



WILHELM LANDIG

volume 2

IDOLS  
AGAINST

**THULE**

# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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## THE JOURNEY

I'm going across the sea

... Escort me, Minne.

I am a Minnepilger, a pilgrim to  
her. I only want to sing about her,  
Until she hears me.

Before I die ...

Jaufre Rudel (Troubadour)

The dark staircase creaked as the men climbed up, Pepe in the lead. Gutmann and Reimer felt their way forwards with their hands, their eyes not adjusting so quickly to the darkness of the basement. In the upper corridor, the Spaniard pushed open a door and asked the strangers to enter after switching on the lights.

The parlour Eli had described was a large room that, contrary to expectations, was furnished with exquisite taste. Old carved furniture, visibly valuable pictures in gold frames, heavy burgundy curtains, antique vases and statuettes, everything testified to wealth and an appreciation of art. The two officers did not have time to scrutinise the paintings in detail, but they would not have been surprised if they had found a genuine Murillo or Velasquez among them. A parlour of old Spain.

A call from Pepes brought in the old house factotum, which

had opened the front door when they arrived. "EI maestre wishes to consider the two señores as his guests. Pour some wine, Viejo!"

"A órdenes del maestre!" The servant took two ornately cut crystal glasses from a box and poured a heavy Xeres wine, as the label on the bottle indicated. He placed the bottle and glasses on a tray and served the drink with the good manners of a lordly servant.

Gutmann looked at his comrade. He said in German: "Careful, my dear fellow! We have to avoid drinking. You never know what the wine actually c o n t a i n s . "

Although the Spaniard Pepe didn't understand a word of German, he seemed to have grasped the meaning of the foreign words immediately. He had the servant bring a third glass and refill it. "If the señores allow - á salud! - It is excellent and harmless," he added insinuatingly.

The involuntary guests sipped cautiously. The sparkling wine was indeed a savoury treat and a pearl for connoisseurs of fine wines. After putting down his glass, Pepe instructed the valet to get the driver ready. "Tell Sebastiano to drive us out of town in half an hour!"

From outside, the dark evening glinted through the windows. As Reimer let his eyes wander aimlessly, he thought he saw a face staring through the panes into the room. When he looked more closely,

the head disappeared as if a shadow had vanished. "I feel like I'm in Merlin's magic garden," said the Linzer to his companion. "You can hardly find any boundaries between truth and dream. A kidnapping in broad daylight like in a gangster play from Chicago, being smuggled into a disguised alcove with an Ahasuerus in the flesh and now my overstimulated nerves are already making me believe I'm seeing faces and ghosts."

"I don't even think you can stand the smell of wine," Gutmann joked. "When faces dance in front of your nose..."

"Rubbish!" growled Reimer. "Hey, Señor Pepe, - perdoneme, but I don't know your name in the way it's used among caballeros, - was it your car that brought Señor Bastia to the hospital?"

"Don't make these superfluous enquiries," Gutmann reprimanded his comrade. "It's a good thing you're used to speaking German. At least that way the guy didn't understand you."

Pepe had been listening attentively to what the two of them were saying, trying to make sense of their tone of voice or individual words. When he heard Bastia's name, he narrowed his eyes slightly. A lurking expression crossed his face, which did not escape the guests' notice.

Against his better judgement, Gutmann now pushed forward himself: "What was the deal with Bastia?"

"Muy simple - very simple." Pepe grinned after this laconic explanation.

"He was well looked after," Gutmann returned ambiguously.

"Si, si, señor. And he has a very capable doctor."

"Ah, you know him?"

"Naturalmente," the Spaniard replied casually, "He protects Señor Bastia like his most precious piece of jewellery."

"We've noticed that." The sarcasm in Gutmann's words did not escape the Spaniard.

"You should be satisfied. Accidents are often related to carelessness ..."

"Si, señor Pepe. So let me advise you: don't be reckless either ..."

"Mil gracias, señor. I will be very careful!"

The opponents smiled at each other in a friendly manner. Both had little to hide and played with their knowledge. Pepe was not unintelligent and possessed mother wit. The men occasionally took a small sip of the oily wine and overlooked the strangeness of their get-together. After a while, the driver Sebastiano stuck his head in at the door. "Acarreamos, señores - we're going!"

"Bueno - let's drink up!" Pepe raised his glass to the guests before emptying it. "Pues, feliz viaje - I wish you a good onward journey!"

As they were about to leave the room, the three men suddenly heard a stifled scream.

"What was that?" asked Reimer. Pepe listened, then stepped out into the dark corridor and peered. When nothing moved, he called out: "Hey. Viejo, where are you?"

"Acà bajo - down here," came from the descending staircase."

Pepe was reassured. "The old man must have hit his head or shin in this night cage again," he said. Meanwhile, the old servant came up the creaking steps from the basement.

"The door is open," he explained gently. "Sebastiano is already outside by the car!"

"We already know that, mate! Sebastiano just called us."

The servant pushed the door of the room wide open, so that a broad flood of light brightened the corridor. "Servidor de Usted - Always your servant, señores!" he said politely, with a perfect bow that would have done honour to a courtier. The three men stepped past him into the quiet evening.

The figure of the driver emerged from the silhouettes of the bushes lining the garden path and hurried ahead of the men behind. There was a soft click of the car's clatter and then a whirring of the starter motor. The departure was prepared quickly and with a precision that bordered on military precision.

The iron garden gate, a recognisably beautiful piece of ironwork despite the evening darkness, was also already open. The moon rising in the sky painted a bluish patina on the narrow path that led to the road and the contours of the black carriage were iridescent. The twinkling lights of the stars enlivened the velvety blue night of the Castilian sky. The lights in the

The pale light bathing the surrounding mountain ranges gave the landscape the image of a fairy tale, with Toledo's reddish yellow eyes shining like pearls in the centre.

For Pepe, the magical image of his country was an everyday occurrence. Unmoved, he took two steps forwards and opened the door invitingly. He waited, this time far more politely than on the journey here and, once Gutmann and Reimer were seated inside the car, took a seat at the front with the driver. "Adelante Sebastiano," he urged.

Gutmann and Reimer were surprised to see Pepe leaning towards the driver. At the same moment, the car that had just started up stopped again with an abrupt jerk, "No movimiento!" the driver shouted at the rebounding Pepe. The man's right hand came out of his coat pocket and an object in his hand dug hard into the hip of the man who had just got in. "Put your hands behind your head!"

The driver's voice sounded harsh and commanding. Pepe hurried to comply with this request. At the sound of the voice, Gutmann and Reimer drove together at the same time.

"Frêne!"

It really was the Carcassonner. He waved backwards briefly and only allowed himself a quick turn of the head. Then he stepped on the accelerator again and, steering with his left hand, drove off quickly. With increasing speed, the car shot off without regard for the



The car travelled forwards on a relatively poor track, so that the occupants lost their seating stability despite the suspension. Reimer realised the new situation a second quicker than Gutmann. He leant forward and grabbed Frêne's right hand. Taking the pistol from his hand, he freed his right so that he could drive the car safely.

Now the Spaniard could lower his arms again. The roles had changed between the journey here and the return journey. Pepe was alone and powerless. Behind him now sat a man with a threatening pistol and next to him, in Sebastiano's place, a stranger. He could work out that this must be the third man he was looking for. Sebastiano's disappearance and the stranger in the car were puzzles he couldn't solve at the moment.

The car drove recklessly fast up to the country road and then turned towards the city centre. The headlights were turned up, their bright beams stabbing into the balmy night and eating up the ribbon of road. The car's clutch worked perfectly and the engine sang smoothly and reassuringly.

After a few minutes, at a place with few houses just outside Toledo, the Carcassonner stopped the car with screeching brakes. "Now," he said to Pepe, "get out of the car!"

The Spaniard didn't need to be told twice. He instinctively realised that this was the best way to get away with it. Without a

Without saying a word, he jumped into the darkness at the side. A quiet "diablo" came back into the car, then Frêne drove off again, leaving the surprised man behind. Before the Carcassonner increased the speed and shifted the clutch, he called out to his companions: "Don't ask, mes camarades. We have no time to lose. I'll explain everything later and report back!"

Houses now lined the road, blurring the landscape. People were once again crowding both sides of the road, forcing us to slow down. Frêne showed an excellent sense of direction. The car turned in front of the hospital again and stopped.

"What now?" asked Gutmann.

"Warn Bastia!" Frêne rushed out. "Both of you stay here, I'll be back in a few minutes!"

Gutmann and Reimer saw him call out the gatekeeper and speak to him fiercely. After some gesticulating explanations, he let the Carcassonner pass. "This time I can't believe it," Gutmann admitted frankly. "I would never have dreamed of Frêne's intervention."

Reimer laughed exuberantly. "Everything is like a dream and reality mingles with hazy shadows. Fate swirls us like the wind swirls leaves. I come to terms with everything. If Aladdin worshipped his magic lamp, I would no longer find it strange. Technology has caught up with Aladdin and

the magic lamp is not far away. But to stay with this moment: Frêne is truly a sleuth with courage and spirit. I wonder how he found us."

"We'll know soon enough. First we have to get out of this danger zone."

"Actually, we were lucky! No one would have crowed about us if things had turned gangster-like, as it seemed at first. The journey out of the city with the three pseudo-policemen and the bullet-spitting ID cards wasn't without its problems. It was easy to get worried about the will."

"Didn't we have such worries almost every day during the war years?"

"Absolutely. But there is a difference."

"Pah," Gutmann interrupted, "the world is peaceless, so all our lives are like dancing on a volcano. The forms and variations of possible dangers are so diverse that you always have to reckon with unforeseen events. And what happens to us today can happen to us again every day. Perhaps even more ..."

"Oops, I wish I was sitting in a box and flying at an enemy pack. I'd rather have to do that than fight in the dark. I see you're not supposed to look for señoritas, because the garden bower idylls are not on any timetable in our lives. Oh, blimey ..."

"Señoritas here and gazebos there, they are all

nice things that I probably liked too. But I always think of the great need of our time! ..."

