bhima flew with his Vimana machine on a tremendous ray, which had the splendour of the sun and sounded like the thunder of a thunderstorm. In the Mahabharata there are further precise figures and references to a terrible weapon effect. In the eighth book

striking details that are entirely indicative of nuclear weapons. - Our Indian friends, observing all precautions for secrecy, are engaged in reconstructing the old machines using all old sources. According to reports available so far, this work has been successful.

We are also looking at the extraction of heat from the air around us using a benzene-water vapour process developed by the engineer Doczekal, who died in 1944, and which is regarded as a kind of perpetual motion machine. So there's something going on at point 103!

The generation of electricity in all its aggregate states as a massless body - gaseous, liquid and solid - is also at the experimental stage. Only the lack of facilities prevents us from taking the practical route of thermal nuclear fission in order to make nuclear energy directly usable for our purposes. There is more, but that should be enough for now. Point 103 is not an island, but an empire, Captain Reimer!"

The flight officer just nodded. He was extremely impressed by the versatility of the Chief of Staff and realised that he had a superior of special stature before him. Even if he couldn't remember all the details of the explanations, the basics remained in his mind. Thinking back in a flash, he himself found the perfect explanation in

the conclusion of the given letters MT, in a common connection Mi-thra, Me-tall, Mo-tor, as a soldierly connected trinity. All that remained was the question of why the mystical. But Gutmann had already answered this self-question comprehensibly earlier. This was a battle on all levels. The visible and the invisible.

"Is something unclear to you?" the Chief of Staff asked mildly.

"I had to collect myself for a moment," Reimer admitted frankly. "I was also looking for a final explanation, but I found the answer myself!"

"It will certainly be correct," the staff officer smiled all-knowingly. "With the knowledge of the transition to the Nordic-aristocratic principles of ultima Thule, for the resurrection of the comprehensive Tuatha Empire under the sign of the Man rune, the actual meaning of point 103 can also be understood. We do not want to have lansquenets, but soldiers who serve a realisation!"

"The political soldier is always the best soldier," confirmed the man from Linz. "If politics is meant in a higher sense, this contributes to the physical superiority of a weapon bearer!"

"Right!" The Ia nodded favourably, while the other officers murmured approvingly. "Our views coincide. I hope that applies to everything fundamental?"

"Yes!"

"Then, Captain Reimer, I ask you: are you prepared, now finally and forever committed, to fly for our high-altitude targets and to continue as a soldier with all your strength and knowledge?"

The man from Linz looked firmly at the questioner. He answered brightly and clearly: "There is no higher goal than a national rebirth. I am ready to obey the ancient law of national solidarity!"

The officers stood up from their seats. The chief of staff walked round the table and stepped very close to the aviation officer. A bright light sparkled in his eyes as he said: "I pledge you to unconditional obedience, comrade, Captain Reimer!" The Chief of Staff gave Linz's hand a firm squeeze. The others present followed his example. Gutmann was the last to approach his comrade: "You're with us for good now, Reimer! Whatever may lie ahead of us, we will bear it together ..."

"One more official matter!" The Ia spoke dryly and matter-of-factly: "Major Gutmann and Captain Reimer, - be ready to receive precise orders for a flight to south-west Europe tomorrow. You will take off tomorrow evening! We have a mission to fulfil!" He placed both hands on Linz's shoulders with the last words, but added nothing more, then gently pushed him out of the room and beckoned Gutmann to follow his comrade ...

THE GRALSBERG

To Fontane la Salvasche it went,
To a hermitage lost in the rock,
Which Trevrizent chose for his
seat. With him Parzival now
learns secret tidings of the Grail.
To a cave the landlord led him

...

Wolfram v. Eschenbach

The engines of a Dosthra type E long-haul aeroplane roared to life and the aircraft taxied over the damp runway with increasing speed. As soon as it had left the ground, it pulled steeply upwards thanks to its excellent climbing ability. The figures of the ground crew left behind quickly melted into small dots. The ring mountains of the base looked like a fading magic circle before the whole thing disappeared completely from the view of the aircraft crew.

Major Küpper sat motionless at the controls in the cockpit. The monotonous grey of the polar expanse stretched out before him. To the south, the horizon showed a small brightening.

Gutmann and Reimer were Küpper's pulpit companions. All three were silent and lost in thought. Küpper scrutinised the landscape attentively, now and again

looking at the dashboard again. He had not yet looked at the maps. Sub-commanders Lechner, Bernemann, Kreß and the Norwegian Torkildsen were lying in the two hull-shaped fighting positions. These men were also silently looking around them, guarding against surprises.

Küpper now flew the same route to Greenland as Juncker and Recke had flown to Prague on their mission not so long ago. Only at this time, the initial visibility had not been as hazy as the months of June and July in the polar zone required. The fog banks over the thawing and sometimes tearing ice surfaces of the fore-zones of the pack ice area blurred the boundaries between land, ice and sea. Constantly maintaining a south-easterly direction, the closed banks gradually receded and an open drift ice landscape increasingly came to the fore.

The Dosthra crew had only learnt just before take-off that their first destination was the Pyrenees. But only the three officers knew about the purpose of a special mission. Gutmann's task was to locate a certain Belisse within a certain area in the eastern Pyrenees. This man was hiding somewhere in the Ariège valley or its surroundings due to the political confusion. As the chief of staff had emphasised before departure, Belisse was an important figure in the Cathar tradition. Once he had been found, he was to be ordered to come along to Point 103. Reimer was to help Gutmann fulfil

support this mission.

A farmer near Ax les Thermes in the department of Foix, at the foot of the eastern Pyrenees, could also provide them with valuable help.

This single hint of possible help made the task much more difficult. This farmer had to be approached and questioned with extreme caution so as not to jeopardise the whole undertaking. Another danger was the strict control of the border areas on both sides of the mountain ranges. France in particular was hot ground, as individual scattered German soldiers or groups as well as Frenchmen pursued by the Resistance were still trying to evade capture and flee to Spain. It was therefore clear to the officers in charge that the slightest carelessness would not only lead to the failure of the task, but also put their own lives in danger.

Küpper flew the aircraft between Craig-Harhour on Ellesmereland and Dundas-Harbour on Devon Island and headed for Greenland over the Baffin Sea, which was covered in drift ice. The deliberately high flight altitude prevented any animal or even human life from being taken out. On the other hand, the sky over the sea cleared up, softening the oppressive polar latitudes.

The engines sang their steady song. Wisps of vapour flashed past as the machine passed high above. Not a bird, nothing to move the eye

would offer. As the drift ice receded and the sea became more open, majestic icebergs travelling southwards crossed the flight of the giant metal bird.

Reimer was quietly introverted and gripped by an inner restlessness. How different was the flight months ago in the opposite direction, which led to the supposed magnetic pole and harboured completely different expectations. The surprises of an unsuspected event, which resembled waking dreams, had revolutionised everything that had gone before in his life and constantly presented him with new problems. There was a pensive look and at the same time determination on his face as he looked through the windows towards the approaching coast of Greenland.

Küpper did not allow radio communication with the submarine base to the south. There was also no justification for this.

They flew over the huge island, which almost resembled a small continent in its vast expanse. Without realising it, they were flying almost the same route as Juncker had done some time ago. The only difference was that fog was also rolling over Greenland at the time.

With the engines humming low, the Dosthra obeyed the guidance, the minute hands of the clocks rounded to hours and once again there was an expanse of water beneath the machine. The Atlantic. The long-haul aircraft cut through the air at increased speed. The metal sang. At Küpper's command, the men in the floor pan peered into the vast airspace, unperturbed

and the low-lying expanse of water, which shimmered grey and jade green.

Turning sharply south, the men flew over the Westfjords of Iceland at a very high altitude and then took a steady south-southeasterly course, pointing into the Bay of Biscay. The Norwegian Torkildsen was the first to spot a large ship on a south-easterly course and reported it. Küpper pulled the aircraft over it unmoved.

After a while, the Major turned to the Linzer:

"Would you like to take charge of the machine for a short time, Captain Reimer?"

"Of course!"

The men swapped places. Somehow, Reimer felt a sense of satisfaction at being able to pilot the large combat machine on a mission. His long pensiveness vanished and his clear eyes wandered between the dashboard and the waterscape. The responsibility of his task boosted his self-confidence. Not only did he have to demonstrate the navigational skills of a transoceanic flight, he also had to ensure the anonymity of the aircraft with the utmost care. For some time now, the sky had returned to its usual European appearance. As the temperature rose with the changing latitudes, the speed of the technological age suddenly brought us out of eternal winter and into midsummer. The men of the Dosthra enjoyed the warming rays of the sun with great pleasure. With the speed they had developed, the destination was literally growing towards them and already the

The same day would prove whether the landing of the crew and thus the initiation of the mission would be successful. Only a Jules Verne with his ingenious ideas could have previously devised such an eventful flight around almost a quarter of the globe in a day. When the aircraft flew over the latitude of Brittany and had already intersected some of the busiest shipping lanes of the Atlantic, the tension of expectation grew almost unbearably. Now, despite the cessation of all combat operations in Europe, all possible air encounters had to be avoided at all times.

Major Küpper now intervened in the flight guidance to give instructions. With shrewd deliberation, he ordered the aircraft to set a direct course for San Sebastian and to climb higher in order to prevent a licence plate recognition from the ground.

The sky was clear and only a few wispy white clouds were sailing their way in the air current. They could hardly provide any visual cover for the aircraft. The Dosthra climbed even higher. After a short time, the men sighted the dark line of emerging land to the south. Coasts were also emerging in the east.

Küpper picked up the flight chart and realised with satisfaction that they had navigated perfectly. The nose of the Dosthra was heading straight for the designated Spanish harbour. At the limit of the three-mile zone, Reimer turned off on instruction and turned into the corner of the country. Passing sharply by Fuenterrabia, he flew east of the Bidassoa River into the Pyrenees and followed

in the same direction as the national border.

Cloud banks drifted over the mountain ranges or billowed around the higher peaks. The violet veils of the dawning twilight glided over the bright, snow-covered surfaces. The crew's eyes wandered over the border areas of two countries and marvelled at the wildness of the mountain scenery. The aircraft flew over the peaks of the Pic d'Ochy and the Pic de Vignemalo in turn, leaving the high Mont Perdu to the right. Shortly afterwards, the highest peak of the whole chain appeared; the Pic d'Anethou in a Spanish border tongue that abruptly pushed into France. Flying over the Maladetta chain, they passed over Andorra and then immediately turned northwards.

Below the men lay the valley of the Ariège River. They were approaching their destination. Despite the gathering darkness, the magnificent massif of Montségur loomed to the half-right like the symbol of a stone sentinel in the sky of glittering stars. A collection of lights towards the nose of the aircraft indicated the important Provençal town of Foix, surrounded by the flickering dots of the surrounding villages.

Küpper throttled back the engines and flew towards the Montségur at a speed of three metres per second, looking for the area of the historic pyre heap on the map. At the same time as the aircraft descended, the twelve-hundred-metre-high rock with its mostly vertical walls rose up clumsily into the night sky.

dark horizon. A bright spot shone in the east: the Mediterranean.

After locating the presumed landing area, it proved impossible to land in the darkness. Küpper could not risk wrecking the aircraft. No aviator would risk this experiment in the knowledge that they had a responsibility.

Küpper let the aircraft circle and turned to Gutmann and Reimer: "It's all over with a landing. Completely out of the question. - There's only one thing left to do: get ready to get out and jump!"

The two men looked at each other briefly. "Let's go!" said Gutmann.

Both quickly shed their outfits. In addition to their boots and breeches, they now wore a civilian skirt with a sporty style. Over this semi-civilian outfit they put on overalls like those worn by mechanics or motorcyclists. They stowed their pistols and sufficient ammunition in their pockets, ready to hand, as well as Swiss passports.

"Get a move on!" Küpper urged from his seat.

Both officers now picked up the parachute packs and strapped them on, making sure the straps were secure. Lechner crawled out of his bathtub and helped with the final steps. He pulled the prepared rucksacks with provisions, maps and equipment, combined them into a bundle and attached them to a parachute at Köpper's behest.

"Food will be thrown at you!" had the Major

decided briefly. Then in conclusion: "Don't forget the deck address where you can report or where you can send a message. And now let's go - break a leg ..."

"There should be no shortage of us," said Reimer hastily and confidently. Equalising the pull of the circular flight, both officers staggered to the exit. Lechner stood just behind them as they opened the hatch. Gutmann, his hand on the ripcord, waved to Küpper, then jumped in first. Just behind him, Reimer pushed off. Immediately afterwards, the NCO lifted the bundled pack and let it follow the parachutists with the parachute line pulled.

Like three long dashes, three bright call signs with dark, oscillating dots, the parachutes came loose and arrowed through the evening darkness towards the earth, suddenly billowing and, with a short jerk, turning into an oblique hover. The two bodies and the pack descended gently to the ground, dragging only slightly.

The parachutists pulled themselves up, freed themselves from the ballast of the glider, then peered around them and stumbled towards the nearby bale, buckling slightly at first. Looking up on the way, they saw no sign of the aeroplane. Even before the sound of the engine died away, the night had absorbed it into its protective darkness.

Standing in front of the pack, the men orientated themselves. In front of them lay a rising forest, above it a massive mountain outcrop with sharp-edged traces of ruins. The

Montségur - the mountain of the Holy Grail!

"The Montsalvatsch of the minstrels!" Gutmann whispered, deeply impressed.

On both sides of the valleys, the dim lights of farmsteads and small villages shone. On the side facing away from Montségur, a slope of fields and meadows sloped gently down into the valley. Towards the south and on the flanks of the mountain, the dark shapes of an imposing mountain world appeared. Inspired by strange feelings, both men stood on the ground of a strange earth and breathed in the odour deeply. A mild wind carried the scent of the nearby forest to them, the first greeting from Europe after their return from the Arctic. Again their eyes wandered up to the defiant rock.

As if Gutmann had read a silent question in his companion's eyes, he said: "Yes, it's Mont Salvatsch or Munsalväsich, which Wolfram von Eschenbach sang about. The last stronghold of the Cagots - the Cathar Goths."

Both men paused. "It may not be the right moment to say much," Gutmann continued cautiously, "but I feel compelled to explain to you that a historical destiny of little-known tragedy took place here. The last Goths of the Pyrenees died here seven centuries ago. The Goths - the good ones! - The Cathars also called themselves bonhommes - good men!"

"Gutmann!" Reimer exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, we Gutmanns are an old heretic family from

Runkel, the German centre of the Pure Ones. - And let me tell you: these good Goths were the Goths, the people of God! The pure, chosen people of the ancient Aryan tradition. Ezra and Nehemiah found this chosenness, this ethnic purity, confirmed in the ancient traditions during the Babylonian captivity and falsely transferred it into the Old Testament as the basis of a Hebrew development ..."

Reimer grabbed Gutmann's hand: "There's a light in me now!"

Gutmann just nodded. "In 1244, over two hundred people were burned to death here on the Camp des crémats, the pyre. They were descendants of the Goths! This happened on a Palm Sunday because they had refused to recognise Yahweh God, Peter's key power and Rome's dogma. However, before the castle fell, which the Popes seized through the treachery of a shepherd, the Grail was saved by four courageous men who abseiled down the vertical walls of the mountain. From the summit of Bidorta, nearby, a bonfire signalled that the Mani had been saved!"

The man from Linz could not suppress an exclamation of amazement. "The Mani? ..."

"I said it," Gutmann confirmed emphatically. "We'll come back to this in more detail later. Now let's move on!"

Before they passed through a small copse, they orientated themselves

Gutmann looks up at the towering mountain peaks. "There's the Pic du Saint Barthelmy! We have to keep to the side to reach the parallel valley of the Ariège."

In the absence of a path, both men carefully felt their way downwards, as the night was not particularly bright. Their breaths were audibly deep! Like starving people at a rare meal, they drew in the savoury forest air into their lungs, which they had missed for so long through months at the icy end of the world.

As they were about to cross the copse, they suddenly stopped. Something had moved in front of them. Reimer wanted to draw his pistol, but Gutmann stopped him. While they were still listening, a branch cracked audibly nearby. Neither man knew whether it was a man or an animal in front of them.

Branches rustled again. "Hey!" Gutmann said half aloud. Silence.

They both took a few more steps forwards. Just as their steps made a noise, a rustling sound came back in response.

There was undoubtedly a human in front of them. An animal would have fled long ago with just a few movements. He seemed to have reason to hide or he must have bad intentions. Now it was Gutmann who took the pistol out of his pocket and put the safety back on. "Attention, je tire - attention, I'll shoot!" he warned loudly.

"Je tyre aussi - me too!" came back. The speaker could barely stand ten metres in front of them.

"Bloody bloke," Reimer rumbled half aloud, also drawing his weapon.

A soft laugh became audible. Apparently the invisible man had heard the German words, which seemed to amuse him.

"Soldates allemands?"

Gutmann motioned to Reimer to remain silent. "Nous sommes touristes suisses. Swiss tourists! ..."

"Ah!" Branches rustled again and a man stepped into the field of vision of the two airmen. At first, they could only make out a silhouette, barely recognising his face. Keeping a little distance, the stranger asked in accented German: "Tourists? Merde, I don't think so! If you do - then I'm a king of the Ashanti on holiday ..." A slight chuckle followed the words.

"All right, monsieur roi d'Ashanti," Gutmann said dryly, "then we don't need to start a bang. If you are a smuggler, you have nothing to fear from us!"

"Smuggler? - qu'est-ce que cela?"

How should I explain this, Gutmann asked himself, whose knowledge of French was not too perfect. He tried: "Contrebande ... !"

"Je comprends - I understand! Pah," the man said scornfully. "There are no Fraudeurs here. Only refugees and lots of gendarmes or soldiers!" Another mocking laugh in response.

"A cosy neighbourhood," grumbled the man from Linz.

The Frenchman came a few more steps closer. He slowly put foot in front of foot and held his right arm slightly bent with a firearm. He must have had a very keen ear and heard the last words. "I'd bet I'd have German soldiers in front of me if the aeroplane hadn't first ..."

"We heard one humming in the immediate vicinity beforehand," Gutmann tried to assure us hypocritically.

"Close by ..."

"Ce n'est pas bien, what you're trying to tell me," said the stranger in a sterner tone. "I would have hoped ..."

"What," Gutmann asked quickly.

The Frenchman hesitated for a moment. Then he replied half aloud: "... to find comrades!"

Silence again. This time it was Gutmann and Reimer who thought for a moment. The former then said casually: "Is there anything we can do for you?"

"J'ai faim - I'm hungry!" the interviewee replied openheartedly. "I haven't eaten for two days."

"So refugee," Gutmann realised with relief.

"Oui, messieurs!"

Linz took off his rucksack and opened it. He grabbed the contents and pulled out a tin and a piece of bread. "Take it!"

The stranger put the pistol in his coat pocket, then came right up to the airmen. With a curt bow, he said: "I believe that at the moment

Names are not important. But it is a happy hour under the stars that I let you meet. If you can really spare the snack ..."

He accepted the things offered to him. His whole demeanour and manner of speech betrayed an exemplary upbringing, which he could not deny despite his distress. No doubt it must have cost him some effort to tuck the food under his left arm with a casual gesture.

Now the three men scrutinised each other. None of them knew what to say at first. They sniffed at each other like animals in nature, trying to come to terms with feelings where reason failed.

The Frenchman was the first to ask quietly: "Your kindness, Messieurs, is proof enough for me to trust you: I am a refugee from Carcassonne and will endeavour to escape to Spain at a favourable moment. Perhaps you know that Carcassonne is not too far from here, so I know the area reasonably well. So if I can be of any help to you ..."

"Carcassonne?" Gutmann wagged his head and at first seemed not to notice the offer. "Carcassonne," he repeated again. "A city of historical importance!"

"You know the city?" asked the Frenchman.

"Only according to their historical past!" explained Gutmann.

"Ah! Oui, monsieur; the fires of Rome ate before

The town whose lord, the Viscount Raimund Roger Trencavel, went down in history and myth as Parsifal."

"So you know..."

"It's my home!" the stranger said proudly.

"Strange conversations at this moment!" rebuked Reimer.

"You're right," Gutmann admitted. "Let's stay in the present. If you, sir, would like to help us find our way?"

"Where to?"

"Ax les Thermes!"

The interviewee whistled. "Into the village?"

"Nearby!"

"I see." The Frenchman thought for a few seconds. "It's in my direction. If you can trust me, I'll take you there!"

"A stroke of luck!" Gutmann admitted with satisfaction.

"Bien!" The Frenchman nodded. Then he took a few steps towards the bushes that had previously concealed him and came back with a linen knapsack, which he casually threw over his shoulder. "Stay close behind me," he said urgently. "And above all - make little noise!"

After walking in silence for a while, they rounded a bend and reached a long valley. To the south, in the direction of their path, the mighty Pic du Saint Barthelmy lay before them, growing with sharp contours out of the darkness of the woods. The two flight officers followed their guide with the utmost attention,

not only the surroundings, which were lost in the blackness of the night, but also him. Caution was still the order of the day before more was known about the stranger.

They must have been walking for about an hour when the valley floor widened and the dark waters of an elongated little lake became visible to the left of the path, on which the reflecting stars danced like silver dots. The Druid Lake revealed itself in all its mysterious beauty. The shadowy mirror of the Pic du Saint Barthelmy lay like a dark wedge over the waters, merging into a single natural image. When Reimer paused for a moment to savour this nocturnal splendour, Gutmann puffed him on, but explained: "This Pic has been called Tabor by the locals since the time of the Albigensians and has an ancient mythical meaning. One of the many entrances to the subterranean realm of Agartha is said to be located there.

There are still ancient remains of an Iberian Belis or Abelliot temple on the summit. When the sky is clear, it is said that you can enjoy a marvellous have an overview of the Montségur."

Despite the half-loud conversation, the Frenchman's fine ears had heard some of the explanations. If it had been brighter, the two pilots would have been able to read great astonishment in his expression. This astonishment was transferred to his companions when he turned to them and concluded Gutmann's explanations: "The explanation about the

early historical temple is true! There is a centuries-old road leading up to the summit of the Tabor, which was built by the Albigensians. However," he said with a smile, "you have to be free from giddiness to walk it. Tree trunks that have been laid down form passages over crevices and deep fissures. We call this path the Cathar Route. And the valley we're walking through now is called Val de l'incant - the magic valley."

"Merci, monsieur!" thanked the man from Linz.

"It's a pleasure," the Frenchman continued in almost flawless German. "I would hardly have thought that strangers would know about this hidden corner of our country and also know the history." Turning to Gutmann, he asked. "Have you perhaps ever been to Provence?"

"No."

"Remarquable - strange ..."

The men marched along the lake and approached the road windings that led past Mount Thor on the left, when two glaring eyes appeared in the distance in front of them.

"Vite!" the Frenchman groaned and jumped into the darkness to the left.

The Germans followed without hesitation. Not a moment too soon, because the flashing eyes grew larger and larger and at the same time the whirring of an engine increased. Gutmann and Reimer huddled close to the ground in the ditch and remained motionless until the fast-approaching car came to a halt.

whizzed past.

"Uninvited night owls!" Gutmann raged as he struggled to get up. "The peace of the night seems to be over here too."

The Linzer just grumbled. Like a shadowy spectre, the Frenchman, who had previously evaded any possible control with a soldierly fixation, reappeared several metres ahead of them. Without another word and following a simultaneous intuition, they set off one after the other. With the beginning of the road windings that led past the Pic du Saint Barthelmy, increased caution was in order, as these did not allow any visibility at a distance. Marching in single file at a distance of two to three paces, they had an easier chance of jumping off the road in one leap.

The Frenchman had proved his worth in this small previous incident. It may be true that he also had no reason to be questioned by any authority. The two airmen felt increasing sympathy for the man who was leading the way.

Now they had the mighty massif of the Taborberg towering beside them. The widening of the valley with the Druid Lake was over and the abutting mountains on either side of the valley narrowed the sky. Somewhere nearby, an owl hooted. The romance of the magical valley turned into a slight sense of oppression.

The stranger marched at a fast pace. The

Unaccustomed to walking for so long, especially with luggage, the two officers had trouble following and suppressing a curse. Nevertheless, they were careful not to increase the distance between them.

In time, they also got the pic behind them and in its place a forest ridge continued, which brightened up the nocturnal valley a little. "This is the forest of Serralunga," the guide called quietly to the companions following behind.

They marched on along the road for a while, then, at the Frenchman's request, they turned left into the bushes and struggled through an ascending stony forest. Not too too soon, because immediately afterwards another car approached from the north at a rapid pace. The border area of the Pyrenees was also very restless in its more remote parts. To our exasperation, not too not too far far away a mutt behind behind the disappearing wagon. The restlessness of the night also spread to the animals in the neighbouring farmsteads. For a while they travelled through a gently rising, narrow valley, then the men had to climb up a steep slope. After crossing the forest saddle that completed the ascent, they slipped and stumbled downhill again in the darkness on the other side. The airmen, who were unaccustomed to long marches, had a hard time despite the rising morning freshness a sweaty backs and were beginning to feel tired. After a flat valley stretch along the forest, the

The Frenchman went back into the woods and then stopped. "If we were to continue along the bottom of the valley, we would immediately come across the village of Ax les Thermes. It's a health resort, but the controls are very strict at the moment!"

"How much further?" Gutmann enquired.

"About twenty minutes!"

Looking back, they saw villages that betrayed a relatively close settlement of the Sabarthé. Pointing to a large group of houses half right behind them, the guide explained: "That's where Caussou is!" The dark crags of the mountains behind them intensified the contrast between the beads of light and the darkness from which they seemed to glow brightly.

Keeping to the left, they stumbled through the undergrowth of the Bois de la Soulane, sweating and swearing quietly. By their reckoning, they must have wandered between the trees for more than half an hour when they reached the edge of the forest. From two sides, half-left and half-right, lights flashed close by. The Frenchman explained again: "The small villages of Ignaux and Sorgeat. Behind them, the larger gathering of lights, that's Ax les Thermes!"

"Well - ?" Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. The stranger had noticed the hesitation and the exchange of glances. He smiled again: "I'll take a few steps to the side so that you can speak undisturbed ... Or if you no longer need me ...?"

Gutmann approached the Frenchman and grabbed him

by the arm. "Don't be displeased if we do something

seem closed. I think we both have nothing to reproach ourselves for in this respect, because the grotesqueness of our encounter is probably explanation enough. Nevertheless, we have you to thank for the fact that we were able to reach our first destination so quickly and relatively easily. We will probably also have to cross over to Spain quickly, perhaps it would even be good if we stayed together even longer!"

The stranger nodded. "That would be very good indeed! Three men - that's a good number! - But now - where to? ..."

"We're looking for a farmer near Ax les Thermes who knows a Belisse!"

"Mon dieu! - You two are living enigmas - I don't know the man, but I know the name Belisse!"

"Ah!" Now it was the Germans' turn to be amazed.

Now it was the Frenchman who approached the officers: "From the few sentences I heard from you, I realised that you seem to know as much about this country and its history as the old-timers. I have already expressed my astonishment to you in the Val de l'incant. Do you have any connections with the circle to which Belisse belongs?" The questioner's eyes were wide and enquiring.

"I don't know exactly which circle you're aiming at. There are several possibilities. The most likely: that would be the circle of the Cathar tradition. If this Belisse is close to this tradition, then

He certainly has my personal sympathy!"

"Magnifique! - The great mystery is unravelling!" He turned his attention to the locations for a few seconds, then continued:

"I think we'll find time to talk more about these things. I will take it upon myself to track down this Belisse. If I'm not mistaken, I've already heard that he lives in a small house to the side of Sorgeat, near the village of Ascou. Let's set off to the left and then I'll go ahead a little later and ask for Belisse. Let's go right away - avant!"

They scurried cautiously along the edge of the forest until, after a while, the guide stopped. Surveying the surroundings, the stranger said:

"Stay here, camarades! If I'm not back in two hours or if there's any shooting, then get out into the forest immediately. Then I'm out of luck. Au revoir!"

"Stop!" Gutmann shouted louder than was necessary. "We can't expose them to unnecessary danger! If we have to, then at least all three of us will go."

The Frenchman turned back: "I know the Germans are good mates! I've already experienced that several times. But it's better and easier if I go alone. Three men are always suspicious in this neighbourhood now. Everything will be fine ..." He nodded briefly, then pushed back the branches of a bush and stepped into the open of the pale night sky

field. His figure moved away quickly and the grassy ground swallowed the sound of his footsteps.

"We've started a nice story. What if it goes well? ..." Reimer looked around nervously.

Gutmann puffed him. "Don't worry!" With equanimity, he pulled a blanket out of his luggage, rolled it up and sat down on it.

"We have walked long enough and bumped our snouts on the trees. Our mother Europe didn't make it too easy for us to return to her sacred realms. Take your blanket and sit down too!"

"Mother Europe - it's a crazy patch of earth!" Reimer now also pulled his blanket out of his pack and squatted down next to his comrade, disgruntled. "I had a different idea of our return. Instead of being at home, we're now squatting like secret gnomes on the border of two foreign countries, always unsure what the next day will bring!"

"Just like in war," Gutmann mocked.

Reimer looked at him. "Hm - you're actually right. It's true: according to the radio reports, only the shooting has stopped, but the war is still going on ..."

The men were now silent. Minutes passed. From somewhere inside the forest came the croaking call of an owl. Midnight had long since passed, but cones of light from moving cars still cut through the darkness. The bright wedges briefly and eerily illuminated trees and houses along the roads,

They emerged brightly from the black of the night and immediately disappeared behind them again. The sound of the vehicle engines then penetrated the peace of the night like a malicious, dangerous buzzing.

An hour had long since passed and still no one had turned up. Those waiting became restless. Slowly, they felt the cold of the night coming up.

Just as Reimer was about to get up, he and Gutmann spotted a shadowy figure in the distance of the field, revealing a man hurrying towards them. The night traveller kept to the fairly precise direction with sure steps, which must have led him infallibly to the two observers. It was the Frenchman returning from his reconnaissance.

Gutmann recognised himself by shouting softly. In just a few steps, the man was with the two Germans.

"Parbleu!" grumbled the newcomer half aloud as he stood in the sheltering darkness of the trees, "You didn't tell me the name of the farmer who is supposed to have a connection to Belisse. By chance, I met a resident of this village who was returning home from Ax les Thermes, late and in a good mood. I asked him straight away if a certain Belisse was known here. The man said yes!"

"Ah!" said Gutmann. "And...?"

"Belisse had lived here with a certain Dubois!"

"Right - that was the name of the farmer I went to

call forgot!"

The Frenchman waved him off, "There are countless Dubois in France! - Just like there are many Meier names in Germany. There may even be some namesakes here in Sorgeat."

"Good, good," Gutmann interjected. "What about Belisse now?"

"I'm sorry, but the man you're looking for has disappeared! And so has the farmer Dubois!"

"What a nice present!" cursed Reimer.

The man from Carcassonne shrugged his shoulders.

"In these troubled times, that's not unusual. Anyone who is even suspected of collaborating with the Germans is being persecuted. The lynch law of the Marquis has already claimed countless victims. And as for Belisse, I know that he was friendly to the Germans because he foresaw the chaos coming with the East."

"Belisse seems to be a valuable man," Gutmann said cautiously. "You seem to sympathise with him?"

"I've already told you that I'm a refugee myself. So I have a lot in common with the man you're looking for!"

"... and I won't find it now," Gutmann added resignedly.

"Olalá, you never know!" The Frenchman raised his palms reassuringly. "The extraordinary situation we find ourselves in here will probably allow us to put aside reservations and misgivings."

leave. If you want to tell me why you're looking for Belisse? ..."

Gutmann looked at Reimer. Despite the darkness, he saw that the man from Linz was nodding. Then he turned back to the questioner: "We're looking for the man to save him!"

"Ah - les allemands want to save Belisse? - Très remarquable! - But at the moment it seems that you, mes camarades, are in more urgent need of help!"

"You bet!" Reimer confirmed this statement. He had felt safer in the Arctic than here on his home continent.

"Camarades, you have a sense of reality! - I will try to help you. If a hunch turns out to be correct, we may find the man we're looking for in a few hours. We want to use the night to penetrate as far as the Sabarthé caves. But that has to be now, because the surrounding area will certainly be under observation during the day!"

"Miracles still happen," murmured the Linzer.

"The whole world is one big miracle that dissolves into many small miracles," laughed the Frenchman quietly.

The officers picked up their blankets and slung them over their rucksacks, which they then shouldered. "Ready, messieurs?"

"Done!"

The Carcassonner took the lead and headed north-west along the edge of the field in the shade of the tall forest trees. Passing Ignaux, they crossed a few fields to reach the edge of the Bois de Comines

to hurry on. To their left, they passed Savignac and Vaychis. The Frenchman quietly called all the places by name. As they left the wooded hill behind, the Pic Calmont, over thirteen hundred metres high, loomed up before them, with the village of Perles at its feet on the road. Along the length of the march, the men were followed by the roar of the Ariège River, which roared its waters through the valley, which was dark in places.

"Attention!" the guide suddenly warned. "We are now crossing the road that we travelled through the magic valley."