"Good God, I won't forget that either," said Reimer, deeply moved. "When I dream of peace, these are images of a brightly glittering dream that you can only see for seconds on the path of the German Passion. And that only so that hope remains in people."

"It's all right," Gutmann said, putting his arm around his comrade's shoulder. "We need the images of hope to remind us of our humanity. Otherwise we harden too much." There was a brief silence. Both men eyed the car attentively so as not to be caught unprepared by another surprise. Reimer moved to the front so that he could take off himself if circumstances demanded it. The tension of waiting became unbearable. What did Frêne know and what did he want with his warning at Bastia? These questions preoccupied the men in the carriage. Suddenly the Carcassonner came out of the gate. He approached the car with long strides, sat down next to Reimer and asked him to drive into the courtyard. Reimer turned the starter key and slowly stepped on the accelerator. The car started up with a barely noticeable jerk. As the Linzer pulled up to the gate, the porter stepped onto the carriageway and signalled for the car to stop. Frêne called out of the open window: "We'll stay with Doctor Rubierda for a while. He

advised us to park the car in the courtyard. So no offence, señor!" The porter stepped aside indecisively. Reimer drove past him by a hair's breadth. "Turn round in the courtyard immediately," Frêne ordered quietly.

The Linzer immediately complied with the request. He drove a dashing loop so that the occupants were pushed to one side by the centrifugal force of the car. He stopped just beside the straight road leading out of the gate. Ten metres separated them from the exit.

The Carcassonner jumped out of the vehicle and tore open the door to the rear seats. At the same time, a figure emerged from the semi-darkness of a small side entrance and approached hurriedly. A man wrapped in a blanket and wearing a white head bandage. Gutmann leant forward. "But that's ..."

It was Bastia who approached and was hastily pushed into the carriage by Frêne towards Gutmann. As he climbed into the carriage, the striped hospital gowns became visible under the receding ceiling. The car driver closed the door almost silently and jumped into his seat, leaving the driver's seat to Reimer. "Mon cher camarade, drive like the devil now"

Reimer would have realised, even without this request, that this was a necessary escape. With forced calm he drove through the gateway without paying any attention to the porter, who was not exactly looking on wittily, and hurried out of the

to get within sight of the hospital. The Carcassoner communicated the changes in direction indicated by Bastia,

"The big end is yet to come," Frêne prepared his companions. "We have to act quickly, otherwise the trap will close!"

A few more turns and the car stopped unexpectedly in front of Juana Colón's house. "So," said the Carcassoner, "now I'll go to the señorita with Señor Bastia and you, mes camarades, get our things from our room at lightning speed. Everything is on a knife's edge and every second counts!"

Bastia could not walk very quickly. This was probably primarily due to his general weakness caused by lying in bed for a long time. The Carcassoner supported him and the two officers rushed past them to secure the common luggage without delay. They ran up the staircase twice and then everything was stowed in the car. As a precaution, they had their pistols ready to hand in their pockets.

Gutmann told Reimer to fetch the Carcassoner and Bastia instead of waiting idly for them. Taking two or three steps at a time, they rushed into the flat, the door of which had been left ajar. As they entered the parlour, they stopped in surprise.

Juana Colón stood leaning pale against the wall, her expression alternating between horror and anger. Bastia and Frêne were standing in front of her, the former with a

Finishing a change of clothes. Somewhere a suit had been found that fitted Bastia's average size. The Carcassonner had narrow eyes and was casually playing with his firearm. He had just concluded a previous argument: "... with this, beautiful señorita, you have betrayed yourself! And so that you don't have to help Señor Bastia to a bed or a coffin again, he will join us in changing the air. I don't think the air in Toledo will be very agreeable for the next few weeks. And that's a great pity, because the city of Toledo is one of Spain's gems. We would have liked to see more of it."

Juana didn't answer. Bastia turned his pale face towards her and said somewhat wearily: "You've let me down and betrayed me, Juana. And you don't know what you've done. The doctor Rubierda has been a tool of my enemies. But despite everything I know now, I don't want to believe the worst of you. Did you betray me out of weakness, Juana?"

"I deliberately betrayed you," she shrieked, suddenly breaking her defiant silence. "Consciously, you hear, consciously! I shall never love a spy who betrays Spain. Never! And I loved you with all my heart, with all the passion a woman is capable of. Until I learnt ..."

Bastia took a step forwards and pressed her fists together. "Until you learnt what, Juana? What?"

"The truth about you! And your question is just mockery. Are you still trying to deceive me?"

"Juana," Bastia suddenly shouted, "what you're telling me is a shameful lie! I was quite right before when I said that I didn't assume the worst of you. The whole thing has been a battle for your trust, in which my enemies have been victorious. And you don't know who my enemies really are! I kept quiet about it because I wanted to spare you any anxiety. Now I see that I have aided and abetted my enemies, for I was never a spy against Spain, Juana! That is a diabolical lie. I may have been born in Italy, but Spain is my second home and I love the country. I fought for this country when it came to freedom. Go to my flat later, Juana, and open the little parcel in the bottom right-hand drawer of my desk, and you'll find two awards that today's Spain gave me in its most difficult hour. Do you want more proof, Juana?"

The Spanish woman stood as stiff as a statue. Only two small beads of tears stole from her wide-open eyes. "Why did you never tell me that? How can I suddenly believe it? You were always so silent, even when you ..." She broke off in mid-sentence and sobbed.

"It's no use," Frêne remembered. "You can't change things any more. We don't have time! Señor Bastia, it's about all of us now. And in a few minutes



they'll know we were here anyway!"

"You're mean, señor!" the Spaniard shouted unrestrainedly.

"No more than you have been so far, señorita," Frêne replied coldly. "We have no time for etiquette and pleasantries because we have to save Bastia before he has another accident. You were a charming co-arranger, señorita!"

Juana approached a chair and sat down. Her eyes looked at the men in turn. "Por dios, who should I believe now?"

"To whomever you like!" the Carcassonner snapped at her. "Ask your mind and test the people. Perhaps a flash will ignite ... And now, adelante, mes camarades!" He grabbed Bastia by the arm and pulled him towards the door. Juana jumped up. She rushed to Bastia and clung to him, "I can't believe all this, I'm completely confused. If it's true - can you - can you forgive me? ..."

"And what I say is true," Bastia said calmly,

"Then tell me, why do you have enemies? - What do they want from you?"

"Fin!" ordered Frêne. "Enough at last! If you sympathise with Bastia again, then let us go immediately. Otherwise the whole thing could lead to other conclusions. Forward, forward now!"

Juana lowered the arms she had held out to Bastia. The woman's pride awoke in her and she took a step back. "Bien señores, go away! I will now do everything I can to find out whether I have been

really shamefully lied to you and turned you into a tool. Until then, I will believe you conditionally. And until then - in any case - have a good trip!" She stood rigid as the men hurried past her and left the flat.

"This is a thick soup," said Reimer, as the men pushed down the stairs, "Such a devilish angel ..."

"Let's not talk about it," asked Bastia, who spoke impeccable German. "Let's just think about getting away quickly!"

"You speak from the heart, señor!" Frêne nodded gratefully. He was the first on the road and pulled open the car. "We'll drive to the station quickly! We wouldn't get much further in the car, and then we'd know where we were going."

As a matter of course, the men resumed the places they had previously occupied and Reimer had the carriage started up before Gutmann had even closed the loop after Bastia. Bastia indicated the direction and, while he was paying attention, pulled a coloured scarf out of a pocket in his coat, which he knotted over his bandage as a headscarf in the manner of Spanish peasants.

Gutmann said approvingly: "You've thought of everything, señor! Your bandage could easily have turned traitor if a search for us were to begin. At least the cloth is less conspicuous."

"Not at all," Bastia explained. "The headscarf is common. We just have to remain modest,

then we will hardly be noticed. A farmer between tourists is nothing that could arouse suspicion. For strangers; a chance conversation, nothing more."

"Of course, as someone who knows the country, you know better," Gutmann admitted. "I'm pleased that you can help us to overcome any difficulties that may arise."

The conversation caused them to drive too far along the straight, which Reimer kept to. Bastia improved the direction and pointed Reimer past the Bibliotheca del Cabildo in the direction of the Gobierno millitar. Driving past the indicated destination, Reimer saw the Alcantara Bridge ahead of him and, after crossing it, the railway station. He turned in and parked the car between other vehicles,

"What now?" asked Gutmann.

"We have to go to Cádiz! You still have the note I wrote to you in hospital?"

"I swallowed it. I'll report on it later, because mate Frêne doesn't know any details about Reimers and my experiences yet. We'll catch up on the reports later."

"Bueno. Anyway - Cádiz!"

"We have to make investigations more difficult!" warned the Carcassonner.

Bastia pondered for a few seconds. Then he said: "The carriage must be taken away from here, I'll organise it later. First I'll buy two tickets to Madrid and one of you will buy two tickets to

Aranjuez. We will then travel together to the first transfer point in Algodor and there we will take tickets to Córdoba. Señor Frêne, you speak fluent Spanish, would you like to come with me to the ticket office?

"Bien, let's go then!"

The two men got out and disappeared between the people standing outside the station. Barely ten minutes must have passed when they returned. Frêne waved. His tall figure stood out silhouetted against the abundance of light in the station, Bastia, recognisable by his headscarf, stood nearby talking to a young local.

"So get out," said Reimer. He and Gutmann grabbed the luggage and threw it outside. In the meantime, Bastia had approached with the stranger. The Toledan greeted him in a friendly manner and climbed into the driver's seat. When Bastia saw that the car had already been cleared, he gave the young man a wave and he started off on his own. The car swerved out of the car park and disappeared towards the city.

"A simple matter," Bastia explained hastily, sensing the questioning looks of his companions. "I gave the young man a tip, your mate Frêne kindly helped me out, and asked him to park the car in Calle de San Juan Dios. That's a long way from the station." He chuckled cautiously. "And now, señores, we're in luck! There's a train in ten minutes."

Frêne had also approached and picked up some of the luggage. Together they hurried into the bright

illuminated hall and after the ticket check onto the platform.

There were relatively few travellers. The train had already pulled in and was under steam. They found enough space in a carriage that was very sparsely occupied.

"We could have done that," said the Linzer, breathing a sigh of relief.

Railway officials hurried along the platform. One of them raised his hand.

A hiss, a short whistle and with a jerk, the train zoomed off. "We now have half an hour to Algodor," Bastia explained. Tell us, Señor Frêne, briefly about your perceptions and experiences! We are all very grateful to you and understandably very curious."

"There's not too much to tell," replied Frêne.

"When we visited you, Señor Bastia, in the hospital, I noticed the doctor's behaviour. I instinctively sensed that there was a man between us who was observant and made little secret of his dislike. His curiosity, moreover, exceeded that of a doctor."

"You were not mistaken," Bastia smiled. "I'll tell you in between that Rubierda gave me injections that made me feel apathetically weak every time. At one such moment of apparent indifference and lack of willpower, he tried to ask me questions, which I **deliberately** ignored. But please go on!"

"I suspected something like that," the Carcassonner added to Bastia's interjection. "Well, events happened more quickly before I got things completely clear, which means there were still small conclusions to be drawn before I could talk to our German comrades about it. And besides ..."

"We were all suspicious of Rubierda," Gutmann remembered.

"Of course. But then: when we said goodbye after the second visit and were about to leave the hospital, I thought about asking the hospital office about the doctor's duty rota. I wanted to find out whether it would be possible to come to Bastia when Rubierda was off duty and absent. This idea had saved me from being abducted at the same time as my German comrades. As I was about to enter the courtyard to hurry after my comrades, I saw through a window how three men stopped the senorita and both companions. I could even see one of the men pocketing the passports they presented, and that was enough for me to make myself unseen. My first thought was to go to our shared room and take the luggage elsewhere. While I was still thinking about it, I saw Juana coming back. She was in a hurry and an intuition made me follow her. I saw that she was going to the sickroom to see you again, Señor Bastia. Surprisingly, she took a different direction on the same floor and disappeared into a room,

after she had knocked briefly. I rushed in and saw that it was the room of the doctor on duty, Rubierdas."

Reimer whistled softly through his teeth when he heard this. Frêne continued: "The seriousness of things drove me to it,

at the door. I couldn't understand much, but it was enough to understand that Juana was telling the doctor about a successful faked arrest. Unfortunately, I had escaped, she said. Approaching footsteps in front of the staircase made me abandon the listening post and disappear. Now warned about Juana, I left the hospital without, of course, discovering any trace of you, mes camarades, for the time being. I saw three children nearby and questioned them. Fortunately, they were able to tell me that a while ago a group of gentlemen had got into a black car, while a lady had gone back to the hospital. They could even tell me the direction the car had taken. So I had the first lead. I looked for a hire car and had myself driven up the designated road. I stopped several times on the way and asked mainly children or old people outside their houses if they had seen a black car drive past. Some knew nothing, others were indolent and I was close to hopelessness. I was almost out of the town when I met a farmer who was walking towards the town. Surprisingly, when I asked him, he replied that I probably meant the wagon of old Eli Nerión, whose country house was still standing.

a little further on. He described the way there. The driver had been listening and probably thought it must be an urgent matter. He accelerated immediately and we sped off until we reached the turn-off that led to the house we were looking for. I paid the driver, as I didn't think it was advisable to leave the car. And sure enough, I found a car parked in front of the house I was looking for. Of course, there are lots of cars in Toledo and black ones too. There could have been a dozen cars on the road in the last half hour and I was chasing a false intuition. Despite this probability, I was convinced that I was on the right track. I crept round the house and reconnoitred the surroundings, too much caution never hurts, then I entered the back garden and worked my way between the hedges to the house. It was very tedious and laborious. It was also a serious disadvantage for me that I was still unarmed at this point. Something like that increases the feeling of helplessness."

"Just a moment, Frêne," Gutmann interjected, "What were you thinking, how could you cope with these forces of an opponent unknown to you?"

"I didn't even think about it," Frêne replied simply. "I only saw that you, camarades, had fallen into a trap. And that it was all connected with the events surrounding Señor Bastia was not hard to guess,



after I overheard Juana's conversation with the suspicious doctor. So immediate help was needed, I was betting everything on chance. But further on: I was glad that it was beginning to get dark and with it my feeling of safety grew. I could also become more mobile. There was light in a small room at the back of the house. I peered through the window and saw an old man just leaving the small room, two other men were sitting around a small table playing dominoes. As I walked round the house again, two of the windows lit up. When I brought my face close to a window pane, I saw you, mes camarades, as well as the old man and a second Spaniard. I was a little taken aback when I saw the wine glasses on the table and what appeared to be a casual conversation going on. I stayed near the window and suddenly I heard, indistinctly but still intelligibly, the exclamation *acarreamos*."

Reimer wanted to make an interjection, but Gutmann told him to keep quiet.

"Now I knew you were coming out of the house. I immediately scurried to the front door and bumped into a man who was in a hurry. I took advantage of the second he was taken aback and knocked him down. I hurriedly dragged him behind a bush, where I first put his own handkerchief in his mouth as a gag and then used his trouser belt to tie his hands and feet together at the same time in a squatting position. And I took the most important thing. Namely

a pistol. It all happened terribly quickly. As I was hurrying to the car, you, mes camarades, came out with another man and I was just able to rush ahead of you to the car so as not to be recognised. Apparently I was right in assuming that the man who was taken by surprise first was the driver. Well, and everything else is known!"

"Not me yet," Bastia said. Gutmann also asked the Carcassonner to continue with the description so that Bastia could get a complete picture.

Frêne complied. When he had finished and also mentioned picking up Bastia, who came along as soon as he could be cleared up in a few sentences, it was Gutmann who said: "Thank you very much, Frêne! Of course we don't want to say much. It's not so much a matter of whether an act is judged to be decisive, but above all that an act is committed. And your efforts, Frêne, would have helped us out of a tight spot if we had been held back in the country house. Don't refuse, your merit is not diminished by the fact that we were on our way back."

"I think we'll be in Algodur in a few minutes," Bastia said, "Let's get ready!"

The train stomped to sleep, a cloud of sparks passed outside the window. A shrill whistle from the locomotive signalled the approach of a station, houses with blinking windows flitted past. Then the pounding became more ponderous, the journey slowed down, a

A small jolt and the train stopped.

"Algodor!"

The four men were ready to disembark and left the carriage. They entered the station and, on Bastia's advice, Frêne took it upon himself to buy four tickets to Córdoba at the ticket office. This time they were less fortunate, as the next train to the south didn't leave until the morning,

"It would be best if we spent the night in the waiting room," Gutmann suggested. He was met with approval and the men found an empty room, which they found comfortable despite the somewhat stuffy air.

The next morning the men were on the train to their next destination and in the afternoon the train pulled into the city of Córdoba.

As much as the beautiful and interesting city tempted them to stay for a short time, the four men had to deny themselves this wish. Once again they bought tickets for a train that would take them directly to Cádiz. Here Bastia thought it advisable to reduce the size of his head bandage by a few turns. He then used the break to buy a hat in a nearby shop, the wide brim of which covered his bandaged head well. Gutmann willingly advanced him the necessary sum. In Cádiz, Bastia then wanted to provide material help.

The last leg of the journey, another half-day trip, took the men via Ecija, Utrera and Jerez de la Frontera to El Puerto de Santa Maria and from there the train travelled in a wide arc around the Bahía de Cádiz.

An elongated peninsula jutted out into the sea like an embankment, with the city and harbour of Cádiz at its extreme tip. Slowing down, the train puffed towards the terminus, passing the suburb of San Bosc and Castillo Puntales before finally arriving at the Estación, which was just outside the harbour in front of Plaza Isabel.

"Now we've crossed Spain and got through with a black eye," Reimer realised as they stood together in the plaza. It was late in the evening and life on the street had already slowed down. Bastia pondered for a moment, then said: "We could go to the Hotel Victoria in Calle Isaac Peral, which is not far from here behind the customs building. It would be better if we were taken straight to one of my friends, who could at least put us up, albeit in a makeshift way."

"We'd prefer that too," said Gutmann, supported by Reimer and Frêne.

Bastia waved a hire car over and indicated Calle Carmen as the destination. The men had barely got into the car when the driver drove through the Plaza de la Libertad and the Plaza de Mina at high speed, expertly darting between the scattered pedestrians, before turning into the designated street. Bastia ordered him to stop in front of a two-storey house. While Gutmann paid the driver, Bastia rang the doorbell. A head peered out of one of two illuminated windows, "Quién es?"

"Bastia y amigos!" replied the Toledan.

An exclamation of surprise was heard. "Un momento ..."

A few minutes later, the small gate creaked open, a dim light shone from a hallway and a gaunt Spaniard welcomed the late arrivals,

"This is Senior Cadenas!" Bastia explained and introduced his companions one by one.

"Me alegro mucho!" Cadenas invited his guests into a nearby room and offered them chairs. "Me pongo á su disposición - you can dispose of me!"

"I know," Bastia interrupted the pleasantries. In a few words he described to his friend the purpose and reason for his arrival and the experiences of his companions. At the same time, catching up on his story to his fellow travellers, he reported that he had been feeling watched in the city of Toledo for some time and had had to keep very much to himself. It was possible, he explained, that this might have been the wrong approach. A messenger had recently visited him one evening and informed him of the arrival of two or three people from the Pyrenees, whom he had to smuggle onwards. At the same time, the bearer of the message announced that no further details or instructions had been given, as the receiving centre had only picked up a somewhat garbled radio message, which then remained unfinished. The word Tangier

He was received by the police, but no further explanations were given. Two days later, he was suddenly attacked in his flat and hospitalised with a severe head injury, not forgetting Rubierda's role. "Of course, the boys were hoping to find any written notes or documents," Bastia concluded, but their efforts were in vain. "Rubierda couldn't get anything out of me either!"