The men peered cautiously in all directions, then hurried a little above the fork into the darkness opposite. Rugged walls rose out of the black of the forest into the night. They were the steep walls that led to the plateau of the Lujatberg.

The Frenchman paused for a moment. "All around here are the caves of Sabarthès, the last refuge of the Albigenses, whose destiny was fulfilled more than seven hundred years ago. Behind us lies the magnificent Fontanet cave. A stalactite cave that stretches for kilometres into the rock. Diagonally opposite on the other side of the valley is the Lombrive cave, which we may have to visit. For now, we want to visit the Spulga of Ornolac and the two neighbouring caves a little further on this side."

Now, under the guidance of the Provençal, they climbed uphill through the overgrown undergrowth, in parts

following a narrow path that they could barely see and could only guess by the lack of obstacles.

At the beginning of the arduous climb, Reimer had asked: "What are coil gases?"

"Spulgas are fortified caves whose entrances were walled up. This is where the Albigensians successfully defended themselves against their pursuers until they later succumbed to primitive life and lack of food," explained the Frenchman. "The most famous spulgas are those of Ormolac and, on the other side behind us, those of Bouan!" The man from Carcasson raised his arm and indicated the direction.

The velvet blackness of the night slowly began to change to a pale colour. The cold increased and fine swathes of incipient ground fog appeared in the incision of the Ariège. Winding their way through the undergrowth, the men suddenly stood on a small slope in front of towering rocks. The light of the dull twinkling stars and the moon, half covered by a cloud, revealed a dark opening that seemed to have been blocked by a tangle of stones, a ruined wall.

"The Spulga of Ormolac!"

"This is where Belisse should be?" asked Reimer, somewhat incredulously.

"Hardly," the guide replied. "Of the three nearby caves, only the second closest would come into question first; Las gleyso!"

"Gleyso - a church," Gutmann explained to the Linzer.

"The cave domes of the Cathars!"

The men continued on their way. They slipped a little

downwards, then they continued in the same direction along the steep rock face. The light of the stars became duller, the moon, which had emerged from the clouds, lost its glow and seemed to grow tired. The wild natural landscape, animated by the myth of a past, spoke a silent language of revelation to the seekers. Parzival had once ridden through this valley as a seeker. Wolfram von Eschenbach sang of a cave in this landscape where Parzival met the hermit Trevrizent. Trevrizent, the Cathar who accepted the viscount of Carcassonne, the young Ramon Roger Trencavel, into the Minne Church. Trencavel became the mythical Parzival, who was poisoned in a tower in Béziers at the behest of the Roman Church. The hermit Trevrizent was called Guilhabert of Castres.

Trees and undergrowth covered a myriad of caves. Caves and grottos kilometres deep. A natural troglodyte city may have existed here in ancient times. Celtic and Iberian sanctuaries were located here, ancient places of worship and Cathar ideograms, which resulted in a surprisingly similar symbolism with an early Nordic-Atlantic culture. The mythical imprint of the Sabarthé exuded a magic that awakened suspicions even in the ignorant.

The men were very tired. The physical tension also played its part. The grey of the passing night that gave birth to the morning made their progress a little easier.

Slowly fig trees, elms, even grotesque weather firs and thorny undergrowth became distinguishable.

"Las gleysos!" Standing on a narrow path, the Provençal pointed to the opening of a huge cave. "Now we should have full lamps so we don't have to save on light. Torches will do in a pinch. We won't get far with them. And my battery is almost flat!"

"We have lamps with us," said Gutmann. "We just have to get them out of the rucksack."

"They're in the outer pockets," explained the man from Linz, who was better informed about the packing. "Why shouldn't our lamps be enough?"

"Bah," said the Carcassonner. "Do you know how deep the Gleyso is? - You could walk for hours!"

Both officers took the lamps out of their rucksack pockets. Gutmann handed his to the Frenchman and asked him to lead on. "Do you think Belisse could be found here?"

"Why not? - Las gleysos and the nearby cave of Lombrives have a myriad of branches that provide excellent hiding places. It could very well be there or thereabouts. There is hardly any research here because it is hopeless to find out who is being chased. Unless you wait until hunger drives him out."

"I think it's more likely to be a lindworm in tails than a persecuted person," sneered Reimer.

"Hm," said the Frenchman. "Hunger can hurt ..."

"Just a moment!" said Gutmann, as the man from

Carcassonne prepared to enter the cave. He took off his rucksack and took out a bottle of cognac. "We want to warm up inside before we walk into the womb of Mother Earth." He handed the bottle to the Frenchman Irin. "Drink up, mate!"

"Oh, that's good when a German says comrade! It's like a great alliance! Cheers, mes camarades!" He took a big swig and handed the bottle back with thanks. After him, the Germans fortified themselves.

"Now, avant!" The Provençal took another look up at the sky, the edge of the horizon gradually beginning to colour with a greenish-yellow glow. The stars only blinked lazily.

The officers followed close behind their guide, who lit the way. There were traces of smoke on the walls of the rock corridor as high as a man's head, which might have been caused by torches. Possibly from a bygone era. They only penetrated a short distance inside, then the Frenchman stopped and let out a bright shout. The cry rolled on like the gobbling of a turkey and died away in the depths of the corridor. The Carcassonner repeated the cry several times, but nothing moved. Only a few bats suddenly fluttered past the flinching men.

"A satanic hole," cursed Reimer.

"Wrong," Gutmann rebuked the Linzer. "It's the stone kingdom of Lucifer, the light bearer! - From these

The pure spirit and the natural realisation of primeval times, whose symbolism can still be found in various places in these caves, will one day come to light again through these gates. And just as the pure ones, the Cathari, found the bridges that led them back to the primeval and drew them back to the stars after they had gained the strength for endura or steadfastness here, so the Light Saviour will support the called ones at the time of the Great Turning."

"When will that be - this turning point?" The Frenchman had grabbed Gutmann by the arm.

"You won't know what the connections are that I was aiming at."

The small cone of light from the torch in the guide's hand danced on the light-coloured limestone floor of the cave. The Frenchman's face remained in darkness and the two officers could not see the subtle smile. "With Lucifer, the horned one, the north rises! The ancient Cretans called the sun: Abellio! - Apollo - but Abellio was the biblical Abel, who was slain by the Semitic Cain. - The desert had killed the north. But when the sun, the eternally victorious one, rises again from the dark womb in the cosmic cycle, then that is the beginning of the turning point. And I know the time is ripe!"

At first, the two officers were so surprised by the man's words that they were unable to reply immediately. But Gutmann quickly regained his composure. "If I make this statement

in Brittany, I could still understand it. Here, I would have expected such references only from the Belisse I was looking for. So there still seems to be a strong tradition in Provence and also in the Pyrenees."

"You might have expected that, monsieur!"

"I underestimated the power of knowledge," Gutmann confessed.

"Remember, mes camarades, this was the home of the Grals!"

"We know that - that's why the Mani had to reveal itself from here!"

"Certainement! It has a force field here; the Albigensians or Cathars used to celebrate their supreme festival: the Manisola! - the feast of the Comforter. The Mani took centre stage as a symbol of the spirit; a shining gemstone that illuminates the world! It also symbolises the Buddhist law and dispels the night of error. I heard some time ago that it was Belisse who claimed that the signs in the sky would increase in about two years. Flaming discs will rise from the bosom of the earth! ..."

Reimer wanted to speak, but the Frenchman had abruptly turned away and strode past the two officers towards the exit. The men trotted back in silence. When they reached the exit, an intense red strip of horizon shone out towards them. Eos, the dawn of the new day, covered the legendary landscape with her

shining greeting. The men stood for a moment, lost in admiration. There was an unreal glow on their faces that blurred everything hard and sorrowful. The sky coloured red. Reimer leaned wearily against the rock face. Turning to the Provençal, he asked: "Do you think Belisse or anyone else would have responded to your call? - Persecuted people are suspicious!"

"You are very right, mon camarade! However, it can be assumed that no-one will penetrate unnecessarily far into the interior of the caves, as there is likely to be a lack of light. With a little attention, you can feel safe even within sight of the exit. At least not too far from it, because the dark interior has dangerous crevices and chasms."

"What now?" Gutmann urged.

"I don't think it's wise to do anything now," said the Provençal. "If you want to take our advice, then we'll take shelter somewhere here and rest during the day. Towards evening, we'll cross over to the other side of the valley and try the Lombrives cave. I have a feeling that we'll have more success with our search on the opposite side."

"A sensible suggestion!" confirmed the man from Linz.

"A good night's sleep can't hurt." He yawned heartily.

"Bien! - So go on."

Tired, somewhat frozen and scratched by branches, the hikers arrived at the Lujat plateau, which

which in places plunged vertically into the Ariège valley. Between dense bramble hedges and hawthorn bushes, there was an artificially extended vault in the mountain, which the three men found very suitable for their day's rest.

"Un moment! I want to see if there are no snakes here first." The Carcassonner scanned the alcoves before making a reassuring gesture. "Everything's fine!"

The two officers spread out the blankets and pulled out a snack, which they shared with their companion. Then they drew lots for the order of the watch. The first two hours fell to Reimer, who was not particularly pleased. Shortly afterwards Gutmann and the Frenchman were fast asleep, while the Linzer stared with burning eyes into the brilliant light of the rising sun.

By the time the light of day was fading and the first dark shadows were slipping across the landscape, the men were ready to march again and fully rested. They took advantage of the twilight of the fading day to work their way out of the tangled thicket of undergrowth. Near the slope of the plateau, the guide looked for a good descent to avoid detours in the darkness.

During the short wait until nightfall, the Provençal explained: "We came down a section of the old Cathar Way. The cave where we stopped for the day was an old resting place that was later converted into a cave."

Forgotten. Strangers find it hard to find and the locals don't care much about it."

With the twinkling of the stars, the men set off. The officers now also had a good sense of direction, as they had studied the map of the area in detail during the day. The Frenchman had explained the intended route to them.

They arrived unchallenged after the descent over the Ariège. Using narrow paths in places, they reached their destination more quickly than expected. This time it was the well-known cave of Lombrives, at the entrance to which they now stood. As they entered, they realised by the faint glow of their torches that they had entered a huge cave dome, in the vastness of which the thin cones of light were lost.

The men advanced to the second part of the branching labyrinth of caves. Via a natural stone staircase, they finally reached an abruptly plunging ravine of incalculable depth. They had now travelled along the main path without finding any trace of people. They did not venture into the ramifications of the corridors; it was also unlikely that fugitives would hide too deep. At least they had to stay close to the main corridor.

The man from Carcassonne had called out repeatedly. Even when Belisse's name was mentioned, only a muffled echo had responded. Turning round, the men's gaze fell on a large overhanging

A boulder, from which a stalactite club hung down.

"An impressive natural spectacle!" Reimer exclaimed enthusiastically.

The Provençal nodded. "The people of this region call the stone with the club the tomb of Heracles. Here, in the depths of the huge cave, there is said to be an underground palace where a king once lived a long time ago who had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Pyrene. At that time, Heracles is said to have found hospitality here, and he and Pyrene fell in love with each other. When his thirst for adventure drew him away again, her Pyrene followed in despair, as she was carrying a child under her heart and feared her father's wrath. On the way, she was attacked by wild animals. As she screamed in terror for help, Heracles heard her cries and came back to help her. However, all he found was Pyrene's body. In wild anguish, he buried his beloved in the mountain. Since then, the mountain ranges have also been called the Pyrenees. - Here in the cave, by a lake, are three stalactite rocks, which are said to be the tomb of Pyrene, the tomb of King Bebryx and his throne."

"And does Pyrene still have a mythical meaning?" asked Gutmann.

"Yes," said the man from Carcassonne. "Pyrene is said to have been the goddess Venus!"

"It was a truly fortunate coincidence that brought us together," said the Linz native. "Some knowledge is complemented by rare opportunities."

"Perhaps destiny..." An indeterminate smile played around the Frenchman's lips.

"Are you a bit fatalistic?" Reimer showed some astonishment.

"Non, monsieur! Fatalism is an inevitable acceptance. I am a supporter of shaping fate, i.e. the realisation of a destiny!"

As the two Germans remained silent and once again scanned the rocky hall, the Provençal slowly turned to retreat. Still murmuring words of admiration and amazement, the officers followed him. Then the beam of light from Reimer's lamp hit a drawing on the rock face. It depicted a charcoal-drawn ship with a sun for a sail.

"Oh - what's that?" The Linzer stopped and lured his companions back.

This time Gutmann immediately gave an explanation: "This is an old ship of the dead with the life-bringing mother of the stars. An ancient symbol from the Atlantean-Nordic culture of the megalithic age, which has survived in tradition right up to the Cagots, the Cathar Goths! And there - look - the symbol of the man-rune!" Surprised himself, he pointed to an obvious runic symbol.

The Carcassonner made a sweeping gesture: "Signs and symbols of this and similar kinds can also be found in the other caves of the Sabarthés. There are also bones and artefacts from the Albigenian period in the deeper interior."

The men moved on. When they returned to the first part of the Gleyso Cave, they had to realise that here, too, their hopes of successful exploration were in vain. The growing displeasure overshadowed the great interest in the natural beauties in the bosom of the mountain. Not least the fear of being caught by a patrol.

Despite the failure, they were glad to be able to step out of the cave into the night-time open air again. The mysterious hissing and roaring from inside stayed in their ears for a while.

"What now?" Reimer's mood hit rock bottom.

"Go on," said the Provençal briefly.

They were not far from the cave when all three men stopped walking at the same time. Not far ahead of them, a branch had cracked very audibly.

"Shh!" The Frenchman raised his arm in warning.

Again, sounds reached the ears of those listening. Leaves crunched. Not far from them, a person was making his way through the thicket. He must have been about five or six paces ahead of them when the Carcassonner suddenly exclaimed: "Stop camarade! - fuyard aussi? - Fugitive?"

It immediately became quiet. Not a sound around. Not even a leaf rustled. "I wouldn't report immediately either," Reimer remarked dryly. He didn't even speak excessively quietly, for it was quite clear that a single person could not be an executive in the night. The man in front of them must have heard the words,

probably without understanding them. Instead of an answer, a soft grinding sound was heard, indicating a cautious retreat.

The Provençal shouted a few reassuring sentences and now an answer came back. The man from the darkness asked who he was looking at. The answer he was given seemed to satisfy him, because branches cracked again, then a medium-sized man suddenly stepped out of the bushes in front of them.

He had a sack slung over his back.

Both Frenchmen spoke hurriedly in their dialect. Then the man from Carcasson turned to the two officers and told them that the man was supplying a group of refugees. He also knew the name Belisse; the man was said to still be in the area. He might be able to make a connection by the following evening!"

"Excellent!" Gutmann exclaimed. "Maintenant - one more day!"

"This period will pass quickly," Reimer interjected cheerfully.

The Carcassonner exchanged a few more sentences with his compatriot. He turned to his companions again: "The man suggests that we accompany him. He would be prepared to lead us to a small, little-known cave where we could spend the rest of the night and the next day. In the evening he would then come round and bring us a message. I think this is a very good idea

happy!"

"Agreed!"

The cave indicated was not far away. It seemed to be in the direction the man would have taken anyway, as he was so willing to lead despite his pack. He had turned down an offer from the Carcassooner to help him carry it.

Before reaching the new destination, the guide warned: "Attention, messsieurs - check for snakes before you lie down!" He said goodbye, promising once again to return the next evening. A brief rustle and the night had swallowed the man up again.

The men's new home was an excellent, secluded hiding place. As they spread out their blankets, Linz joked: "We're well on the way to becoming cave dwellers. If we carry on like this, we'll regress to Neanderthals or even amphibians ..."

The Provençal, however, pretended not to have heard and said abruptly: "We have been extraordinarily lucky. The man is from Bouan, so he's very close to here and seems to play an important intermediary role or be a link. Something like your farmer Dubois at Ignaux. If we ever have a chance of finding Belisse, this is it!"

THE KNOWLEDGE

What you cannot touch is miles away,
What you do not grasp, you lack
completely;
What you do not reckon, you believe
is not true;
What you do not weigh has no weight for
you;
What you do not coin, you think is not
valid.

Goethe

The next day was rainy. Clouds occasionally veiled the mountain peaks and marred the landscape. The cold, damp air drew into the small cave and made the three men shiver.

It cleared up towards evening. The leaves of the trees and bushes hung heavy with drops. The forest smelled and the earth steamed. Forest birds were still awake and heralded the change from day to night with their enticing songs. Gradually, the darkening sky became dotted with shimmering stars.

The patience of those waiting was put to the test. They kept quiet so as not to miss any sounds.

It rustled once. Some kind of animal. Later, an owl called.