Cadenas tilted his head with a worried expression. He had a sharp-cut face with hard wrinkles, as is usually the case with racing drivers or pilots, and tufts of white hair at his temples, "A bad story. What will happen next?"

"Above all, we hope that you can accommodate us today!" said Bastia. "Tomorrow we want to find a way to get from Cádiz to Tangier without any fuss. That means: for the senores! I'll stay with you for a few days until I've decided what to do next."

"My house is your house, señores!" Cadenas replied simply. "My possibilities are extremely modest, but I'll manage somehow." He rose and left the room after excusing himself for a few minutes.

"Well, now at least we know that we've found a temporary terminus in Tangier," Gutmann said in a slightly reproachful tone. "You could have told us that earlier, Señor Bastia!"

Bastia didn't feel offended at all. "It wouldn't have changed the situation," he said evenly. "The longer you have to brood over problems that don't really have to be problems in the end, the longer you're in trouble. Besides, the Alemanes are taciturn and not particularly curious ..."

"You too!" Reimer laughed in between.

When Cadenas returned, he was carrying a platter of cold food, which he placed on the table. Then he brought wine and glasses. He begged his indulgence for not being better prepared.

The men ate. Thirsty from the journey, they did not disdain the wine. And when the host invited them to rest, they gratefully and quickly accepted his invitation.

The next day, the men stayed at Cadenas' house. After breakfast together with Bastia, he went into town to look for a quick way to leave. Bastia felt fresh and well again and proved to be a willing helper, effectively influencing his friend Cadenas. Late in the afternoon, both returned from a second exit and Bastia requested the passports of his three protégés.

He and Cadenas returned late in the evening. While the latter apologised for keeping his guests waiting so long, Bastia smiled and handed the passports to the owners.

"Donnerwetter!" Gutmann exclaimed in surprise when he

curiously opened his booklet. He found neatly arranged entry and exit stamps, both from Cádiz. The dates were also plausible. The exit stamp was for the next day.

"How is that? -" asked Frêne.

"Very simple, señor. We're going on board a small steamer tomorrow without going through any checks. But it will be advantageous for later if the passport is in order throughout."

"How did you jinx it?" Gutmann asked.

"Connections," Bastia said laconically. "Some things are very difficult, some things are easy, in this case nothing special!"

"When does the ship leave?"

"Midday. In the early morning we will bring your luggage on board and at lunchtime you will first take a trip on a cutter and then be taken on board."

"Looks very simple."

"It is, señor."

The next morning was perfect for the planned project. The southern sun hung like a golden fruit in the shimmering blue sky and promised a cheerful day. After a hearty breakfast, the men made their way to Punta San Felipe and then turned right towards the harbour. A small cutter, which had set sail, bobbed between a few boats and an olive-coloured fisherman waved to those approaching.



"Get in, señores!" said Cadenas with an inviting gesture. "Señor Bastia will take you to the Mercedes, I must say goodbye here. It has been a great honour to put my humble home at your disposal. Que Ustedes siga bien - farewell!"

The three men thanked him warmly. As the boat pushed off, Cadenas stopped and waved in a friendly manner. He paused for a while until the boat had crossed half the harbour and pushed off into the open sea. Although the water seemed fairly calm, the cutter danced considerably. Every now and then wisps of white foam slobbered over the bow and wetted the inside of the boat. A light breeze billowed the brown, worn sailcloth. Seagulls sailed around with shrill cries or stroked the crests of the waves, hungry for prey. The skipper turned slightly to the left and headed for a small steamer that was bobbing up and down in the moving swell. A faint plume of smoke billowed from an old-fashioned tall and narrow chimney: "El vapor Mercedes," said the fisherman, explaining. "The steamer ..."

"Now it's time," Bastia said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out an envelope, which he handed to Gutmann. "Aqui, señor, - here, take it!"

"What is this?" Gutmann lifted the envelope flap and saw some banknotes sticking out.

"I have been commissioned to help you. You can go ahead and accept it. It's not my money."

"Hm, if that's the case ..." Gutmann thanked him,

The sail pole creaked. The seagulls kept circling the boat, which was now leaning slightly in the wind. The steamer lying off to one side was slowly rising out of the water and its superstructure was already clearly recognisable in detail. A few men stood casually at the railing and watched the approaching cutter.

"We know very little about each other," Gutmann said to Bastia, who looked silently into the distance. "We recognised each other by our slogans, but otherwise did nothing to get to know each other better in the short time we were travelling together."

"What's the point?" Bastia asked, "I'm just a little agent, as you would say in the vernacular. But we also have our own code of life. Don't ask a lot of questions and only know the essentials. That's the best way."

With a sweeping arc, the boatswain manoeuvred the cutter alongside the steamer. A rope ladder slapped against the stained side of the boat, ready to help the passengers on board. When Frêne, who was closest to the ladder, reached for the rungs first, Bastia held him back for a moment.

"Un instante, señor! - You saved me from a very dangerous situation, I am very much obliged to you. No offence, let me give you this as a small memento of the episode in Toledo!" He had a small parcel in his hand, which he solemnly handed to the Carcassonner,

Frêne knew the Spanish etiquette and did not want to

insult them by refusing. As Gutmann and Reimer were already climbing ahead and on board, he could only stammer a few quick words and give Bastia's right hand a firm squeeze. "Hasta la vista ..."

"Adios!" Bastia improved the greeting. "Good luck for Tangier!"

On board, the new arrivals were welcomed by the captain. They were given two cabins, one of which was apparently the captain's cabin. In contrast to the somewhat dirty exterior of the ship, whose pistons were now beginning to pound more heavily, the interior of the small rooms was modest but clean.

The luggage was neatly stored in the captain's cabin, nothing was missing, the captain had come along and politely asked for any requests.

"Al instante - nada!" thanked Frêne politely.

Reimer suggested going on deck for the time being. Despite the portholes being open, the air in the cabins was a little thick and hot.

The few men on the deck crew hardly took any notice of the passengers. No doubt they often took individual travellers with them, which meant a welcome extra income for the captains of the small freighters. The cutter with Bastia on board rode out to sea and was already a considerable distance away again. The "Mercedes" had picked up speed and the initially faint plume of smoke from the strange-looking funnel had turned into a thick, smelly cloud.

The rocks and the Alameda above receded, twitching in the heat-soaked air.

In less than two hours, the asthmatically plodding steamer had reached the island of Santi Petri and was heading for Cape Trafalgar. Entering the Strait of Gibraltar, the course was set directly for Tangier.

Suddenly, the Carcassonner remembered Bastia's gift. Followed by his companions, he went back into the captain's cabin for a short time, pulled the parcel out of his pocket and unwrapped the thin paper. A small box peeled out and when Frêne opened it, an ancient-looking ring was revealed to his curious eyes, which was clearly of Arabic origin and featured an ornate inscription on a round plate.

"My knowledge of Arabic isn't good enough for that," Frêne confessed. "I'll have it translated from time to time. Certainly a pious saying."

"A very fine piece of work," said Reimer. "I don't know anything about these things, but it's undoubtedly valuable."

"And an old job," Frêne explained.

"If it were a magic ring," said the man from Linz, "then you should be able to fly immediately with a turn of the ring or at least summon a servant spirit. The Thousand and One Nights is full of such gifts. I used to love reading the book and had memorised these recipes, but all the rings and carpets turned out to be rivets.

when I tried to step into the magic realm. All that remains are the beautiful images of pluderhosen-wearing virgins with scanty pearl bustles and belly dance pantomimes. By Allah's beard or Mohammed's, I am really curious to see if there is at least a trace of it in Tangier. After all, it is already the Orient."

"Whatever you say," the Carcassonner dampened Reimer's expectations. "Tangier is a dangerous city and only has a semi-oriental façade behind the modern foreground. Now a major smuggling centre. You can buy anything from American cigarettes to a warship

"That's not news." The Linzer grumbled. "But somehow you'll be able to save an illusion ..."

"Illusions are always dangerous, dear Reimer," Gutmann reprimanded. "When you start dancing on clouds, you fall through a hole!"

The hours crept by. As the sky changed colour, the coast of Africa emerged from a strip of haze. The bay of Tangier opened wide and the crescent-shaped shore stretched out towards the steamer like the arms of a loving woman.

The captain came down from the bridge and approached his passengers. "I have orders, señores, to recommend that you stay on board overnight and only go ashore in the morning!"

"That's very pleasant," said Gutmann. "What about our obligations?"

"It's all done, señores. Besides, Señor Cadenas has been an old friend of mine for many years." The captain tapped the peak of his crisp cap with two fingers and continued on his way.

Tangier! The Babel of Africa had given the three men a very sober welcome in the morning. They stood aimlessly in front of the Ball el Marsa, completely abandoned to blind chance.

"It will go wrong," Reimer tried to joke with gallows humour. In reality, he couldn't hide the pressed sound of his voice. So far, the men had always managed to catch a glimpse of something or had acted according to a programme. Now they were facing a strange world that offered few opportunities. Looking back for a moment, they realised that they had been following a goal that suddenly seemed to dissolve into nothingness. This blind chance, which seldom comes when you expect it, was more than a game of va-banque, on the other hand, they confessed out of righteous considerations that the organisation of Point 103 worked far too precisely to expose their people to chance. The thread broke, but the knot had to be in Tangier after all.

Slowly and, quite literally, without a plan, the men took their steps towards the city centre. The two officers saw the gateway to the Orient for the first time in their lives and marvelled at how much the European whitewash concealed. In contrast to the modern buildings in the occidental style, the

Locals unchanged types, even if some are dressed in European clothes. Children begging for baksheesh everywhere.

Various foreign consulates were grouped around the suq ed dâjel. The square was a hive of activity. Cars, American road cruisers next to solid German brands and French models, signalled busy business and economic activity. European women wore the latest models of haute couture, rings with large diamonds flashed from the hands of gesticulating fat men, the sounds of different languages indicated that the whole world seemed to be meeting here. The white-clad policemen had no other task than to regulate the busy traffic.

Frêne mentioned during the walk that he knew North Africa from Algiers. This also explained his modest knowledge of Arabic. language. As the luggage was becoming a nuisance in the rising heat, he, as the most experienced, recommended taking a room or two in a guesthouse. He called a mature Arab boy over and pressed a banknote into his hand, which he made disappear in a flash. In return, he promptly had the name of a small guesthouse nearby. "The big hotels in Tangier are wickedly expensive," the Carcassonner explained. "It's wise to be economical with our means!"

"It l o o k s like it," said Reimer dryly.

"When you look at the people here and the luxury

of this neighbourhood, you feel like Cinderella at the royal court."

"Make sure you don't get a complex," Gutmann warned. "A lot of this wealth was made with dirty money."

"Money is always dirty," returned the Linzer, "But you only turn up your nose if you don't have it. It's easier to dance with money!"

The guesthouse we were looking for was quickly found. The house was clean and the man from Carcasson was satisfied. He explained that you can also be unlucky if, behind the inviting façade of a house, you end up in a room that could easily be described as a miniature zoo. To illustrate his words, he made a suggestive scratching motion and grinned.

Freed of their luggage, the men felt freer and less conspicuous. Gutmann briefly assessed the prices of the necessities in relation to their wealth and, with Frene's help, bought half a dozen light shirts. They were short of linen, after all, and the hot south required frequent changes.

They passed the Kobba de Sidi ber Reisul, from whose minaret spires the golden crescent moon sparkled in the bright sunlight. A little further on, they reached the Kasba through the Bab Ráha. The Maghrebi style of the Yatna'a al Kasba, the Sultan's palace, elicited an exclamation of delight from both officers. Here, for the first time



the unadulterated face of the country without constriction.

Slowly they turned back, and at a corner they came across a man, obviously a North African, wearing a worn European suit and looking at them. Frêne stopped walking. "What do you want? The man immediately lowered his eyelids. "Baksheesh," he asked humbly and held out his hand. The Frenchman gave him a coin, which he pulled at random from his pocket. The man mumbled a few Arabic words that were too indistinct to be understood. Then he stepped back against the nearby wall. "This man has inherited none of Tangier's wealth," said the man from Linz.

"Mon dien, you never know. People have died in rags and left behind a huge fortune. You shouldn't be fooled in individual cases. Besides, this man didn't seem to be unintelligent."

Involuntarily, Reimer turned round, but the man was no longer to be seen.

Heading towards the harbour, they came across the wide harbour boulevard between the long almacén on a protruding pier and the customs office building and surveyed the hustle and bustle and the ships. A light breeze from the sea was somewhat refreshing.

People of all races hurried back and forth. Mysterious individuals repeatedly approached the three men and offered goods, American cigarettes and secret pleasures. Arabs, Levantines and declassed whites. In between, luxury limousines with

Traders who negotiated with captains and visited the neighbouring ships.

"Hm - from here to Genoa and home," Reimer said half aloud, more to himself.

Gutmann narrowed his eyes and stared into the horizon. He didn't want to let on that he was experiencing similar feelings to Linz.

"Homesick?" asked Frêne.

Reimer looked at him. "Five years of war, in countries in all four corners of the world and still no end ..."

Merde, I'd rather be in my Provence too!"

Tangier proved to be an expensive city, but the wine was cheap and so were the oriental restaurants. Mutton on a spit, roasted over a charcoal fire, tasted excellent and lifted the spirits of the three men. "Let's go to the old town," suggested Reimer, who had become enterprising. "I'm sure there will be plenty of attractive things to find

"You must mean something undressing," Gutmann mocked.

Frêne raised his hands. "Mes camarades," he said urgently, "I have the feeling that it would be better for our safety if we got around Tangier as little as possible. We have not come as tourists."

Reimer had initially scowled at Gutmann, but agreed with Frêne's objection. With a visibly disappointed expression, he grumbled at fate: "You live like a stowaway and only see the world through a

Crate corner ..."

"And I thought it was already an overindulgence," Gutmann teased, "North Pole and Andalusian spring with one ticket ..."

"And it's not over yet," growled the Linzer. "But always keep your distance!"

The Frenchman appeased. "I can understand Reimer. If we can agree to just take a short walk and **avoid** the pubs, the risk might be low after all. I'd be happy to take a short tour!"

Gutmann nodded.

Heading towards the old town, the men pushed their way through the throng of Maghrebi, Levantine and elusive international types, with Frêne also warning of the numerous pickpockets. As darkness fell, it became quiet in the narrow alleyways and only the distant noise of the brighter and livelier streets slightly dampened any emerging uncertainty.

The odd passing figure did not exactly inspire confidence. The city's clandestine and open vices showed themselves with silent enticements or quiet girring, dull traffic lights advertised small night-time businesses.

Just as Frêne was trying to get out of the narrow maze of alleyways and the darkness, a girl's sharp cry rang out. A few dozen paces in front of the men, a girl rushed out of a dull

A female figure emerged from the illuminated opening of the blue-black rows of walls, straight towards the Frenchman holding the lace. A lean, agile man emerged from behind the woman who was shouting again. The alley was immediately deserted, the few shadowy figures from before had disappeared.

The pursuer had reached the fleeing woman in a few movements and brought her down with a sudden jerk of the caught dress. A half-stitched "Help" was a final expression of desperation.

It was a German word that made the three men jump together. With a few long jumps, Reimer was at the man who was brutally trying to pull the fallen woman up. Before his companions could reach him, the man from Linz had grabbed his pursuer and struck him a blow that made him groan loudly. A second blow sent the man to the ground.

At that moment, the alley came to life. Sounds came from everywhere without the people themselves emerging. With a sudden sixth sense, one felt that the walls everywhere had eyes and that gnomes were growing in the dark shadows,

"Merde!" cursed the Carcassonian. Without needing a hint, the three men formed a phalanx on all sides and, with the girl in their midst, headed half-running towards the far, brighter end of the alley.

Now, like night mares, they appeared in front of and behind the

Rushing figures. Frêne pushed down the first man who tried to block the way, Gutmann defended himself with a few well-directed blows from the edges of the hands of two men who were pressing him as a rearguard. The commotion in the background grew louder and a harsh voice cursed loudly in Arabic.

The determined attitude of the three men with the girl caused the pursuers to hesitate, but this short time was enough to bring the harassed men close to the bright end of the alley.

Frêne replied in Arabic. Gutmann stayed by his side while the Linzer hurried ahead with the girl to the alley exit.

The Maghrebi screeched hoarsely, but then abruptly broke off. The Carcassonner had knocked a suddenly drawn pistol out of his hand and pushed him back. At the same time, he brought the gun to him with a lightning-fast crouch and now threatened the pursuers with it.

The bird-of-prey-faced man raised both fists and cursed again. Once again, the alley dwellers gathered and advanced behind the clamouring Maghrebi. Only the pistol in Frêne's hand prevented them from attacking the strangers.

When they reached the end of the alley, the harassed people saw a busier street in the bright light of modern

Street lights. Now only the girl's pursuer followed, shaken by a fit of weeping under the protection of her rescuers and clinging to Reimer, who tried to calm her down in German. Frêne pressed the pistol covertly into the Maghrebi's side and, exchanging words with him incessantly, forced him to follow.

Gutmann stopped the first hire car that came along. Pushing the Maghrebi back again, Frêne was the last to jump into the car, shouting Bab el Marsa as the destination address to the driver. The car sped off immediately.

"Don't talk in the car," warned the Carcassonner, hindering Reimer's further endeavours. "We've reached into a thick soup and now we've got to find our quarters, hook, line and sinker!"

At Bab el Marsa they unloaded the wagon. On Frêne's advice, the men immediately split up. The man from Carcasson took the girl, who was still trembling, and drove her to the guesthouse in another hire car. The two Germans did the same.

"And now, girl, tell your story," Gutmann demanded as they sat in the guesthouse room. Frêne showed a worried expression.

"My name is Nella - Nella Post from Munich! - And I

Thank you ..."

Gutmann waved him off, interrupting. "Straight to the point," he said dryly.

"Well, I was an intelligence officer with the German Wehrmacht in Italy. During the retreat, I was captured by the Italian Cominunist partisans along with a few other fellow sufferers. We were imprisoned on the orders of the so-called commander, supposedly to protect us from the intrusiveness of the Red Horde. But he himself ..." A brief shiver ran through the girl again. "We defended ourselves against him with difficulty. After days, we were taken out of the musty dungeon, half-starved, and loaded onto a lorry. One rainy night we were taken to a ship in a harbour. We were four German girls. We were crammed together with two Italian girls in a tiny chamber in the depths of the ship. Before the ship left, we all had to sign a contract for an amusement centre, saying that otherwise we couldn't be transported back and would be interned in poor conditions. And then - then came the surprise! We had landed here in Tangier and had been handed over to a Levantine ..."

"Girl trafficking," Frêne interjected briefly. "The same everywhere. On all the Arab coasts and in the interior, as well as in South America. In this case, a private business of the communist partisan chief."

The girl nodded, "Angela committed suicide. The other two girls and the Italians who had suffered the same fate as former members of the Fascio were sent somewhere else. I was kindly given some time to settle in. Only now was I told in no uncertain terms what I had to do ..."

"Why didn't you seek the help of the police?" asked Reimer.

The girl waved her hand in resignation. "The police in the neighbourhood are on the take and are in cahoots with the establishments, and you can't leave ... The police in the district even bring girls back. After all, the landlord has a contract!"

"Yes, that's the trick," Frêne confirmed. "It usually holds up in court too!"

"A thousand bombs on Engelland," cursed Reimer.

"Will you help me?"

The men looked at the girl seriously, "Have you assumed anything else? We just need to think about what we can do," Gutmann said. "You don't have any papers, of course?"

"No, nothing at all," the girl confessed,

"If she had had them, they would have been taken from her immediately," Frêne said. "Of course we'll help despite these difficulties, that's as clear as mountain water! I suggest we leave the girl in a room here for the time being."

"Of course," Gutmann decided. "We take



A room for her." Turning to the girl, he added: "I'll take care of that right here in the house. And until further notice, I request that you do not leave the room under any circumstances!"