The brief interruptions in the lingering silence in the forest kept the men's tension high.

The togetherness and the relationship of dependence that developed between the Germans and the Frenchman gave them a mutually reassuring feeling of increased security. The two officers did not yet know the name of the man from Carcassonne, nor did he know the names of his companions. And they did not even realise the strangeness of this state of affairs.

The hands of the wristwatches moved steadily. The silver ball of the moon hung high on the night zenith. The outlines of bizarre tree branches stood out like sharp silhouettes against the illuminated velvet of the wide sky.

There - a slight creak - silence. - Then again - a crack. A rustling sound!

The three men reached for their pistols. With short grips they had realised that they had heard the noises. Again a branch snapped somewhere in front of them in the darkness.

The men's senses were tense. There was no longer any doubt that something alive was approaching. Judging by the subtle sounds, the distance to the cave must have been barely more than a dozen paces. At this moment of mutual appraisal, a soft call came: "Etes-vous ici - are you here?"

The Carcassonner half shouted back, "Who's ahead of us?"

"The man with the sack from the night before," it came

promptly in response.

"Bien - come here!"

Now the forest floor rustled and two figures emerged from the darkness. They approached quickly and stopped two steps away from the cave entrance, clearly visible. One was a tall and strong man, the other smaller. The latter was obviously the guide from the previous evening. He said: "Come out!"

Without hesitation, the three people called stepped outside. Gutmann asked without introduction: "What about Belisse?" The tall, broad-shouldered man stepped in front of the little boy.

"That's me!"

A few seconds of silence. The two Germans were surprised, the arrivals patient. Gutmann cautiously tried to check the accuracy of the man's claim. He quickly regained his composure. "Is the name Belisse branched out here?"

"No," the interviewee replied curtly.

"Are you expecting messengers, sir?"

"As the case may be." The tone sounded mocking. "Perhaps you will tell me first, messieurs, where you are from and what you want from me!"

Gutmann endeavoured to appear calm. "We've come from the Arctic to get you!"

"Parbleu!" The tall man came right up to Gutmann. "What did you just say?"

"We come from the far north!"

"Impossible - not possible!"

The Carcassonne was a step surprised at first

stepped back, now he chuckled softly and mingled:

"I didn't know that myself, but I think it's possible. Les deux allemands arrived on the Montségur just as a mysterious aeroplane was making a few rounds and then disappeared again."

"Well - I already said that I am Belisse. Who are you?"

Gutmann introduced himself and Reimer. "Here - our guide from Carcassonne -"

"Pierre Frêne," he suddenly added readily.

"Frêne?" Belisse took a closer look at the man. "I've already heard your name!"

"Why not? - They're looking for me!"

"Pourquoi - why?"

Frêne briefly asked the counter-question: "Why are you in the woods?" Belisse said nothing more. He waited until Gutmann continued his explanations. Encouragingly, he remarked: "Go ahead and speak German! I speak the language well. My companion won't understand any of it, and he's reliable."

The Carcassonner politely interjected, "Shall I take a step back?"

Both officers exchanged a glance. "Stay," Gutmann replied. With a few sentences, he then addressed his order to Belisse. A look of boundless amazement appeared on the face of the man he was looking for. With a few sentences he revealed that he knew the polar tradition, but despite his far-reaching

connections that it was given a meaning of its own, as expressed by sending messengers from a northern militant base. The hasty yet detailed conversation revealed a broadly shared knowledge of the connections between the events in the background and the forces at work.

Belisse's reticence disappeared completely. The last message he had received, to continue his work in the secure seclusion of a well-protected base, meant possibilities that were not available to him at the moment. Nevertheless, he was unable to make up his mind without thinking.

The other three men surrounded the two speakers expectantly. The two other Frenchmen realised that this nocturnal meeting had special significance and remained motionless.

Concluding the lengthy conversation, Belisse explained: "The time is fast approaching, messieurs! I suggest you stay here in the cave and I'll come back to you at dawn. We will then have a whole day to discuss things in detail. Do you agree, messieurs?"

"Your proposal is actually excellent," Gutmann confirmed approvingly.

"I'm glad you accept. So let's stick to it, I'll be back in a few hours. Until then - au revoir!" He held out his right hand to the three men

and forcefully squeezed their hands. A few seconds later, his tall, powerful figure had disappeared behind the leader in front of him into the darkness of the forest. Only the faint sound of moving undergrowth accompanied the disappearance of the night walkers.

Now the Carcassonner approached his German comrades again. "Thank you for your trust, mes camarades! Our previous conversations have already revealed many surprising points of contact, we are very close. You can count on me for as long as you need me!"

"I am extremely surprised," admitted Reimer, "that you show no particular surprise, since you are not one of the people around Belisse!"

"If not exactly that, but I'm very familiar with all the things in my immediate homeland. This also includes knowledge of certain circles ..."

"All that has already been established anyway!" Gutmann interrupted impatiently. "No offence, but it would be better not to turn night into day now." And he jokingly ordered: "March into the cave and get a good night's sleep!"

Reimer and Frêne reluctantly followed the request. So all three men stumbled back into the cave and rolled under the blankets. As a precaution, they didn't decide to keep watch; besides, one of them always had to wait for Belisse at dawn as agreed.

It was Gutmann who was the first to lean against the entrance and stare at the flickering stars. The surprising nature of the previous encounter had excited him more than he wanted to admit. So he was even grateful for an hour of reflection.

It was already broad daylight when a nearby call signalled the arrival of the expected figure. The leaves on the ground rustled again and the tall figure of the night walker emerged from the undergrowth. The man crossed the small, gentle slope. The shadow of large overhanging branches of old giant trees did not prevent Belisse from being easily recognised as he approached.

The Goths in this country must once have looked like him. A fine, aristocratic head sat atop his massive body; steel-blue eyes flashed out from under bushy brows, his nose resembled a sharp beak and his prominent, prominent chin showed a great deal of energy. His ice-grey hair was the only visible sign of his advanced age. His springy steps, however, were those of a young man.

When the three men approached him, he paused briefly to scrutinise them too.

"Bon jour, messieurs! I hope you spent the second half of the night well?" There was a broad smile on his face, a strange contrast to his otherwise stern features. He entered the small cave informally and unceremoniously and sat down on a small boulder. Stretching his legs out and then bending them again, he pretended without fuss to be

he would have been a member of the small community for a long time.

Reimer put together a small breakfast from the scant provisions, which Belisse eagerly partook of. He asked the two Germans a series of general questions, the answers to which filled him with obvious satisfaction. In the course of less than an hour, the bond between the men was fully established. The whim of fate had turned them all into the hunted and forced them into the close-knit community that always arises in times of need.

Belisse was amused as he listened to the description of the search for him. He thought the Carcassonne's behaviour was quite logical, but he pointed out that under the circumstances, without sufficient provisions and permanent lamps, hiding in the deep giant caves would not be advisable. He would therefore have preferred to do exactly what one would hardly expect in this area; he stayed in the open. He told his attentive listeners that he had already left his home in the days after the German capitulation, as his personal safety no longer allowed him to stay. He had already been subjected to harassment months before. It was enough, he reported, to know that he was one of the men in the district who clung to traditions and had a different field of vision and thinking than was desirable at the time. There was only an absolutism of the opinions now prevailing. To

to avoid imminent arrest and thus an uncertain fate, he had to abandon everything.

Gutmann wanted to know what mau was accusing him of in particular.

"The acquaintance with a German who was a keen speleologist some time ago and had a lot of knowledge," Belisse replied.

"And that alone is enough?"

Belisse smiled enigmatically. "It's not that alone. It's just a tangible occasion!"

Frêne made a disdainful gesture. "Hand-grabbing occasions? - Pah, - before I made my way here, hundreds were arrested in our neighbourhood for no particular reason and some were even killed. Politics is often just a cloak for crime!"

"I have shown many friends across the Pyrenees," the giant continued in his story. "I myself stayed behind because I still had tasks to fulfil."

"Which I hope will be largely fulfilled?" Gutmann asked eagerly.

"Not in any way," the interviewee replied. "Above all, I'm waiting for the signs!"

"And which are these?"

"The Manisolas!"

There was silence for a moment. Then Frêne whispered: "The Mani is coming because the time is being fulfilled!"

"That's the way it is! We have a part to play," emphasised

Belisse. Reimer jumped up from his seat. He didn't even try to hide his partial ignorance, his curiosity got the upper hand. "And what is - the Manisola?"

Belisse looked at him fixedly, then his gaze slowly wandered to Gutmann. When the latter remained silent and thoughtfully drew figures on the floor with a wooden chip, the giant said: "The manisolas are energetic circles of light in the first stage process, which are caused as emanations from the mani, the 'stone', through circular communications. The second structural form of this biomachina is the process of gradual hardening to a crystalline, metallic form with a high zirconium content. As a biomachina, it is feminine here, i.e. material, think of the Great Mother, with an indifferently contained masculine-energetic element. In the third stage of the process, the excretion of the male element begins, which in the highest effect formation gives rise to the central phallus, the archetypal dwarf, the zvirgo!

This is followed by the fourth structure of the complete equilibrium of the generative forces, i.e. a hermaphroditic state. The climax, as archetype monad!

Once this structural culmination point has been exceeded, regeneration begins. The bioenergy corresponds to a state of pregnancy. The sixth process is the splitting, as a result of which the spent male torso, which has been harboured in the womb of the feminine element, falls away and retains the material, female womb form

a maturing, embryonic core."

Here the Linzer interrupted: "Mr Belisse, you're talking about something alive!"

"I'm talking about a biomachina! - Think about the word and you will have the answer yourself! - But continue: The regenerated part is repelled by the remaining mother core as a new energetic circle of light, which corresponds to a birth process. This new circle also enters the same seven developments, while the repelling mother element clusters into a sphere that subsequently detonates. The remaining metallic residue contains copper particles. The visual impressions of these manisolas described so far by eyewitnesses are essentially quite uniform. During the daytime they show a golden or silver, very bright glow, occasionally also pink traces of smoke, which then often dissolve into grey-white condensation trails. At night, the discs glow partly incandescent, partly in glowing shades of colour, occasionally long flames and red and blue sparks appear at the edges, which can intensify into whole sheaves of fire. Remarkable is the ability to react to pursuers, which corresponds to a thinking creature and far surpasses any possible electronic self-control and radio remote control."

As Belisse stopped speaking, the man from Linz turned to Gutmann: "So that would be the luminous disc that gave us the Eskimo magic at the pole?"

"Certainly," Gutmann confirmed. "As you can now see, the effects described and those seen are completely consistent!"

Now it was Belisse again who, for his part, curiously asked about the Arctic incident. Gutmann therefore gave him a detailed account of the experience.

The giant listened with great interest. When Gutmann had finished, Belisse said: "My knowledge and thinking are being confirmed very quickly! - I am firmly convinced that in the next few years the Manisolas will occupy the minds of the whole world. The discs will appear everywhere, but very few people will know what to do with them. Perhaps even an H. G. Wells psychosis of the Battle of the Worlds will emerge first. There will also be much confusion in distinguishing between the biomachina and the constructed discs, especially if the latter create similar optical effects."

"And what could be the driving force?" asked Reimer, still curious.

"Très simple," Belisse said lightly, "it is the azoth bound to the ether, the vril of the ancient Atlanteans, which has the property of a gas, lighter than air. The aether gives it a repulsive effect which, if strong enough, gives it a rapid propulsion, either rotating or in any orbit, depending on the distribution of the force components."

"Yet it is a metaphysical problem?"

"Certainment - absolutely! - There was also a mystery of the Cathar Manisolas here in Sabarthès. The torturers of the Inquisition did not succeed in wresting the knowledge of the Supreme Minne from the Cathars. The secret died for the world at that time with the last Albigensians in the caves of Ormolac."

"And what is the connection to the Grail?" Reimer's head poked forward with extreme excitement, while Frêne showed no particular surprise.

"A direct one," Gutmann interjected, explaining. "According to tradition, Mani herself was an emerald, in which the Cathars also saw the Paraclete, a kind of Paredra of God, a female principle, the mother of the Logos."

"The great mother of the Eskimo and the other primitive peoples," added Reimer, shrewdly grasping the primordial ground.

Gutmann continued: "The Grail of all myths, the Romanesque Mani, was therefore a material object that not only symbolised the physical, physiological and spiritual potencies, but had to possess them due to its special composition. In Provence and Languedoc, the discs of the mani were signatures of the highest minnes. The minstrels and troubadours, the trobadores - the seekers - sang and wrote poetry in the service of this Minne, and thousands died at the stake of the Inquisition."

"Two hundred thousand lansquenets and twenty thousand knights were organised by the Pope and the Archabbot of Cîteaux against our prosperous and happy

country," Frêne suddenly interjected bitterly. "In my home town, Carcassonne, four hundred people who had been left behind, old and sick, were burnt to death. In neighbouring Béziers, a desperate crowd gathered in front of the victors. When a knight asked the archabbot how it would be possible to separate the believers from the heretics, he scornfully replied that they should all be killed, God would find out who was his!"

"It is the dualism of all things, the bipolarity of all being," said Belisse. "Where there is love, you find hate, and where there is goodness, you don't have to look too far for wickedness. The blood of the slaughtered smouldered next to pure minstrelsy." Belisse suddenly raised his voice, almost carelessly loud, and continued: "After Saladin's death, this Innocent the Third wanted to recruit Richard the Lionheart for a new crusade through his envoy Foulques ..."

"These crusades have all sapped Eurofi's biological strength and constantly weakened the dam against the eastern tide," Reimer remarked bitterly in between.

"When Lionheart refused, Foulques became abusive and ordered the king to marry off his three daughters as quickly as possible if he wanted to avoid disaster. The king called him a liar because he had no daughters. Foulques, however, called them by their names: arrogance, greed and fornication. Lionheart was furious at this and replied recklessly: "Well, I'll give the Knights Templar the arrogance, the Cistercians the covetousness and the fornication.

and the prelates the life of pleasure! - As a result, the Pope excommunicated the British king."

Again there was a brief silence. Belisse had become somewhat agitated, which otherwise did not match his superior demeanour. Frêne said: "The old tales tell us that the last Albigenses disappeared in the caves of the Ariège mountains."

"They disappeared to live on in the myth." Gutmann jutted out his chin defiantly. "Whatever the tales may tell and whatever people may believe, the Albigenses are now safe from persecution and have taken the purity of their will with them into the spheres of eternity. This victory is also the triumph over the filthy hatred of the spider with the fish mark."

"With this saying by the troubadour of the time, Peire Cardinal, the Albigensians or the Cathar Goths, as we also call them, demonstrated their Nordic pride and faithfulness," Belisse added. "There are still enough Cagots living in the Pyrenees and they are all proud people. Taciturn and introverted. From time to time, they pay homage to old customs and no one knows how to interpret them when they are unexpectedly joined. Any curiosity bounces off the stubborn silence of the interviewees."

"They don't say that Germanic is heretical for nothing," Reimer interjected.

Frêne added: "This may also have something to do with the fact that old Basque farmhouses are located on the outskirts of the city."

The Swastika sign is still attached to their doorposts as a religious symbol of protection. There are still many traces of ancient traditions. The old Celtic-Iberian Dispater is the Dyaus Pitar mentioned in the old Sanskrit writings, whom the Greeks called Zeus Pater. The Latins, however, called him Jupiter in a distorted form. This ancient Dispater is none other than Ahriman from the tradition of the archaic Aryans."

"You could learn to love this wild country here," said Reimer pensively. "It's a tough country and can give away the impulses of the north."

"That's why I'm staying here," said Belisse firmly.

"My mission is to take you with me at all costs," Gutmann repeated his original introduction to the conversation."

"And my mission is to stay here!" Belisse looked at Gutmann full on.

"What if I force you to come with me?"

Belisse furrowed his brows. "Godfather," he said dismissively. "It's not that simple. Do you have such an order?"

"The order is to find you at all costs and bring you to our base!"

"That's still not violence," laughed Belisse, clearly amused. Then, becoming serious again, he continued: "And what other mission do you have to fulfil here?"

Gutmann sighed. "This order is difficult and impossible enough. That's enough for us. One more order,

that would be too much ..."

"Don't take it tragically," the giant replied. "It's a superstition that forces me to stay."

"And this is - ?"

Belisse hesitated. But then he murmured slowly: "It's my name."

"I don't understand that," Gutmann said open-heartedly and challengingly at the same time.

The giant folded his hands in front of his legs and bent his torso forward. "The god of light Apollo, the Beel - Belenus, is the ancient Celtic Belis."

"Belis - Belisse!" Gutmann called out in surprise.