"Let me take care of the room," Frêne interjected. "The girl has no papers, as we've now discovered. As a Frenchman, I can get around here more credibly with a short delaying tactic!" Without waiting for further consent, he left the room.

"How can I thank you," the girl stammered, still a little distraught. "My God, my nerves are completely shot."

"Oh," said Reimer with feigned levity, "that will soon pass. Think of the song 'Es geht alles vorüber', which was often sung during the war."

"I know it," the girl replied calmly.

"However, after a while it was no longer to be sung because the lyrics were given a political connotation."

"Sure," agreed the Linzer. "But the soldiers liked it. They didn't ask for a background, for them it was a song from the Heimrat and nothing else. You know the success of 'Lili Marleen', which was sung by friend and foe together on all fronts and especially in Africa before Tobruk and El Alamein. The Tommies had made up their own English lyrics. As far as I remember, it was a first lieutenant from Vienna who sang the song over the

made Belgrade famous."

"You were soldiers?"

Despite a warning look from Gutmann, Reimer said yes. "But keep that to yourself under all circumstances if you want to get out of here safely and return home. We're in a lot of trouble ourselves!"

"I promise," she said seriously. Her eyes regained a bright lustre. Frêne returned a few minutes later. He had a letter in his hand.

"The thing with the room went smoothly. I even got the one next door. No questions, no curiosity. But this letter was waiting for us. Addressed to the three Messieurs who were staying here today!" He handed the envelope to Gutmann.

After opening the envelope, there was a short message in English: "If you are the men from Eagle Land, tell the beggar standing outside the front door the number from the north in the morning. You will then receive a message!"

The men looked at each other in amazement. Reimer, sometimes as brash as a Berliner, lightly poked Gutmann. "Hey, worrywart, the thread's back!"

"Wait and see," Gutmann said cautiously. "Where did we attract attention here or how were we notified?"

"That's still in the book of oriental mysteries," Frêne said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it was the beggar who scrutinised us on arrival and then asked for a baksheesh."

"That could be," Gutmann replied. "Here in

Allah is omniscient in this land. Let's let him play his game, we can't do anything about it now. Let's go to rest so that we are fresh enough for any surprises tomorrow!"

It was obvious to the girl that she wasn't even thinking about sleeping yet. She was visibly reluctant to comply with Gutmann's suggestion. She reluctantly left the room, thanking him again, to go to her neighbouring room.

"Another leaf in the salad," Gutmann growled, looking after her pityingly. "What are we going to do with her?"

Frêne slapped his forehead: "How about if I hurry back to the harbour alone now to talk to the captain of the Spanish ship? He could somehow get the girl on board inconspicuously and deliver her to Cadenas in Cádiz! We'll give her a short letter of explanation with a request for further instructions."

The two Germans immediately showed their approval. "Be sure to take the pistol with you," Gutmann warned anxiously. "Of course, it's best if Frêne sets off immediately, perhaps the steamer will run out of steam in the morning ..."

"I hope it works?" Reimer said timidly.

"You have to exhaust every possibility," the Carcassonner replied. "In the meantime, take it in turns to watch over the girl's safety with the door ajar. You never know, do you? As your soldiers said, horses have been seen vomiting in front of a chemist's shop! Farewell

Messieurs, I'm leaving!"

"Now we have to stand guard like recruits," grumbled the Linzer. "Well, the poor thing ..."

Frêne only returned hours later in the dark. He found his companions sitting expectantly behind the ajar door of the room.

"All's well that ends well," he said laconically as he entered.

"In what way?" Gutmann urged,

"The ship was still in its old place. But the captain was somewhere ashore. So I had to wait for almost two hours until he and his helmsman came booting up. Luckily they were both stone cold sober. However, I needed a bit of persuasion and had to play with open cards. These also worked best. This old sea hidalgo then gave up his initial resistance and will - as I now realise from my watch - come here this morning at about eight o'clock and take the girl. He swears by all the Spanish saints and the entire heavenly entourage to deliver the girl safe and sound to Cadenas and is also convinced of his own accord that she will be in the best and most caring hands with his amigo."

"Almost too good to be true," said Reimer, shaking his head. "After all the madness that's been going around so far, the simplest thing is becoming the most outlandish ..."

"I think, like Frêne, that we trust the captain

can," Gutmann said with conviction. "And there are no temptations for amours, dear Reimer!"

He waved him off. "As far as I'm concerned, Allah should only be with the girl instead of me ..."

The men looked at each other and then out through the window into the night. The crescent moon hung over a grotesque silhouette of the city and silvered the angular contours of the buildings with a soft glow. A grey veil stretched out over the earth's satellite. A benign night now gave forgetfulness and peace.

Early in the morning, Nella Post was already waiting with the men. She was provided with plenty of advice and a written recommendation, which she was advised to hide intimately on her upper body. She had also received money, but her friends in Spain had to take care of everything else.

Just as the girl was handing over her home address to Reimer, a hire car pulled up outside the guesthouse. Minutes later, the captain stood in the room and greeted those waiting as if they were old acquaintances. He placed his right hand on the girl's shoulder with a gentle gesture and said with a smile: "Señorita, you're in good hands now! Your friends here have many good friends in Spain who will make sure you get home. I am very much obliged to these men and will take you here with every guarantee for your safety. Let us make it informal and short, for I must leave as soon as possible.

to set sail. Vamos - it's a great honour, señores!" The girl's renewed attempts to express her gratitude men off. "See you in Munich," grinned Reimer optimistically. "Get lost, girl, and if you're Catholic, donate a candle for an old heathen!"

The men escorted the girl and her guardian to the gate of the boarding house and waited until the carriage pulled up. A quick wave from the occupants, brief hand gestures in return and the men were rid of an added worry with hope in their hearts.

As they were about to re-enter the house, a throaty voice suddenly came from the right: "La hawla, wa la quwata illa bi'llah - there is no power and no force but God, - lihaza bismillah bakshish, ya effendil - therefore, in the name of God, a merciful gift, O Lord! As if conjured out of nowhere, a plainly dressed native stood before the men and stretched out a sinewy hand, lurking with sharp eyes.

"Tell the man the number 103," Gutmann asked Frêne, asking for an Arabic translation. He complied immediately.

A flash of lightning stung the eyes of the apparent beggar. In easily understandable French, he whispered hoarsely, half-hidden by bows: "The men of the Great Eagle are under the protection of the Black Burnus. Go to the harbour in the evening and look for the ship 'Esperanza'. Captain Carón is our friend and his helmsman is an Arab from Syria. Go

to the master of the ship and tell him, "You bring blessings from Allah!"

In the meantime, Gutmann had taken a coin out of his pocket and placed it in his still outstretched hand with a feigned gesture. "Sahite, effendi - baraka 'Ilah. - Thank you, O Lord, may Allah reward you!" he added aloud. Murmuring more words of thanks, he withdrew. After the initial astonishment, it was Reimer who found his voice again first. "By Allah's beard - that was easier than simple, too. In short style: poor man - please - thank you - away! And another thread, but not to home."

"For the homeland," Gutmann improved.

"And in the name of Allah, spurt," Frêne added his opinion. "The people have a good deal with Allah and we too walk on the edge of his shadow."

The men only left the house for dinner. Almost feverishly, they longed for the evening to get to grips with their increasing restlessness.

Barely twenty-four hours in Tangier and filled with excitement and secret danger, they were once again on the brink of a new uncertainty. Now they were standing at the edge of the harbour, watching for the aforementioned ship, while pale stars slowly rose in the sky.

A porter approached the seekers. "Allah is watching," came from his mouth in a throaty chant.

"Allah be with you," Frêne replied cautiously.

Without another word, he walked ahead of the men after a lightning-fast wave. In ten minutes they were standing in front of the "Esperanza". Before the men could say thank you, the man had disappeared behind the hustle and bustle of the harbour.

The ship we were looking for was a small but clean-looking vessel moored at the end of a protruding quay. The Spanish flag was flying at the stern.

The Carcassonner called the ship. A bearded sailor looked down from the railing. "Quien es?"

"Donde es el capitano?"

The man disappeared and returned shortly afterwards with a gaunt man wearing a white peaked cap, who identified himself as the person called.

"We bring Allah's blessing," Frêne's call wafted over the ship.

"Wait!" it came back.

Minutes later, a gangplank slid onto the quay wall. As the men boarded the ship, the captain raised his right hand to his cap. "A sus ordenes, señores!" he said politely, scrutinising the new arrivals. "You have paid passage. Please come with me to my cabin before I assign you your cabins!"

The men thanked her.

"You are to go ashore in Alexandria, gentlemen. If your passports are in order, you won't have any problems," said Captain Carón as he walked off.

"Passes are fine," Gutmann said curtly.



"Good!"

The men quickly let their eyes wander over the hill town. The pale aura of the fading day on the horizon shimmered over the towers of the minarets and over the Kasbah, while an increasingly dark velvet curtain stretched across the heights of the firmament, studded with ever brighter dots of brilliance. Now Tangier also greeted us with a sparkling illumination of its lights. Ripe and swelling like an eternally young woman, the city lay in the sweeping arms of the giant Atlas, caressed by the sound of the sea and showing off its multifaceted face and its charms. Once in the cabin, the captain announced the departure for the night and asked his guests not to leave their cabins until then. He reassured them once again that they had nothing to fear from the British forces in Egypt if they exercised cautious restraint. would have. They received further information afterwards.

A little later, the anchor rattled. The winch squealed, scraps of words flew through the night from the bridge and a thick plume of smoke billowed out of the chimney. The hurried activity of the crew gave the ship new life and soul for the great voyage.

The pounding of the engines, then a shuddering and grinding of the hull and finally a short toot signalled the start of the journey.

Reimer looked out of the porthole of the cabin where the men were sitting together. "Tangier - that was a short flash. Always quick - on the nerves ..."

"Nerves?" Gutmann raised his eyebrows disapprovingly. "You wanted to have fun, didn't you? And a flyer with nerves of steel? Then jump off and pull the cord!"