"Just a coincidence," said the giant. "Yet I am associated with it. A very unfortunate coincidence that binds me here now. There are rumours about many things in Sabarthè and it could be that I die somewhere in a foreign land. Then I would unintentionally take the power of a name from this landscape and that must not happen. As long as the Countess Esclarmonde of Montsegùr and the old traditions of the Cathar Goths are spoken of here, the Atlantean-Nordic imprint will remain. These traditions form a chain that stretches back twenty thousand years. If this stony wilderness could speak, it would fill one of the most exciting books on earth. I am so deeply connected to this mountain world that nothing can take me away from here. No matter what might come."

"I can understand that very well," admitted Reimer.

"My heart and my senses are also attached to my homeland. Nevertheless, I'm travelling everywhere at the moment because I can't go back!" The man from Linz pressed his lips together. "Once, yes. I know it!"

Belisse looked fixedly over the high treetops. "You will see the homeland, but the homeland will not see you ..."

"What does that mean?" Great astonishment and incomprehension painted themselves on Reimer's features. The other men also looked at the giant. Belisse, however, remained stubbornly silent. Frêne stood up and stretched his legs. He had been sitting badly and had developed a slight cramp. He said sullenly into the silence of the men: "The air is thick here, mes amis - we should soon come to an agreement on what to do next. There is really no time and no reason to marvel at the ancient rock paintings in the many caves. We should endeavour to get away from here as soon as possible."

"Very sensibly spoken," agreed Reimer.

"Where do you want to go first from here?" Belisse enquired, giving up his senses.

"Somewhere across the border." Gutmann pointed south with his hand.

"That's too imprecise. You must have a temporary destination, right?"

"Certainly. Our main station is called Toledo!"

"A beautiful journey. It's not easy travelling in Spain at the moment. The Guardia Civil is hard behind the

Foreigners sneaking around the country. But at least when you're on the train, it's not too bad."

"Let's take a look at the maps," Frêne suggested.

"Not necessary for now," Belisse cut him off. "I'll take you across the border myself without you getting into trouble. Rest well now, messieurs, we can leave with the setting sun!"

A large bird flew past low in front of the cave entrance and cast a darting shadow on the small floor area. Somewhere an animal rustled in the undergrowth. In the greenish glow of the horizon, the sun hung like a golden ball and shimmered through the towering treetops of the mighty trees. Dark purple clouds with sparkling orange edges sailed through the velvety blue dome of the sky in a slow, steady procession. Isolated rays of the departing sun flashed across the colourful firmament like golden arrows. Everything breathed the magic of creation.

The man who had accompanied Belisse had left at midday with an assignment. So now the giant and the Carcassonner sat with the two Germans and ate their evening meal together. Despite limited supplies, Gutmann had handed out large enough rations. According to Belisse, they had quite a strenuous march ahead of them.

... from here on something is missing ...

"No," Gutmann replied briefly. "His satchel is still here."

After about ten minutes, the Carcassonner came back.

"If we take Belisse in - there's a small cave not far from here! - We could bury him there ..."

"Then let's go!" Gutmann said resolutely. As the three men stood around the dead man, their expressions were stony. Their jaw muscles were taut as they lifted the body and took it in the direction the Carcassonner was pointing. They stumbled over a stone-strewn narrow passage. Dry branches cracked under their footsteps. The low clouds of a stormy sky and the gusts of wind seemed like a prelude to the Last Judgement. Heavy drops were already falling sporadically. "Quickly!" Gutmann pressed out between his teeth. Reimer left the group and hurried back to catch up with the luggage. Gutmann and Frêne hurried on with the dead man and reached their destination. As soon as they reached the cave found by the Carcassonne man, a storm broke out. A white-grey flash of lightning illuminated the rock cavern and blinded the men.

The Linzer emerged gasping out of the roaring rain and loaded his luggage onto the dry rocky ground. A thin layer of humus absorbed the water as it beaded down. The curls of his hair were sticking to his forehead and his shoulders were wet and shiny.

were jet black from the wet. Nevertheless, he had got off lightly, because after he entered the cave, the rain thickened into a thunderous veil of water. As far as could still be recognised, the narrow channel resembled a wild torrent. In between, lightning flashed in rapid succession and the rolling thunder made the earth tremble. With an almost dramatic furioso, the nature of the Pyrenees greeted its fallen giant, who had returned to the bosom of his homeland.

After almost an hour, the storm was over. With the last fading rumble, the men got up to do their sad work. They took their luggage back outside and then set about collecting stones. Frêne placed the body of his compatriot in a semi-upright position, so that his closed eyes were turned towards the north. After a short time, the men were able to start piling the collected stones in front of the cave entrance. This work took more time than they had previously estimated. When they had finished, their eyes were presented with the image of a natural-looking landslide. Belisse had a found a grave worthy of him.

The sky cleared up a little at midday. The three men were on the march southwards again. This time it was Frêne who led the way.

Without the knowledgeable Belisse, they now had double the

Attention needed. This necessity distracted them somewhat from their oppression. They were already several kilometres away from the giant's cave tomb, which they would always remember as a figure from the past. The last clues that Belisse had painstakingly interpreted for them in the morning made the route much easier with the help of the map. On the other hand, they lacked knowledge of the critical crossing points on the border.

Frêne had a rough idea of where they could hope to have the best chance of crossing, according to the giant. This did not significantly reduce the dangers, but it saved a lot of time and that was already a big gain in every respect. The restlessness drove the men to take only very short breaks in order to get through the Pyrenees as quickly as possible. Once on Spanish soil, everything else was relatively easy.

They pushed through during the night. As if they were on a scouting expedition, they took every precaution and used every safety precaution. At dawn they looked for a resting place in a dense grove of trees.

While Reimer and the Carcassonner rolled up their blankets, Gutmann looked at the map again and noted the location they had reached. He then pointed the way to Lérida and explained the next distant destination to his companions. Among the instructions received was an address for the town mentioned, where Gutmann hoped to find further instructions. On

The men refrained from keeping watch after they had camouflaged themselves well in the thicket against outside view. They were now on foreign soil, but no longer in enemy territory.

The Spanish sun, rising from behind the slopes of the sierras, was kind enough to shine its warming rays through the copse in which the three men were slumbering, heavy with lead.

SHADOW GAME

The nightly mists flood ever wilder,
Flashed through with flashes of light
because' on because';

It flee suddenly all the
silhouettes,
And victorious looks the Sun's
source of light.

Friedrich Nietzsche

It was around midday when a train pulled into the Estación del Ferrocarril in Toledo. Gutmann, Reimer and Frêne were among the crowd leaving the station. They had shouldered their luggage and squeezed past the peasants standing around, most of whom were carrying sacks and packs and obstructing the free flow of traffic. They realised with satisfaction that, despite their somewhat different appearances, they didn't really stand out here. Once out of the extended border area, they no longer needed to be overly cautious. Apparent indifference and composure were the best passport to the interior of the country. The journey to Toledo was under a good star.

The men stepped out onto the Paseo de la Rosa and turned towards the nearby Alcantara Bridge, which spanned the Tagus. The river ran in a semicircle around the city,

whose old houses on the steeply rising plateau offered a romantic picture.

Past the Castillo de San Servando, the men crossed the bridge and passed the Gobierno Militar, behind whose walls stood the proud remains of the famous Alcázar. They contented themselves with a quick glance and asked in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento for the address that Gutmann had recorded. A resident in a dark beret showed them the way in great detail.

The street scene they encountered on the way was very lively. Farmers drove their loaded mulas in front of them, Camións sped around the street corners at an alarming pace, men sat in front of a tavern chatting eagerly and the uniforms of the Spanish military kept emerging from the hustle and bustle. Every stranger had to recognise at first glance that the head of state, General Franco, had taken the world situation into account and had brought the Wehrmacht up to a good standard.

The three new arrivals had long since become accustomed to the throaty yet melodious pronunciation of Spanish, and Frêne, as a native of southern France, spoke the language very fluently. Gutmann was also able to make himself understood to some extent. Reimer, who hadn't understood a word at first, proved to be very eager and docile. *Vino* was the first word that the *bon vivant* from Linz promptly remembered. Frêne had laughingly warned him not to do too much of a good thing. The cheap price of the excellent Spanish wine was an easy temptation.

The proverbial brittleness of Spanish girls did not seem to be a rule. Reimer, who nodded mischievously at a young Spanish girl out of exuberance, received a friendly smile that almost sent him over the edge. "My God," he whined as his mates pulled him away, "you don't even know how to behave towards a girl any more ..."

"Very demure and completely restrained," Gutmann explained in a hypocritically serious manner.

"Hm," said the man from Linz, looking at his companions askance.

Following the information they had received earlier, the men turned into a side street off Calle del Pozo Amargo and, after a short, effortless search, stopped in front of an old, unremarkable house. An old man was leaning in front of the entrance, his hands buried in his pockets and squinting into the sun. Gutmann turned to him and asked for Señor Bastia.

"Señor Bastia está en Hospital!"

"In the hospital? - Where?"

"Hospital de San Juan Bautista."

The three men looked at each other, perplexed. The man from Carcasson asked the old man: "Where is the hospital?"

"Next to the Paseo del Madrid," he explained cheerfully. He raised his hand and pointed the way.

Gutmann said casually: "Do you know what's wrong with him?"

"Quien sabé?" muttered the man. "I think it was

an accident." With a jerk, he abandoned his casual demeanour and shuffled inside the house. Apparently he was uncomfortable with superfluous questions,

"A hospital is still better than a cemetery," explained Frêne when he saw Gutmann's perplexed expression.

"That's true," he remarked, "but the two are sometimes very close!"

"Bien, that's right. Then it will probably be best if we go straight to the hospital with the nice-sounding name. At least all doubts and uncertainties will be resolved shortly!"

"We have no other choice anyway. So let's go!"

They suppressed their haste and impatience and strolled in the direction they were shown. The typical Spanish street life delighted them and they couldn't resist buying some of the appetising and cheap fruit on the way, which was delicious. For the two flight officers, the whole thing was a long-lasting picture of profound peace. They were certainly aware of the great excitement of world events from the newspapers and were followed everywhere by the glances of the locals, who were not used to any noticeable tourist traffic, but their behaviour did not arouse suspicion anywhere and they were not bothered by any of the authorities.

They crossed Calle San Juan Dios and came across the green area of the designated Paseo del Madrid. Immediately behind it, they discovered a large old building, which turned out to be the object they were looking for.

This time, the man from Carcasson took it upon himself to ask the hospital porter for Bastia. His French accent made him less conspicuous.

"Señor Bastia? - No se - I don't know! - Ask at the office!"

Frêne waved his mates aside and suggested that Reimer wait at the edge of the park with his luggage. It would look better than three loaded foreigners turning up at the house. It was also easier to avoid unnecessary questions. Both officers immediately agreed to the proposal and Gutmann praised the Frenchman's prudence. While Linz guarded the deposited luggage a little way from the building, the companions passed through the entrance and went into the office. A corpulent and elderly clerical sister was on duty. "Bastia?" she repeated in response to Carcassonne's question. "Bastia - I think that's the man who was brought in here a few days ago. He was mugged, wasn't he?"

The two men looked at each other briefly. "I don't know," said Frêne, slightly embarrassed. "I hope it's not bad with the patient?"

"Would you like to speak to the doctor, senores?"

Frêne looked at Gutmann before continuing. "Hmm - that's unlikely to make much difference to the patient's condition. If it's not particularly bad, we'd like to visit the man!"

"It's not visiting hours now, but I see you're a foreigner. I'll speak to the doctor on duty

to see if the patient can have visitors!" She nodded kindly to her words and looked up the patient's room and bed in a large ledger. Then she picked up the telephone and asked the relevant department for information.

A voice from the other end of the wire rattled from the membrane of the receiver. A short pause. Visibly, the person being questioned obtained some information, then after a final dialogue, the nurse said: "You can speak to the patient for ten minutes. I'll take you to him myself!"

The hospital was an old building and looked more like a convent inside. The nurses hurrying around the corridors with their strange starched head coverings would easily have led to such an assumption had it not been for the pervasive odour of disinfectant. They had to climb a flight of stairs and then walk along a long corridor before the pulpit nurse stopped: "One moment, señores!"

She disappeared behind a door and left the visitors behind. After a few minutes, she came out again accompanied by a doctor and directed him to the visitors. With a friendly greeting, she left.

The doctor made a curt bow. His mumbled name sounded indistinct and his eyes were fixed enquiringly on those standing in front of him. "You are acquainted with Señor Bastia, señores?"

"Whatever you say," Frêne said lightly. "Such a

Casual acquaintance, so to speak." The Carcas sonner showed his white teeth and shone with his southern French temperament. "Señor Bastia is a lovely man and I think he will not only remember me well, but will certainly be pleased to meet me. We met in Geneva at the time. Do you know the city, Doctor? Oh, it's marvellously beautiful there. The climate, the landscape ... We spent some lovely hours together there. I'm very sorry to hear that Señor Bastia is in hospital. Vraiment! - Of course he's in good hands with you, Doctor!"

The doctor didn't answer straight away. He seemed to think for a moment. "Where did you find out that Señor Bastia was here?"

"Oh," replied Frêne, "just imagine, Doctor, we arrive here in Toledo unsuspecting, wanting to surprise Bastia and an old man tells us this unfortunate news at the entrance to the house. Of course we came here immediately. Did he fall, was it a road accident, is it his appendix ... ?"

"The nurse told me that she had already informed you that Señor Bastia was the victim of an assault!"

"Oh lala!" Frêne rolled her eyes theatrically. "I thought it was a stupid joke ...!"

"There are no jokes like that in a hospital!" the doctor reprimanded sternly.

"Perdone me, we didn't want to believe it. You must understand, Doctor ... !"

"What's your name? - Do you both want to go to Bastia?"

The man from Carcasson gave his real name, as did Gutmann, whose name was the same as his Swiss passport. "We'd like to audition together!"

"Señor Bastia has suffered a serious head injury. In view of his condition, I can only allow you a few minutes!"

"Of course we would like to thank you for your responsible approach. You show consideration for both parties!"

The doctor was much more reserved than the Spaniards usually are. He dispensed with the usual polite phrases and only said briefly in advance:

"Entremos, señores!"

Gutmann and Frêne followed at his heels. They entered a large room with two rows of beds. The doctor crossed the room and stopped in front of a small door, which he opened. Only now did he allow the visitors to go ahead.

The second room was small. A single window provided light. Two beds stood against the opposite long walls. Both were occupied. One of the patients had a large head bandage. Of course, this could only be Bastia.

The doctor stopped in the room. Gutmann stepped to the bedside of the bandaged man and gazed into dark eyes that stared at him wide. Frêne positioned himself slightly behind his companion to block the doctor's field of vision. In this way, Gutmann was able to briefly and unobtrusively touch a finger to

his lips. Nevertheless, Bastia made no sign that he had understood.

The moment was somewhat critical. Gutmann took the patient's right hand, which was lying limply on the bedspread, and squeezed it gently. "I am heartbroken to find you here ill, dear friend?" he said as best he could in Spanish. The doctor would have understood French anyway and German was not advisable so as not to arouse suspicion. We still knew nothing about the situation and the doctor's behaviour was strange enough.

At first, Bastia remained silent in response. Then he said in a clear, melodious voice: "I'm very pleased about the unexpected visit?"

Both visitors breathed a sigh of relief. Nevertheless, the sentence was short and didn't say too much. Bastia seemed to be an extremely cautious man who was also quick on the uptake. He had immediately guessed the visitors' silent wish and yet he did not commit himself to anything with his words.

Nevertheless, the greeting was a little strange. The doctor came closer and stood at the head of the bed.

Gutmann put all his eggs in one basket to bring about a quick understanding. "Mr Küpper from Zurich has sent me special greetings for you. You remember his lovely villa by the lake, I think at number one hundred and three! ..."

Bastia moved his head slightly as a sign of affirmation and that he had understood.

"We called him Eos back then. You know ...!"

Eos was the key word that Küpper had given the officers as a watchword. Bastia immediately moved his hand and waved it slightly. "Oh, my friends, I know! - It's a pity you didn't come a few days earlier. Before I had my little accident." At the word accident, he bared his teeth slightly like a tame animal. His teeth had a yellow gleam and his unshaven chin, left bare by the bandage, tightened slightly.

"We regret that very much," Frêne assured him sincerely. He felt that circumstances had prompted him to join in the conversation. The doctor eyed him like a policeman and urged extreme caution.

"I suppose you'll be staying in Toledo for a few days?" Bastia asked.

"Absolutely," Gutmann replied. "We only arrived today!"

"You'll have to be patient for a few days until I'm discharged from hospital. I hope you have some time at your disposal?"

"You underestimate the severity of your injury, Señor Bastia!" the doctor objected. "You'll have to stay with us for a while yet."

The patient was silent again.

"That's enough for today, senores!" said the doctor.

"Un momento!" said Bastia. He turned his

bandaged head with a slight turn towards the visitors. "I assume you have already been to my flat, where you will have been told of my misfortune."

"Surely we were sent here from there?" Gutschmann confirmed.

"Who told you about my misfortune?"

"Oh, some old sky-gazer was standing by the gate."

"Hm - that was Alvaro! - Go back again and tell him to give you the address of Señorita Juana. Juana will take care of your accommodation if you let her know that I have sent you to her. And if you want to visit me again tomorrow

..."

"That goes without saying. Gladly!" Gutschmann and Frêne gently shook hands with the man lying down. "Au revoir! ..." Bastia squinted one eye and then turned his head back. "Hasta luego, amigos!"

The doctor closed the row of departing patients and quietly pulled the door shut behind him. The men walked through the large room and the Spaniard stopped in the corridor. "You've made good use of the few minutes I've allowed you. The high house number and the joking name of the man from Zurich quickly refreshed Señor Bastia's memory."

Gutschmann looked sharply at the doctor. His voice had had a strange sound. Somehow there was hidden irony in it. The officer immediately parried: "What's so strange about that?"

The doctor's smile, intended to be engaging, looked like a grimace. "I didn't mean to offend you with my remark, señores! As a foreigner, you undoubtedly have different feelings to us Spaniards. You were so sober and precise with your few sentences, as only the English or Germans usually are!"

"Mon dieu!" rumbled Frêne, "that's all we need, to be categorised in a foreign nation! Do we look that Germanic?"

The tone of the question was intended to lead past a fact and tempt the interviewee to give in. However, the psychological shot missed the mark. The doctor said briefly: "You certainly look like it!"

"Parbleu - that's the first time I've heard that!" Frêne acted offended.

"You want to come back tomorrow, don't you?" asked the doctor, now distracted.

"We would be very grateful for your permission in this regard!"

"Pues, hasta mañana - Tomorrow, then! - Buenos dias, señores!"

"Mil gracias, doctor!"

For a moment it seemed as if the doctor wanted to say something else, but suddenly he made a sharp U-turn and went back into the ward that they had left together earlier.

Gutmann and the man from Carcasson looked at each other. "A strange chap," said the Frenchman.

"I think we've been pretty clumsy

I was very daunted," Gutmann replied. "But I saw no other way of making the necessary contact. Bastia had to be put in a position to see clearly so that he could help us." As he walked, he said: "Perhaps trained agents would have behaved differently. Something like that is devilishly difficult. And even more so when you have the feeling that there's a catch with Bastia."

"Perhaps Señorita Juana will give us some clarification," Frêne interjected.

"Maybe," Gutmann said monosyllabically.

They left the hospital and hurried to get to Reimer. The man from Linz stood in front of the luggage with his hands clasped backwards, looking bored. No foreign tourist could have looked more snobbish in this pose than Reimer. He was excellent at adapting to a situation. "Everything all right?" asked the Linzer.

Gutmann and Frêne picked up their luggage and while the men headed back, the former informed his comrade of what had happened.

"The main thing is that Bastia is helping us!" said Reimer hopefully. He paid little attention to Gutmann's report on the doctor's strange behaviour. "I'm terribly curious about the Spanish woman!"

When they arrived in front of Bastia's house, Frêne again took it upon himself to find old Alvaro and ask for the

to eat the girls. After a few minutes, he came out of the house with the old man, who pointed them in the direction of Calle de Capuchinos. After some rather detailed explanations, the man shuffled back into the house.

"Come on then!" said Frêne. "This Juana lives in a side alley of the street I mentioned earlier. We'll find her easily."

Reimer grumbled again: "If this goes on, we'll get to know the whole of Toledo like our pocket today. Just keep walking around diligently ..."

It wasn't as bad as Linz had feared. In about ten minutes they had found the designated address. They walked a few steps further and discussed the matter. They came to the conclusion that it would be best if Frêne, as an innocuous Frenchman, went to the señorita first to sound her out.

It wasn't long before Frêne came out of the house. His face had a vague expression. Nevertheless, he showed cheerfulness as he reported:

"Messieurs, despite all the difficulties, we are lucky! - The lady opened the door in person after I rang the bell. Comrade Reimer, you will be very interested to know that the señorita is a Spanish beauty! - And the main thing at the moment is that she will help us with everything until Bastia is able to do it herself! - She sent me down to fetch you."

"All's well that ends well!" said the Linzer cheerfully.

"Let's hope so!" Frêne stopped briefly in the hallway:

"Nevertheless - however we are received, I advise

to be careful!"

"Why?" Gutmann grabbed his companion by the arm.

"I don't really know - maybe it's just a stupid feeling of mine - Oh, - let's go on! ..."

They climbed a flight of stairs. Despite being strangers, they all had great expectations that this would be the place to rest for the coming days. The peaceful life in Toledo had softened their moods and fuelled their desire for true relaxation. Nevertheless, even without words, they felt together that letting go would mean the end of their journey. The Carcassonner stopped in front of a dark, high door, ringing the bell again.

Despite the seemingly massive door, light footsteps could be heard. Then it was opened.

"Oh - Señores! - Mucho gusto de conocer à Usted! - I'm very pleased ..." A slender and strikingly pretty Spanish woman stood in the doorway, her first words and gestures revealing her great worldliness. The two Germans stared at her in surprise.

The way the girlish young woman stood before them was exactly how the officers had imagined the Spanish Carment type to look. An ivory-coloured, groomed complexion gave the gem-like face a refined nuance. Large dark eyes literally shone at her and bewildered her. The mouth smiled and looked like an open dark red blossom. There was a delicate scent of cologne in the air.

"Come in, señores!"

The three men spoke a few phrases of politeness. Reimer only mumbled. His ignorance of the language made him doubly embarrassed.

The señorita went ahead and escorted her guests into a parlour, where she offered them seats. "You come from Señor Bastia? - No doubt you are a stranger here. What can I do for you?"

Gutmann took it upon himself to speak. "If we could ask you for advice: where can we stay without making a fuss and at a reasonable price?"

Juana let out a pearly laugh. "You are certainly guests of Señor Bastia by right. He very rarely has visitors. But when he does, he goes to a lot of trouble." She scrutinised the three men with undisguised curiosity. "I don't know how far..." She looked a little helpless.

Gutmann understood immediately. "Unfortunately, Señor Bastia's condition did not allow him to recommend us in writing or in any other way. However, we can assume that it is already a matter of trust that he referred us to you." He had used the word "matter of trust" on purpose. He didn't want to be any clearer.

"But of course, I realise that. Don't take offence at my uncertainty, señores!" She paused for a moment in thought. Her eyes travelled from one visitor to the other. Then she said hesitantly:

"I have a guest room on the top floor of the house. But there's only room for two!"

The men had nothing to say in reply.

"Don't misunderstand, senores, I have room here in the flat, but a Spanish woman has to be very careful about her reputation. It's stricter in our country than anywhere else in Europe!"

"Oh, I suppose it's like that everywhere where decency is important," Gutmann explained, emphasising her apology. "It's very unpleasant for us that you've broken your head because of us!"

"It's not meant like that. Señor Bastia's guests are also my guests. If you don't mind, I could provide sleeping accommodation in the same room if necessary. But you might find it a little uncomfortable. There's a nice guesthouse nearby ..."

"If there is a possibility that we could stay together, we would prefer that!" Gutmann admitted openly. "Of course, we're not making any demands. We are used to great modesty!"

She asked the guests to follow her to the last floor. The men picked up her luggage and climbed the stairs with her.

Once upstairs, she unlocked a door. "Here, senores!"

The men entered. The room was large and bright, with two windows offering a beautiful view over the roofs of the neighbouring houses. Two large beds tempted the men, who had suffered enough hardship recently. It was easy to get into

create a third sleeping option in this spacious room.

"I don't think we could find better accommodation in the whole of Toledo than here!" exclaimed Reimer enthusiastically. He really liked it here.

"If you would allow me, señorita, all three of us would have enough space!"

Juana nodded kindly. "Make yourself comfortable, señores! - I'll send a snack up to you in an hour. I hope you'll have settled in by then."

When she had gone, Gutmann went to a window and once again surveyed the view of Toledo with its scenic background. Frêne stood next to him and asked after a while: "What now, monsieur?"

"Wait and see! - We'll probably see more clearly in a day or two."

"That's not what I meant by the question. I have accompanied you this far and now you have found the connection you were looking for. You no longer need me. On the other hand, I have a lot to thank you for, because without provisions I would hardly have got across the Pyrenees so easily. Anyway ..."

Gutmann interrupted: "We have you to thank, Frêne! - Together, we made this dangerous part of our journey easier."

The Frenchman nodded slightly. "It was great camaraderie! It's good to have Germans as friends

has. You are reliable. I appreciate you very much, mes camarades!"

"The feeling is mutual, comrade Frêne! - But why are you talking about these things now? Do you want to leave us?"

"Absolutely! - You now have another destination. I, on the other hand, will try to get to Portugal. Maybe Tangier ..."

"Don't you have a fixed end point?"

"Actually - no, Comrade Gutmann!"

"Then why are you so keen to think about separating now? - We stayed together after crossing the border. And we're not all safe yet!"

The Carcassonner raised his chin and remained silent. His eyes wandered into the distance; they seemed to be dreaming.

"What reason do you have, Frêne?"

"Reason? - Truly, I have no reason! - But I said before: you have a new path ahead of you here. New tasks now that you've come out of France in one piece ..."

"We don't know anything yet. Maybe tomorrow we'll be as aimless as you are today! - That's no reason to leave right now. Why don't you stay with us, Frêne? - Stay if you value German comradeship! We'll take you with us. You have helped us a great deal from Montségur; you played a part in our finding Belisse. There are still a number of

Things you don't need to talk about. If we find help and thus safety again, then you should be part of it. We have become comrades - haven't we?"

"Certainement! - But I told you..." His voice sounded stubborn.

Gutmann put his right hand on his companion's shoulder. "I'm beginning to understand what you mean! - You don't want to stand in our way. Isn't that so?"

"That's what I wanted to say. Up to this point, I've been able to help you; now I'm just ballast for you!"

"Nothing there!" Gutmann's tone was forceful. "You're staying! - You can still leave us at a later date if you see any particular opportunities for you to progress. At the moment, we're all still playing a game of blind man's buff!"

The Carcassonner pulled up one shoulder. It was a gesture of his embarrassment. "What would your friends say if you brought a Frenchman ..."

"A Frenchman? - Heaven forfend, arse and twine! - Since when do you have complexes about our nationality? - Don't you remember what brought us together and united us?" Gutmann got really angry: "That's silly stuff you're saying. Watch out, Frêne: if Reimer and I bring a French comrade with us, our other comrades will be delighted. Yes - rejoice! - Haven't we already had Frenchmen with us in this war?"

Germans fought for Europe? - You make me really angry! Be careful, Frêne: if we are to come out of our adventure in one piece, it will only be with the help of a powerful organisation. We realise that, don't we? - I will take it upon myself to bring you into a community of all the persecuted, if you are willing to keep quiet and remain true to your principles. You are a patriot - just like us; that is why we are all persecuted. You heard Belisse and me speak and showed no particular surprise. You confirmed that you know many things that only a few know at the moment. We do not need to legitimise ourselves. That was not necessary from the very beginning. We understand together and therefore understand each other! - Is that right?"

"Yes!" said Frêne firmly. His eyes had a warm lustre as he looked at the German. "Yes, that's right. We understand each other! ..."

"Then - it's a deal. You stay, Frêne!"

"If you want - with pleasure!"

"Come on, let's sit down! - I'll tell you in a few words how we got to Montségur ..."

The two men sat together in quiet conversation for some time. The man from Carcasson had always shown himself to be a master of restraint, but Gutmann's partial openings brought a look of great astonishment to his face. Now he found his speculations and other previously known clues

confirmed: there was a hidden power. He did not know its location, but he suspected many things. He understood Gutmann's caution, which was also based on a sense of duty. He had once been a soldier himself ...

"Then everything is fine now," said Reimer in his usual soldierly manner. "I firmly believe that we will all complement each other well in the time to come." With a slight sigh, he added: "May the Norns promise us good things! - At the moment, everything is rosy red; but who knows what lies ahead ..."

"Fight!" Gutmann said harshly.

It was quite late the next morning when the men woke up. The first was Frêne, whose nose was constantly buzzed by a large fly until he opened his eyes and let out a loud "merde".

His exclamation woke his sleeping companions, who both blinked uncomprehendingly at first before finding the real sense of being awake.

"God bless his own!" Reimer belted out as a morning greeting. He laughed heartily at the sleepy faces of his companions and lolled up comfortably.

"Gosh, such a fine bed! I feel like the Emperor of China ..."

"Pah," said Frêne. "I feel like the good Lord!"

"There is no more than the good Lord," said

Gutmann dryly. "So I feel modestly soldierly: really good!"

"So everyone's happy!" concluded Reimer.

"A very nice holiday in civilian life. The last few days haven't exactly been pleasant. And no bird will tell us what's to come!"

The men jumped out of bed and slipped into their clothes. Thoroughly refreshed after a cold morning wash, they were now hungry for breakfast. Reimer agreed to go on a reconnaissance mission, as he mischievously put it. Making his way downstairs, he stopped on the first floor in front of the hostess's front door and pressed the doorbell lightly. At the same moment, however, he heard a melodious laugh behind him.

"Buenos días, señor! - Cómo está usted - how are you?"

Juana Colón took the last flight of stairs up and stood next to Reimer, taking keys out of her handbag. "You'll have to excuse me, señor, if you had to wait a little. I had an urgent errand for a few minutes!"

She unlocked the front door and asked Linz to come with her. "We just wanted to check in with you as we're going out," said Reimer sheepishly. He wasn't even thinking about breakfast at the moment.

However, Juana knew only too well what she owed her guests. "You'll have to have breakfast with me for the time being. You

and your companions!" She paused thoughtfully for a moment. "You're visiting Bastia again today, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course, señorita!"

"If it's all right with you, you can take me with you!

Maybe Bastia has some wishes ..."

"Oh, with pleasure, señorita!"

"You must fetch your companions now! But wait another two minutes; if you really want to go out before midday, you have very little time left. If you have any errands, I can send old Rosalia!"

"We just wanted to take a stroll," said Reimer. This is our first time in Toledo."

"First time ever in Spain?"

"Yes, we already said that yesterday."

"Oh, men are always so terribly sober when it comes to business. You don't know what and you don't know how. It's the same with Bastia. You will know what business Bastia has! ..."

"Yes and no," Reimer evaded. Juana had stepped very close to him. Her glittering gaze confused him. "I don't really understand. But if you need my help here in Toledo ..." She took a step forwards and suddenly buckled with an exclamation. "My foot!" she complained.

Reimer immediately took her by the arm and asked anxiously: "What's happened, señorita?"

She grimaced slightly. "Oh, I've hurt my foot

represent. It's not bad, just a bit painful!" She tried to take a limping step and leant against Reimer. "It'll be fine in a minute, señor!"

Reimer felt the warmth of her body flowing over him like a tingling current and the fine scent of her hair made him breathe heavily. Juana Colón must have noticed his incipient arousal, because she looked at him enquiringly out of the corner of her eye as if she was expecting something.

Quite against his intention, more in obedience to an impulse, the man from Linz pressed Juana closer to him. She gave in for a moment, then released herself with downcast eyes. "Oh, señor!" she whispered.

Reimer tried to apologise, but Juana smiled forgivingly at him. She played a joke on him: "Oh - I thought the Alemanes were as cold as the ice on their mountains!"

The change in her feelings and behaviour made Reimer more insecure than before. Juana Colón seemed puzzling to him. He forced himself to adopt a more indifferent expression and replied: "Don't we northerners have hearts, señorita? We also admire beautiful women."

"Oh, admiration doesn't always have to be the language of the heart," Juana said lightly. "It's usually desire that attracts men!"

"You have a bad opinion, señorita! Desire is based on animality and primitiveness. Do you believe..."

She cut off Reimer's sentence. "Are you saying that you always let your heart do the talking?"

The man from Linz showed his white teeth. "What do you mean always? There's often a long way between admiration and love."

"Naturalmente," she said in an almost provocative tone. She looked at him askance.

"Señorita!"

"Well?" She **s t e p p e d** close to him again. Her painted mouth shone like a red hibiscus flower. Reimer felt drawn to her as if under compulsion. But before he could kiss her, she pulled away again. In a somewhat darkly modulated voice, she said: "You mustn't keep your companions waiting any longer. We can find time to chat later. Now you must have breakfast with me first. Then we'll have lunch not too late and go and visit Bastia. Bueno?"