"Thank you for such jokes," the Linzer snarled. "And jump off? I didn't ask for a bottle of milk."

As always, Frêne equalised: "Let's be glad, mes camarades, that we can always jump over the many tricky thresholds quickly. And we were able to do a good job too!"

"That's right," Reimer admitted immediately, straightening up straight as a die. So everything makes sense!"

Now the banks slowly receded and widened the panorama. The Playa Grande with its long coastline showed itself in its full length. The rocks with the old batteries at Tanya ei Bália emerged, then the steamer swung into the Strait of Gibraltar on an east-northeast course.

Alexandria.

The "Esperanza" entered the western inland harbour and moored alongside a British steamer. The harbour was bustling with ships and boats, and the arrival of the Spanish steamer hardly attracted any attention. The formalities took little time and the three men's passports were stamped without much question. During the journey they had received a sealed envelope from Captain Carón containing a brief message that the men should disembark at Silsila House ,

where they would receive further mail after giving their names. They said goodbye briefly and warmly to the captain, who had not neglected to provide them with the necessary comforts.

After a brief enquiry about Silsila House, they were directed to Boulevard Saad Zaghoul. In fact, after entering their names in the guest book, they were handed another letter at the aforementioned guesthouse containing a considerable sum of money in large notes and instructions to report to an address in Cairo listed in the letter.

"Great thing," commented Reimer when they realised that they had plenty of material resources. "We're sliding over the world's hump like nabobs!"

Gutmann, prudent as ever, advised caution and restraint. He thought it would be a good idea to build up a larger reserve in case of unforeseen mishaps. You never know, he explained.

They only stayed one night in the large harbour city and boarded the train to Cairo the next morning. Without having seen much of El Iskandariya, as the Egyptians call their Mediterranean harbour, they were already rolling towards their new destination.

The speed of the train brought a fresh breeze into the compartment, but at the same time a swirl of dust that was unpleasantly noticeable. The rapidly changing scenery of the delta region revealed all its beauty.

The wheels roared in steady beats like distant drums. Inside, the noise of the vehicle rose to a thunderous roar, like the pounding of an anvil. A swelling chorus that slowly died away in rhythmic repetition. Somehow the hammering of the train had a soporific effect. The hot sun did the rest and the brightly lit landscape tired the eyes. The men began to doze. As if from far away, a suppressed call reached their ears. The rolling of the wheels disturbed all perception and so for the time being it was only Reimer who did not give in completely to the monotony of travelling and stepped into the corridor after the compartment door opened.

He faltered. A few steps in front of him, an Arab squirmed under the firm grip of a white man. The few words that the European, dressed in a light grey tropical, spoke to the presumably local man remained incomprehensible to Linz. Stepping closer, he asked: "Did the man steal?"

When he asked the question in English, he received a prompt reply. "No, sir, the bloke is a bloody ringleader of an Egyptian movement aimed at us Englishmen. We've been after him and his men for a long time. Now we've finally got him!"

The Arab had rolled his quick eyes to see if he had a chance. With the arrival of a supposed second Englishman, he saw all his options disappear. The Briton had twisted his arm behind his back so that he was almost defenceless.

"I'm Inspector Maxwell," the man said to Reimer.  
"Help me secure this guy as far as Cairo. You can never be too careful with this kind of person. They've been washed in all kinds of water!"

The Linzer thought quickly. He could not allow himself to do anything that could get him and his comrades into trouble. And the fact that the English were the masters in Egypt had to be accepted as a given at this point. He **p a s s e d** h i s hand over his forehead to mark the heat and, unnoticed by the Briton, blinked at the Egyptian. The latter raised his eyebrows in uncertainty and astonishment as his only sign of understanding. A silent question flickered from his restless eyes. "Well," said Reimer briefly and nodded. The Brit tugged the Arab by the twisted arm. "Go along - march into the compartment with you!" He pushed the detainee through the half-open door and, with a subsequent shove, into a corner seat by the window. With a half-loud cry of pain, the Arab held his arm. "I've got a pistol pointed at you in my pocket now, Fellow," said the inspector to his prisoner. "If you do anything stupid, it'll go off! - Do you understand?" The Arab made no reply.

"Excuse me," the inspector said apologetically to Reimer. "If you will only keep me company as far as Tanta, that will be enough. We'll be able to call for military police at the railway station immediately."

At that moment, Frêne came by to h a v e a look. When he saw Reimer talking to a

stranger, he immediately withdrew discreetly. This was only right for the Linzer. The Englishman looked mockingly at the Egyptian. "The jug goes to the well until it breaks, Omar Sayid! - You haven't stood a chance since we chased Rommel away. Back then you should have given up. Now it will cost you your head!"

The person addressed pressed his lips together and remained silent. Reimer could see that he had an extremely intelligent, even handsome face, which betrayed energy and willpower. His age was difficult to determine, but he was probably in his mid-thirties.

"Yes, Omar Sayid, you managed to slip through our fingers once in Suez. Don't think you'll succeed in the same experiment a second time. Now we're going to make the account smooth, I think. But first you'll tell us a few things that will interest us!"

"La!" the Arab answered laconically in the negative.

"You'll be fine," grinned the inspector. There are some nice little remedies that can help. You'll be chatting and singing very nicely, you son of a bitch!"

A sparkling look was the only answer,

"What a cheek," Inspector Maxwell told Reimer. "The guy is wanted like a pin in a haystack and sits down calmly on the railway line that runs from Alexandria to Cairo with great frequency. Then walks here on the train

around as if he were King Faruk himself. I was out to get him. But he surprised me here, Heavens, he almost had the advantage. Hey, mister, er - mister ..."

Reimer called his name, with a strong English accent. It was his own little game that he wanted to play here without risking too much.

"All right - so be kind enough to check the brown man's pockets to see if he's concealed a firearm. Be carefull - take care!"

Concealing his displeasure, the man from Linz took two steps towards the Arab and carefully felt him over, skirt pockets, trouser pockets, nothing.

"Nothing!"

"Well, it'll cost him his head either way. Just wait, mate!" He wiped his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief. Then he growled: "Bloody heat!"

Reimer was sitting opposite him next to the entrance, so that it was blocked. The Arab couldn't get through the window because the train was travelling too fast for that, and the inspector was still holding the pistol threateningly in his hand. It was certain that he would not miss his catch.

A train conductor in a white jacket passed by the compartment without realising the strangeness of the situation. The Englishman was sitting half backwards towards the door, as was Reimer, so nobody could have realised that a drama had unfolded here. The Arab sat with

He sat motionless in the corner of his window and continued to stare out into the landscape. Once he had cast an enquiring and penetrating glance at the Linzer. His instinct might have told him that his second guardian was not who he seemed to be. Nevertheless, he refrained from any attempt to feel his way forward.

The inspector took it for granted that few words would be exchanged, for which Reimer was only grateful to him. In this way, he could maintain the anonymity of his nationality for longer without committing a direct offence against the Englishman, which would cause difficulties with the authorities. The heat in the compartment was not conducive to conversation either.

After glancing at his watch, the inspector suddenly said: "We'll be in Tanta in about ten minutes. Perhaps you will be kind enough to inform the military police at the station. The stationmaster must not give the signal to proceed until the police have secured the guy!"

Reimer showed a blasé face. "Tanta? - Unknown, unknown to me. First time here ..."

Now Maxwell grumbled angrily: "Damned, when there's a fire somewhere, everyone calls for the police! But when you call on civilians for support, then ..." He broke off, because Reimer had put on the haughtiest face he had ever shown in his life. He babbled on discontentedly and indistinctly.

Houses appeared on both sides of the railway line,



The train slowed down. The hammering of the wheels became harder and more intermittent.

"Have the courtesy to close the window," asked the Englishman, who kept a constant eye on the Arab.

"Well," said Reimer and closed the window. The view already showed shunting tracks, the station was approaching.

Stumbling back to his seat, the Englishman suddenly held his pistol out to him. "If you're a stranger here, I'll take care of the military police and have the train serviced. The man is safer here in the compartment."

He added ironically: "You'll be able to handle this little bullet syringe, won't you?"

"Yes!" Reimer nodded briefly.

"All right. Just keep the man at bay until I get back. It'll only take a few minutes. And again, watch the fuck out, the guy's got all the bad Djinns in him!"

The train stopped with a short jerk. Reimer sat stiffly in a pose and held the Englishman's pistol at the Arab with a bent arm, while the inspector hurriedly stepped out onto the gangway with a short nod. The staccato of his hasty steps died away. Now the Arab's eyes were fully focussed on the Linzer. Hope and despair were reflected in them. Reimer considered the situation for a moment. If he helped the man, it could be unpleasant for him. Far more unpleasant, however, were all

Consequences for the Egyptian. This comparison was decisive. He threw his head back. "Get out - but quickly!"

The Arab jumped up. Slowly at first, like a panther scenting disaster, he moved towards the door, expecting a shot at any moment. When he saw that the white man in front of him was leaning back in his corner and putting his pistol on the seat, he brought his hand to his forehead in a flash. "Sahite, ya effendi - Allah be with you!" With one leap he was in the corridor, then he swung himself nimbly out of the open window onto the railway track to disappear behind rows of parked carriages.

Frêne had seen the window jump from the next compartment and cheered Gutmann up. Both men came to Reimer to ask. "What's going on, Reimer?"  
..."

With hasty words, the Linzer told me and concluded: "Any minute now, this Maxwell will be here with the police. I'll probably have to fake a robbery!"

"You must have been bitten by the monkey!" Gutmann hissed.

"That could get us into a lot of trouble ..."

"Don't get angry, act," demanded the Carcassonner. He grabbed the pistol and flung it into a corner. Then he yanked the Linzer forwards by the shoulder. "Bend over like you've been punched in the stomach! We're going to play the Samaritans. All right?"

He gave him a firm slap on the side to give his

Imagination about low blows.

"Oooooo," gurgled Reimer theatrically.