"Yes," Reimer replied. "And if you are angry, señorita ..."

"Why, señor? They could be just as bad. They are dangerous, señor! ..."

"Oh no," parried the Linzer. "I'm only subject to worship!"

"You speak like a caballero from my country. But leave now, otherwise we'll miss lunchtime!" She turned round with a graceful flourish and hurried towards the kitchen. The Linzer had no choice but to close the door behind him with his eyebrows raised.

close the door and inform your comrades.

It was still early in the afternoon when the three men led by Juana Colón entered the Hospital de San Juan Bautista. The porter took no notice of the visitors and let them pass without being asked.

In a short time, they were standing in front of the ward that formed the anteroom to Bastia's room. The three men had hoped to find a different doctor on duty due to the usual rotation in hospitals, but were disappointed. It was the same doctor who had behaved rather strangely the day before. He had just come down from an upper floor, as if he had been aware of the visitors' presence.

When he saw Juana Colón, his face was a little friendlier than the day before. "You've come to see Señor Bastia?"

The new arrivals replied in the affirmative. Juana asked: "I hope the patient is all right, Doctor"

"You have to be satisfied," the doctor obviously evaded. "There are no more complications to worry about ..."

"We've brought the patient some fruit. You do give permission, don't you?"

"Fruit - of course! On the other hand, I must ask very much that not all three of you go along. So many visitors - you understand ..."

"What should we do?" Juana Colón looked at her companions.

"Are you coming with me, Señor Reimer?"

"I'm going with you, señorita!" Gutmann said between them.

"Please," said the Spanish woman. Turning to the doctor, she asked: "How long can we stay, doctor?"

"No longer than ten minutes," he explained briefly.

Gutmann scrutinised the doctor sharply, but he looked past him as if he didn't notice anything. As he opened the door to the ward and offered Juana the right of way, the doctor pushed his way between the two patients. For a moment, it seemed to Gutmann as if he had murmured a few words behind Juana. Reimer and Frene had stayed behind in the corridor. When they entered the sickroom where Bastia was lying, the patient looked wide-eyed at his visitors. Despite the whiteness of the bandage on his head, they could see that his face was very pale. He raised his right hand slightly, which was lying on the blanket.

Juana leant over him and ran a gentle hand over both of his hands, which were twitching restlessly.

"You poor thing! - How do you feel?" She sat down slowly and carefully on the edge of the bed, ignoring the doctor's disapproving looks. "Your friends are my guests and Señor Gutmann has come in with me."

"I'm pleased," Bastia said, turning his eyes to the visitor. "I'm very sorry that the accident happened to me, just at the time of the unexpected visit. But I don't think my friends will be better housed and looked after anywhere than at Juana's." He

looked at the Spaniard and tried to smile. "Will you be staying in Toledo for a few more days? I hope I'll be allowed to leave the hospital soon."

"Don't get impatient!" warned the doctor, who had positioned himself at the head of the bed as he had done the day before. He stood there like a guard protecting prisoners.

Bastia looked at his visitor in an answering manner, ignoring the doctor's words. Gutmann found it difficult to answer because it essentially depended on Bastia himself. After a moment's thought, he said: "A few days is probably not enough. However, our travel programme is limited in terms of time and we would still like to go south!" With the last words, he looked at Bastia urgently.

Bastia slowly closed her eyes and opened them again. Nobody would have been able to tell whether this was a reaction to the message or a sign of slight tiredness. He said slowly: "If you come south, you can visit a business friend of mine. He's in Algeciras. Is that on your route?"

Gutmann nodded. "That's where we want to go. That's a marvellous coincidence that won't cause any trouble. When we come back tomorrow, we want to discuss this matter right away."

Bastia was silent for a while. Suddenly he said: "Can I have a piece of paper and a pencil?"

The doctor pulled up. "I can't allow that, Señor Bastia. You're trying too hard!"

"Oh no," Gutmann replied mildly. "Pencils are not traverses and a sheet of paper is not a lead sheet. The pressure of a thumb and forefinger required to hold a pencil ..."

The doctor turned red. "I resent your criticism, señor!"

Unmoved, Gutmann handed Bastia what he had asked for, while replying: "Señor Doctor, I had a different idea of Spanish politeness!"

The doctor looked at his wristwatch with a demonstrative gesture. "You have two minutes left, señor!"

Juana Colón had made no attempt to mediate in any way. When she saw that Bastia was trying to write a few words on the paper he had been given, she slipped him her flat handbag as a writing pad. He thanked her quietly and scribbled a few words in a somewhat whimsical script on the sheet, which he suddenly crumpled up and handed to Gutmann in his fist.

Gutmann quickly grabbed it, closed his fingers around the note like a fist and sank his hand into his skirt pocket, not letting go of the paper. He was quicker than the Spanish woman, who also wanted to grab it. She was openly offended by her rebuffed willingness to help.

"Enough now!" the doctor trumped categorically. "The time has long since passed."

Juana took Bastia's hand and stroked it. "We'll be back tomorrow. Enjoy the fruit

and don't think too much. Hasta luego!"

Gutmann looked at Bastia. "All the best, señor! See you tomorrow."

"Si, mañana - tomorrow!" The patient closed his eyes again and slowly turned his head towards the wall.

When Bastia's visitors stepped into the corridor, Gutmann and the doctor stood face to face. The Spaniard's gaze was threatening and cold. Gutmann showed only a hint of a mocking smile. This irritated the doctor. He was about to say something to give vent to his heart. But just at that moment, the Spanish woman stood between the two men. She distracted them with a few calm words and politely thanked the doctor for his endeavours on behalf of the patient. She shook his hand and the men just bowed their heads as he turned to leave.

While Juana Colón reported to Reimer and Frêne on Bastia's condition and walked down the stairs with the men at her side, Gutmann stayed a few steps behind and took the note out of his pocket to read it. There was nothing more on it than a name and an address in Cádiz. Surely the next post in a network of trusted people. Bastia felt unable to take action at the moment and directed the group onwards. This was also the most important thing Gutmann expected. It should be easier for him to find a message from Küpper in the south. He memorised the name and address, then put the note back in his pocket. At the next available opportunity, he wanted to

destroy.

Frêne suddenly stopped in the courtyard. "Why don't you wait for me for a moment? I have something to enquire about in the prison office." Before his companions could ask any further questions, the Carcassonner hurried back into the main building with long strides.

"Shall we wait right here?" asked Juana.

Reimer fought back. "Better not, señorita! - Hospital air is not very inviting. Let's go out onto the paseo instead."

As the two men stepped out of the portal with the Spanish woman, three civilians stood in front of it. A few steps to the side was a closed car.

One of the civilians lifted his hat slightly. "Dispense me, señores, may I ask for your identity cards!"

Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. Nothing could be done here. They probably had their passports with them, but a check must have revealed that the entry stamp was missing.

When Juana began to rummage around in her handbag, the speaker waved her off. "Only the señores!"

Gutmann and the man from Linz presented their passports. While one of them leafed through them and looked at the entries, the other two men came very close. They held both hands in their coat pockets, their hats pulled down low on their foreheads.

"Why are you stopping us?" Gutmann asked.

"Policia!" said the speaker briefly. "Control of foreigners."

"And how do you know that we, of all people, are foreigners?"

The man looked up puzzled for a moment. "You can see that," he then said.

"Strange," Gutmann criticised. "In front of a hospital of all places! It would be more logical in front of a railway station."

The man had finished checking his passport and he pocketed both documents. "Señores, I'm sorry, but you have to come with me!"

One of the other men approached the speaker and whispered something to him.

"Alto ahí!" he stopped. "Where is the third man?"

"The third man? I see," Gutmann said, stretching. "Are you already that well informed?"

The Spaniard bit his lips. "Three of you were seen coming in here," he said. "What about him?"

"He had already left earlier," Reimer interjected. If they were unlucky, at least Frêne should get away with it, thought the Linzer. He silently hoped that the Frenchman wouldn't show himself too soon.

"Imposiblemente - impossible!"

"Why?" Reimer acted offended.

"Then we would have seen him come out!"

"Couldn't he have chosen a different outcome?" Biting irony underlined this sentence.

The Spaniards tried to overlook the inner courtyard of the hospital, but apart from two spiritual sisters

No one was there. Only Reimer had the impression for a moment that he caught a glimpse of Frêne's face behind a window pane, who immediately withdrew again. If the Linzer was not mistaken, then the Frenchman seemed to have been warned.

"Do you know anything, señorita?" One of the Spaniards tried to question her.

Juana Colón just shrugged her shoulders. Gutmann thought for a second that she wanted to say something, but when she felt the eyes of her companions on her, she apparently gave up.

"Please, señores!" The Spaniards were always polite. With a wave of their hand, they pointed to the car.

The two Germans turned to Juana to say goodbye. Reimer was a little pale, Gutmann said: "The whole thing is a formality, señorita. Don't worry about it. We hope to be back soon."

The young woman smiled encouragingly. "I'll try to find your friend in the city. I'm sure everything will work out."

One of the civilians ripped open the flap. The spokesman sat down in the centre of the back seats and had the supposed Swiss sit on either side of him. The other Spaniards sat in the front.

The driver stepped on the accelerator and the car started up. However, if the detainees had thought that they would be taken to the police station by the shortest route, they were surprised to find that they were wrong. The car turned sharply to the left and through Calle de las

carreteras, he roared past the low rows of houses at quite a speed.

After the end of the road, the driver turned half-left into the Paseo del Safont. The town soon came to an end and rows of fields and trees appeared on both sides of the country road.

"Where is the journey going, senores?" Gutmann asked anxiously,

"We will soon reach our destination," the spokesperson evaded.

"Outside Toledo?"

"Not quite."

"Do the police work in vineyards?" mocked Reimer. The surprising twist in their fate had initially depressed him greatly, but now vigour and gallows humour had regained the upper hand. The Spaniard just grinned. It was not clear whether it was at the question itself or at the awkward way of expressing it in Spanish. Gutmann's mind was working feverishly. There was something wrong about the whole incident. The journey out of Toledo could never lead to an office. He turned to the speaker:

"Señor, you have our passports! - May I also ask you for your identity card?"

The interviewee remained silent and looked rather impassively out of the car window. Gutmann repeated his request a little more insistently: "All over the world, police officers are obliged to show their identity cards on request in case of action!"

"Bueno!" said the Spaniard curtly. "Sancho, show the

Señores our identity card!"

The man next to the driver turned round and made a grimace of derision. He held a black burnished pistol in his right hand. "Nuestro testimonio - our identity card!"

The German officers realised immediately that they were not in the hands of policemen. They had fallen into a clumsy trap that had no claim to even modest originality. No doubt the story was connected with the Bastia case.

"You could bite your arse," growled Reimer angrily. They had no weapons with them. They had kept the pistols in their luggage and, besides, resistance would have been futile at the moment.

Gutmann's forehead was wrinkled, his mouth was narrow. He wasn't paying attention to Reimer's emotional outburst, but was looking for connections. For the moment, he was resigned to not being able to do anything about the men. An involuntary movement almost made him realise that there was a crumpled note in his pocket that he didn't want anyone to find.

Individual Spanish country houses whizzed past. A team of oxen passed, now and again a few people. Suddenly the carriage turned into a side lane and stopped in front of a small, inconspicuous house half hidden behind bushes.

"We're getting out," said the spokesperson.

"Gladly," the Linzer grumbled ironically and squeezed himself

out of the car.

"Veo, que es usted una persona razonable! - You are very sensible!" the Spaniard replied.

Gutmann followed, and by now the men from the front seats were also outside. They had their hands in their pockets and it was easy to see that they each had an index finger on the trigger of a pistol,

"Vamos!" The speaker signalled to the officers to follow him.

The men walked through a small garden gate, took twenty steps along a bumpy, narrow path and stopped in front of a simple wooden door. The spokesman for the Spaniards knocked three times at short intervals, while the two other men positioned themselves behind the men they had taken with them to prevent them from escaping.

A voice was heard from inside the house. The Germans did not understand the words, but their leader answered briefly. The door opened and a cross-eyed man stepped aside to let them in. His face was expressionless and showed no surprise.

When the door closed behind the entrants, it was quite dark. Gutmann used this moment in a flash to pull the note out of his coat pocket with one hand, crumple it up again and put it in his mouth. As he did so, he made a small half-sided movement and staggered

in front of him. His movement was therefore not particularly noticeable in the semi-darkness.

He felt himself being pushed forwards and almost fell over a wooden staircase that started abruptly and led downwards. The Linzer in front of him had also found reason to curse half aloud.

"Atención!" warned the guide, rather belatedly.

Now Gutmann began to retch. As he slowly stumbled down the stairs, sweat beaded on his forehead. Never in his life had he imagined that swallowing a ball of paper could be so disgusting. He was certain that this paper would have caused him a great deal of trouble and would also have put his confidant in extraordinary danger. The strange case of Bastia was the link to all combinations.

Another dark corridor with only the meagre source of light from above. The Spaniard in front knocked again on a door that looked like nothing more than a dark spot on the gloomy wall. A caw came in reply.

Then a bright light suddenly shone in the men's eyes. The door had been pushed open, revealing a large room that was well furnished beyond all expectations. The first thing they saw were high bookshelves that reached up to the ceiling, crammed with volumes, and in the centre of the room a huge desk, behind which sat a strange figure.

You would have thought you were looking at a model of Ahasuerus. The man facing the entrants was tall and gaunt, and two dark eyes glowed like coals from deep sockets in a face criss-crossed by countless wrinkles. The whole head had something ascetic about it. Strongly defined lips were half concealed by a grey beard, hair of the same colour hung down the sides almost to the man's shoulders, and a semicircular cap sat on his head. A fleshy and curved nose completed the image of a pure Israelite.

The Spaniard who had taken the passports approached the desk and placed the documents on the plate. "Los papeles de los extranjeros!"

The old man took the passports and opened the one on top. Then Gutmann stepped forward; Reimer stood beside him and watched.

"Un momento, señor! - What do you care about our passports? - You are not an authority. And anyway ..."

"Lento - slowly!" A lean and bony hand commanded silence. The man's gesture was so compelling and impressive that Gutmann broke off the sentence. The old man continued: "You are understandably surprised, senores. But in these times, the strangest things are closer to the commonplace than the outlandish. Don't protest and accept the facts! People are interested in you and it could even be a great advantage for you!"

"What's the old eagle owl talking about?" Reimer asked his companion half aloud. With his poor knowledge of Spanish, he hadn't been able to make out the last few sentences clearly.

The old man pursed his lips and pulled the corners of his mouth apart. A very strange kind of silent laughter. The tips of his moustache trembled slightly. Then he said abruptly: "We can speak German!"

Reimer was in no way embarrassed. It was only right that the man in front of him should know the mood of the unwilling guests. "That will make it much easier to clarify this mysterious invitation," he said.

The old man nodded. The Adam's apple in his scrawny neck bounced up and down. Then he hooted: "Your passports, senores, are good. Whether they are correct is another question." He leafed through both documents more carefully. Then he squinted one eye briefly and asked: "What's a Mielchmaucherli?"

Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. The old man in front of them was more than he seemed. But while Gutmann furrowed his brows in annoyance, Reimer guessed at random: "A cup of milk, señor!"

"No, dear confederates for Papiers' sake. Not a cup, but a bucket!" He leaned back in his high-backed chair and let out a restrained chuckle. With a lack of knowledge of the country, the best passports were worthless. But no one could guess what was going on behind his forehead with the sunken temples.

Gutmann pushed forward: "Your examination is in honour, señor, but it is completely inappropriate! Despite your introduction, it is up to us to ask questions; you mentioned earlier that we are of great interest. Who is this 'one'? And why this violent kind of so-called invitation? Wouldn't it have been easier in the form of an announcement and discussion in a public place in the city?"

"I am Rabbi Eli and I very rarely come into the city. And I very much doubt whether you would have accepted an invitation on a ticket. And as for your first question: they are interested - they were sent! So two parallel cases. So there's no need to say more!"

"Is that so?" Gutmann's voice sounded stretched. "What do you think we are?"

"They are couriers of your organisation!" The old man's head jerked forwards like a bird of prey, his eyes taking on a basilisk look. Gutmann's face remained unmoved as he asked: "Do you want to continue your measures and have us searched?"

"No, gentlemen. I don't think your organisation is so stupid as to assume that courier bags will be hung around your necks. Senior Bastia doesn't have an archive either." A grumble accompanied the last words.

"So everything is connected to Bastia?" Gutmann found his thoughts confirmed more quickly than expected. The old man beckoned to a Spaniard. "Move two chairs for the señores to my desk. Stay in the

I'll have you available in a moment. The rest of you can go upstairs for the time being!" At another hint from the rabbi, the officers sat down.

"Our time is a little short," Gutmann tried to coax the old man out of his stupor. "Can't we get straight to the heart of the matter?"

Silence. The rabbi slumped down a little and pondered. The old man's bluntness astounded the officers. The next few words had to clarify things and decide their fate.

The old man's eyelids, which were pulled halfway over his eyes, opened again and his gaze swept over the men in front of him. "The sand runs and measures the time until the man with the hipper stops the measure. Yet time and sand are eternal. We are all puppets of a short life, but thoughts and events work in space and remain. He who professes power and serves power gains value in life more easily!" His eyelids twitched as he broke off again.

"What is power?" Gutmann retorted. "The highest thing about power is value. But in the reversal of values, power has been degraded to a means. Power now means domination per se. Domination over everything and by all means. Any philosophical definition is now just an embarrassment."

"That's why I said: whoever serves her wins!"

"And which is the right power to serve?"

"The strongest!"

"That requires a cosmopolitan attitude."

"Why not?"

"And which is the strongest power?" The old man took a deep breath. "The power that reaches from the temple of Jerusalem to midnight!"

"And what about the power that reaches from midnight to Jerusalem?"

The old man covered when he heard these words. Slowly, he replied: "This power has a soul, but no body."

"You don't know that," Gutmann replied. "And besides - a soul lives forever, a body dies."

"Today the blue flag flies in New York with the map of midnight and around it is the laurel of victory."

"Just as if the North were flying a flag with the moon in it." Reimer interjected fiercely.

"There is no so-called North," the rabbi told him. "The North is the USA and its rival, the Soviets!"

"And where would the soul of the north be then?" Gutmann picked up the thread of the conversation again.

"The Nordic soul is the new Ahasuerus. But the chosen people return to their old homeland!"

"And when the room is filled with the wandering soul of the north?"

"The magic of the Ark of the Covenant will prevent that!" The old man stretched **up and his eyes grew wide.**

"The time has been fulfilled." Gutmann replied. "The

The charging of the Ark of the Covenant as an accumulator of astral power has lost its magical power with the advance of the Tyr Circle. It is still effective, but its end is in sight!"

"The end?" The rabbi grumbled. "Who's talking about an end? Everything is just beginning!" His eyes fixed piercingly on Gutmann. "You know a lot, sir from Switzerland!"

"Why not?" said Gutmann, seemingly equally valid.

"I was not mistaken," said the old man. "When I heard that Señor Bastia had been visited by three men, I knew immediately that they must be people in the know. Where and who is the third man?"

"It's best if you ask him yourself."

The rabbi ignored the irony. He did not return to his question, as a forced answer seemed worthless to him. It could be true or not. Suddenly he asked: "Would you enter the service of victory?"

"Victory?" Gutmann asked slowly. "We only have chaos in this world. Not a trace of victory. At most, nihilism ..."

"This is just a failed experiment. The flag of the UN flies above all this. Is it not victory when the covenant of nations is established and equality before Sinai becomes the law of the world? Equality in service for the building of the world?"

"We would be serving an imagination if we served your

would fulfil the request. There are neither winners nor losers in today's chaos. There are only the superior and the inferior. There are terms against each other, but only the bayonets have decided!"

"Would you rather see a sparkling bayonet point before your eyes than have one yourself?"

"You speak very openly! So we are supposed to submit to the apparent power?"

"Yes, because it is the real power! It is not apparent, because it already rules the world!"

"The Western world, you say, Rabbi! The East has become insubordinate to this concept. Moreover, this world building is a sober organisational construction for a higher end. To stay with our previous statement: a body without a soul! A world can only be given a new face and a new form if it is given a new ethos. And this ethos can only come from midnight, as it always has!"

"The world has the Christian ethos and the commandments of Moses." The rabbi's voice had a dark tone.

"In doing so, we have made our contribution to shaping the world."

"That was a bad contribution for the peoples of the West," Reimer interrupted the old man, "because they all more or less lost their national consciousness and helped to prepare the levelling chaos of the present day. And all because all values were denied, the earth and life itself and the people only more

reach for the ladder to heaven. That's what's killing the West!"

The old man shook his head. He clung to the back of his chair with his hands as he continued. "This development was premeditated. It was the only way to take away the arrogance of the peoples and make them willing to renounce the rights granted to them by nature."

"What rights do you mean?" Gutmann asked.

"The arrogant right to defy Yahweh's will!"

"You want to bind the power of the north for this reason?"

The old man raised both hands imploringly. His lower lip twitched before he found a new approach to continue. "You have to make this power subservient to all humanity ..."

"Subjugate?" Gutmann asked, stretching.

Like a turtle, the rabbi's head jerked back between his hunched shoulders.

"We can also create the world together that Moses promised us. Nothing would be more natural than that. For centuries, Central Europe became the second homeland of the Jewish people and our clans still bear their German names in all parts of the world. Despite all the contrasts par excellence, there is a bond here. We are the antipodes between the peoples who face each other and yet need each other. When the heart of the West is united with the Holy Land of humanity to form a great

synthesis can be brought together, then the building would stand forever!"

Gutmann made a very thoughtful face. "That's a fallacy, Rabbi! Antipodes cannot merge unless the laws of eipolarity and dualism cancel each other out. You are right about one thing: Aryans and Hebrews are antipodes and both are decisive factors. The question is therefore: not synthesis, which would be impossible, but equalisation and demarcation."

"We would be the losers," the rabbi panted.

"To each his own," said Gutmann.

"This would create a peaceful equilibrium from opposing force fields and security for your people. That would be a task in the history of mankind; the Hebrews would no longer be a ferment of decomposition among the other peoples, as Mommsen put it, but a people that would find itself anew."

The old man tried to straighten up, but fell back into his seat, agitated. "You want to send my people back into the desert?"

"You should never turn back history. It repeats itself all too often anyway. All peoples need peace and the harmony of living side by side. Therefore, let no nation reach for the North unless it comes from the North itself. Then everything will be able to follow the path of destiny!"

"The path of destiny only leads over the high seat of humanity," the rabbi murmured thoughtfully.

"Where the ravens are guessers."

"Hugin and Munin," whispered Reimer. "Think and remember! Now the ravens are at work, doing what the eagles failed to do. And the ravens murmur what they have heard from the Ur."

"We all have ears to hear!" The old man's voice rose again. "The whispering from the Ur will benefit us when the ravens fly."

Gutmann did not give Reimer an answer. "They're already flying and whispering. But you have not heard the raters. The runes murmur through the black messengers from the Ur, the Ur-da. And it is the language of our blood circle and therefore only audible to us!"

The rabbi closed his eyes briefly. "And what do you hear that I don't?"

"That a new time is dawning! Just as the German-Dutch scholar Herman Wirth discovered the Holy Urschrift of mankind and thus closed the ring of a mighty retrospective, just as Rudolf John Gorsleben unveiled the last secrets of the runes and revealed the deepest meaning of all the signs and traditions scattered around the world, so Aryan people will always find their way back to the roots of their existence and draw from them the destiny and obligation for a future. And the ravens will help!"

Now it seemed as if the old man was asleep. Barely noticeable

his lips moved. After a short while, he said: "You disappoint me greatly, senores. I had hoped to convince you of the reality of the situation. It would have been to your advantage. Unfortunately, you know a lot! You are dangerous."

"You have no reason to be disappointed. We've spared you a cat-and-mouse game and taken a clear **s t a n c e** ! It's absurd to assume anything more about us. We don't have the importance of the people you're looking for!"

"Then what did you want with Señor Bastia?"

"We can say that openly: we need his support!"

The rabbi screwed up his ascetic face in disbelief.

"I know that Bastia has been waiting for a message for some time. A modest enquiry with him was unfortunately unsuccessful. He had a little accident ..."

"Will we be able to do the same?" There was a subtle irony to Gutmann's question.

"I don't think so," the old man replied frankly, as the sentence left all possibilities open. "Do you want to answer a question for me?"

"That depends."

"Report on your flying discs!"

"Ahhh - ! What do you know about it?"

"Little."

"Even a little is already too much! I refuse to say anything about that. I know nothing ..."

"Yes - I'm sure you know a thing or two!"

"We saw the luminous discs in the sky, which are signs. If you mean these? ..."

"We all still know nothing about these flying discs! Nobody can say when we will succeed in unveiling this secret. They could just as easily come from an esoteric centre as they could be messengers from outer space."

The Linzer was unable to overcome his astonishment. "Messengers from outer space?"

The rabbi swayed his head. "There are still many mysteries. But the German flying discs are not a mystery: they are just somewhere and few people saw them. This mystery could easily be revealed."

"All in good time," Gutmann interrupted him. "It's the same with this thing as with the Manisolas!"

"The Manisolas?" The old man's eyes widened. "What you call Manisolas are the tables of Solomon!"

"That is your interpretation. Solomon's table was among the treasure of the Goths and later fell into the hands of the Moors. Some time later, Beidhawi mentioned this sacred device in the commentary to the Koran on the fifth sura as a motif of a table coming from heaven. That's all!" Gutmann concluded briefly.

"Aih, aih," Eli egged, "that's not all! - The tables are there - not one, but many! They encircle the earth and promise a new temple."

"I repeat: you are wrong, Rabbi! The Manisolas - I

do not speak of the flying spinning tops - manifest the White Power. Their increasing number indicates the significance of the dawning Aquarian Age. They illuminate the world, they are the salvation of Helios, the Aryan-Greek sun. The brightest, the whitest. May mankind make a true peace. - When the blue flag, the colour of the Nordic Atlantis, with the circumpolar symbol in white, the colour of the north and of salvation, is placed in the hands of the called ones from the midnight circle, banishment and terror will give way. Not before, Rabbi, for the current bearers of our symbols reach for the North for the sake of power, not for the sake of contemplation. And there is no responsibility without reflection. Even childbearing, the new childbirth, will still bring humanity many torments, because it denies high breeding and pays homage to fornication. And all this because the Chosen One has been banished for a mission from the homeland of the primordial white race to the desert of Asia Minor. Whatever else may happen, the signs in the sky are the beginning of an unstoppable development. Whether we want to serve or not, what is destined to happen will happen. And to your other opinion, about the messengers from outer space, this can only testify to our connection with the cosmos. But we know nothing about it. We can only speculate. There could be a third reality to two realities ..."

The old man curled up again, as if he was frightened.

"You know more than is good to know! You know the
power,

that still stands against us and you are of it. You spoke of the peace of humanity; only those who have power can bring peace. And didn't I say that we were ready to synthesise and unite our peoples?"

"Can you mix the North Sea with the sand of a desert?" asked Reimer.

"Aih," the rabbi said, "that's it; the sea is stronger than the sand. But Yahweh is even stronger!"

The Linzer narrowed his eyes. "Yahweh is a vengeful god who can never promise peace. He is El Shaddai, the Sheitan; the Satan, the shadow, the harm, who wants to devour all nations because he is a jealous God. But God, the true God, cannot be jealous because he has no gods beside him. - Only when El Shaddai is overthrown, like the Golden Calf once was ..."

"No, no!" screeched Eli. "That's enough! You blaspheme the God who has preserved my people. And he will also bend your pride, because you are rejecting the hand that can lead you out of chaos!"

"You're wrong again, Rabbi!" Reimer continued: "You offer your hand because you want to secure power. But we, we take the hand that secures peace. Therein lies a difference. In addition to power, this also requires the good will of all those who have come to their senses. They do not yet have a god, but an idol! Who would bring the perfection for a new ethos that humanity so urgently needs? You put the world on two

Pillars of the cult to rule them like a house. We do not build, but subordinate ourselves to the harmonious laws of the cosmos and yet we are still masters in the process. But what is called building per se is the act of a vocation."

"We all think we are called!" The rabbi swayed his upper body jerkily, as if he were following the magical rhythm of a prayer in front of the wall of a prayer house. The protruding veins in his bony hands pulsed strongly. "We all have our own faith, which, I confess, can hardly be manoeuvred any further ..."

"That would be even more waste. You shouldn't allow this with people either. For racial levelling is the forerunner of general levelling. However, levelling is the destruction of the upper values and the elevation of the lower ones. This is the beginning of the descent of the human race. As mentioned a while ago: destruction of high breeding, confession of fornication, an arrogance against the light-giving God, the Enlightener!"

The old man sat quietly again, but his breath rattled. He was silent for a few minutes, his eyes half closed again. "Your German language has a saying: Every man is the architect of his own fortune. You have chosen a part that will cause you hardship and perhaps futile endeavour. Here in Toledo you have already felt a power against which you are powerless. I said before: You know a lot! I would have

but your knowledge makes you superior! I almost want to believe that you would be able to take the blue flag out of our hands. And what you have confessed could possibly mean death. For even chaos eats those who fall into its arms and are not on their guard." His hands reached for the passports in front of him. "I want to let you go, but I must be careful for my own safety. When you came, I expected otherwise. My expectations have been proven wrong, my assumptions were wrong. What shall I do with you now, Servores?"

"If you just want to let us go, everything is uncomplicated!" said Reimer. "We will say: it was even a pleasure, señor!"

The rabbi smiled thinly. "I don't want to get into trouble with the authorities. After all, you didn't come to me entirely voluntarily ..."

"We are not interested in an authority," Gutmann assured with a convincing tone.

"I want to believe you. But that's no guarantee!"

"Those who create complications must also be able to solve them!"

"When do you want to leave Toledo?" The rabbi's gaze was tense.

"As quickly as possible. Maybe tomorrow, maybe in three days. We don't know for sure at the moment."

The old man handed them the passports. "Here, take them!"

I believe that it would be in your interest to leave the country as soon as possible. You don't have visas and anyway: if you come into conflict with the authorities, even for reasons of circumstance, it is always unpleasant and can even cause unexpected difficulties. If you take intelligence and logic into account, then you could refrain from drawing more complicated conclusions ..."

"You can do that," Gutmann supported the old man's considerations.

"And you reject irrevocably?" Eli asked
Eli asked again.

"Irrevocable!"

"That's a great pity." The old man shook his head regretfully. "There should be no hatred between us."

"There is no hatred between the recognisers of our peoples. We all obey only the destiny of our blood and are subject to a development that is causally determined. Everything is resolved in the realisation of measure and reason. The chaos of the world means that all people have to follow a path of purification. Your people will also have to search for new laws if they are not to remain aloof. And where there are seekers, there is no hatred."

"Our laws have stood the test of time for thousands of years," said Eli. "They have made my people tough and invincible."

"Hasn't it always involved heavy sacrifices

have to? Your people will always have a sword point in their necks as long as they act according to the old laws. He who climbs higher than he deserves always falls low."

The old man let out a chuckling laugh. "That's right. That's why the power of the north room has collapsed."

"You are wrong again! You are only counting on external success, which is changeable and fleeting. We have already spoken of this before: You are symbolically and actually reaching for the north because you have not overcome its power and wish to banish it. You have triumphed over one generation and will be threatened again by the next. Is that what you call victory? The wheel of history rolls and it brings destruction when it is driven by unreason."

The old man's slender fingers gripped the back of his chair tightly. The wood creaked. His face looked tired and his lips twitched slightly. "Go, Servores, go! We can't settle this. We decide nothing. We all serve a faith and a trust and cannot leave the fate-shaping law. Here - take your passports, go and be silent!"

Gutmann reached for both documents and took them. "We will leave Toledo immediately and travel to Barcelona. And we'll keep quiet - as long as we're in Spain!"

"That will be good for your safety," Eli said dryly. "And one more thing: I ask you, señores, to

to have my men drive you back a little way towards the city centre. The car will be ready in half an hour."

"We are dependent on your offer," Gutmann replied.

"Muy bien - we get on really well!" Eli waved to the Spaniard squatting in the corner. "Take the señores up to the little parlour, Pepe! You and the driver take the señores back to the paseo. In half an hour, because it will be dark enough outside by then. In the meantime, treat the señores to a glass of wine in the parlour!"

The Spaniard looked somewhat astonished. He had not understood the conversation, which had been conducted in German, but the turn of events seemed strange to him. A little more politely than some time ago, he asked the strangers: "Will you follow me, señores!"

Gutmann and Reimer stood up. The former said: "We've let you down, Rabbi! But to be honest, the mistake was yours. Adios!"

Reimer also gave a curt greeting. The old man looked after the departing men. When the door had closed behind the men, he stared at the top of the desk in front of him. Inaudible to anyone else's ear, he groaned: "Waih, my eyes! I see fog everywhere. And the future is as dark as the long night of Babylon. The barbarians know much and do not all dance around the Golden Calla. Ayh, ayh. Who will be master of the spirit? Ardonai or Lucibel?" He laid both hands on the table and buried his head between them. "I

am tired. Unspeakably tired. There should be peace ..."

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