Footsteps could already be heard. "Attention!" warned Frêne. In this almost improbably short time, the inspector was back, and behind him came an officer and a sergeant of the British military police.

"What's the matter?" barked Maxwell, with Gutmann and Frêne blocking his full view. Behind him, the soldiers eyed him curiously.

"Robbery!" Frêne explained briefly, "We heard a scream and when we came out of the next compartment to have a look, a man jumped out of the window and this gentleman was kneeling on the floor holding his stomach. Apparently incapacitated with a single blow!"

"All devils!" howled the inspector angrily. "Didn't I say before that this brown fellow had all the Djinns behind him? You hand a grown man a shooting iron and he lets himself be taken by surprise like, like..." He gasped for comparisons that he couldn't quite think of. He pushed the travellers aside and looked at Reimer, who was crouched on the bench, groaning with a distorted face. "That was still too little!" the Brit panted angrily.

In the meantime, the officer who had come along had given the sergeant an instruction that caused him to hurry off immediately. The inspector reached for a bag lying in the luggage net and said: "Well, mister, if you've got over that ache - it's happening

You're right! - then think about your - er, abilities. Every shepherd boy among the Nile valley sheep herds a thousand sheep more easily than you, an armed man, a single person. I don't have time now - but I'll find you in Cairo and then you can tell me about your misfortune. By then I hope to have caught the brown chap!" He turned round without greeting, dragging the officer with him.

"My hat's off to you," Gutmann grumbled. "Wherever we go with you, Reimer, we get into a mess! We're more than lucky to have got off so lightly at the moment. If only there isn't a bad end to come ..."

"You could try to avoid it," Frêne soothed,

"That's easy to say. Probably by jumping on the moon? ..."

A shrill whistle signalled the train's departure, people rushed, carriage doors slammed and the throaty sounds of Arabs came from the platform. The three men looked out of the window as the train started rolling again. A group of soldiers had just come out of the station building, led by the gesticulating inspector.

"We've spoilt his soup," Reimer laughed mischievously. "Don't look so worried, Gutmann! The brown lads in Tangier helped us out of a jam by sending us to Egypt so nicely.

before the French police or Spanish gendarmerie would have made trouble for us in the city where we had been forced to move, and now we have modestly returned the favour. Surely this Omar - and whatever else he may be called - was one of those who backed Rommel and is now one of the hunted. Are you still complaining?"

Gutmann sat down with a sigh. "You should have become a lawyer," he said devotedly. "You can't get away with ..."

"Which is a plus for the whole round," Frêne noted dryly.

Few people had boarded in Tanta. The three men were satisfied that they could keep the compartment to themselves.

The procession drew ever closer to El Kahira, as the locals call her, the victorious one. Again houses, more and more, which gradually formed a coherent cityscape. Another increasingly muffled rolling of the wheels, the journey slowed down and finally the train pulled into the main station.

The railway station was teeming with porters and young fellows chattering excitedly and jostling for the luggage. The three men struggled to fight their way through the pack. An Egyptian policeman in shorts and a red fez showed them the way to the Pension Hanse, which, as noted on the Esperanza newsletter, was located on the Maïdân Ismailia.

They travelled by tram through Sharîa el malika Nazli, past the Egyptian Museum, turning left into Sharîa Mariette Pasha to Maïdân Ismailia, a beautiful square. The Hansa House was soon found and the men were amazed that they were actually handed another envelope promptly after the registration formalities. They chose full board and were soon able to have a snack, accompanied by ice-cold beer, which they enjoyed immensely.

"It must be said," Frêne marvelled, "that the famous German organisation could hardly work better than the communication game with the messages always at hand. The modern means of communication are used very skilfully!"

"You will probably experience more miracles like this and then get out of the habit of wondering altogether," explained Gutmann.

"I've been trying to do that since our Pyrenees tour!"

"Pah, that's nothing compared to everything that will be revealed to you when we get there, which is home for us now" Gutmann pulled the envelope he had received out of his coat pocket after serving a Turkish mocha. "I must say, you really aren't curious. Let's see what happens this time ..."

He scratched the envelope open with the small spoon handle and pulled out the paper inside. It was in English and contained the instructions to return the evening after the

Arrival in an atfa, dead end, which branches off from the Sharia el Zarâya and whose last, final house has a small gate which has to be knocked on three times.

"Very interesting and mysterious," laughed Reimer.

Frêne shook his head. "The Orientals love secrecy coupled with caution. They are experienced secret-keepers and set managers. The English could tell you a thing or two about the impenetrable secrets they were unable to unravel. There are enough fanatical orders and brotherhoods to keep a smouldering fire with mostly anti-English tendencies burning."

"That's for sure, that we are under the protection of a widely ramified brotherhood," Reimer admitted.

Gutmann nodded in confirmation.

"I'm thinking of the messengers ..." Reimer broke off and looked at his companion,

"To the messengers of Ali Sikh from Cairo; one of the guardians of the secrets," Gutmann added openly, alluding to the appearance of the messengers at point 103. "Oriental societies are very ramified. It is very questionable whether we ended up in Cairo, of all places, with Ali Sikh, through the Spanish connection."

Frêne, who could not yet see completely clearly, refrained from asking any questions. When there was a slight pause in the conversation, he suggested that they take a look at Cairo. "In the end, we might have to move on after a day or two. And it would be a shame..."

"Totally agree with you," Reimer concurred.

"We had to miss out on visiting the Nebi Daniel Mosque in Alexandria," explained Frêne.

"It used to be called Türbe el Iskander, the tomb of Alexander the Great, but very few people still know about it today ..."

"Not me either," Gutmann confessed with interest, "Is that true?"

"Yes, a legend arose that whoever was in possession of the body of the great dead would rule a great empire. So Alexander was brought from Babylonia to Egypt, where Ptolemy, one of his generals, buried him in the city founded by Alexander and named after him. Later legends linked the person of Alexander with Daniel in the oriental imagination, which also explains the naming of the Nebi Daniel Mosque built over the old tomb. And since to this day the sanctity of the building prevents research into Alexander's remains, one would have to rely on conjecture unless a corner of this mystery had been revealed by chance. Around the middle of the last century, a traveller lost his way in the underground corridors of the mosque and suddenly found himself in front of a chamber containing a mummy crowned with a diadem, surrounded by a mountain of books and papyrus scrolls. A mollah or guide who had just arrived prevented any further investigation of this find. When some time later, on the basis of this report



When the head of the Egyptian institute, Yakub Artin Pasha, wanted to visit and inspect the tomb, he found himself standing in front of a wall that had been built in the meantime. The guardians of the mosque denied that there had ever been an opening here and so the Pasha had to leave without having achieved anything. Subsequently, the Pasha was prevented by higher orders from pursuing matters further. To this day, the sacred regulations surround the mosque like a protective wall, so that no European may dare to carry out any act that would desecrate the building."

"Yet another great secret that will have found its guardians," Gutmann thoughtfully added to the Carcassonniers' comments. "Also proof that all legends and tales, even if they reach back to the most distant times, have a true background, no matter how embellished or even shifted into the transcendental."

After an early dinner, the men asked for directions to the Shâria el Zarayib. With some difficulty, they found the dead end indicated in the letter and Gutmann knocked three times on the small wooden door in an alcove. Only when he had repeated his knocking did a shuffling sound come from inside and a voice asked in Arabic about the request.

"Nachne telât rigal min Iskanderiye! - We are the three men from Alexandria," Frêne replied to your

invisible questioner.

There was silence for a moment, then the gate creaked open and a wrinkled face peered cautiously through a now open gap.

"Antun min Maghreb - Are you from Morocco?"

"Aywah, Tangier," Frêne replied,

"Marhaba - welcome!" the man greeted with a deep bow, bringing his right hand to his forehead, he opened the entrance and asked to come in.

He pushed behind the visitors a  
behind the visitors, then shuffled past them and led them through a dark corridor into a small courtyard, where he excused himself for a moment. With a bunch of keys in his hand, he returned and led the men through another corridor. After several turns, they stepped outside through another door and, to their astonishment, found themselves in another alley. The Egyptian led them a little further and then once again into a narrow passageway, through a gate opened with one of the keys into another courtyard and from there into a nested building, the inner entrance to which was once again secured by a locked door. Another creak. A dull air hit the people entering towards them, then then they After passing through two rooms that l o o k e d dilapidated, empty and desolate, they entered a larger, surprising room. Thick carpets, a number of cushions, Nargilehs, small tables and and an ornately barred window leading into an air shaft.

were a typical oriental feature that signalled wealthy ownership.

"Tefeddel ukud - take a seat!" the guide asked, pointing to the cushions. Throwing back a tapestry, he disappeared through a door hidden behind it.

"A real foxhole," whispered the Linzer, looking around. He reached for the mouthpiece of a nearby nargileh. "It's cold," said Frêne.

The strangeness and surprise of the room prevented any real conversation during the long wait. Her wandering eyes took in the various details of the room: An alcove with stemmed pipes, a few small bowls with golden settings, faience vases whose blue, red and green glaze ornaments glowed dully in the dusk of the dimly penetrating light and carpets, carpets everywhere, on the floor and on the walls. A beautifully crafted traffic light dangled from the ceiling.

A soft breeze swept through the room. Then the tapestry behind which the door was hidden was pulled back and an old, white-bearded Arab entered. With an enquiring look, he surveyed the three slowly rising men, slowly brought his hand to his forehead and gave a measured greeting: "Massik bilchair!"

"Sallam aleikum!" the three men greeted back.

"Essallam!" The old man stepped fully into the room. Now

Only then did two more men become visible behind him, following at his heels. They greeted him very politely.

At a hint from the old man, the men took their seats. One of the Arabs accompanying him lit the water pipes and offered the mouthpieces invitingly. No words were exchanged yet, only the gurgling of the water accompanied the first puffs. An aromatic scent spread through the room.

"I heard you've come a long way," the old man suddenly initiated the conversation. His voice was deep and melodious.

Frêne put his right hand on Gutmann's arm and replied in his place: "Only Allah knows what is far away. Some things seem short to Him that seem immense to us!"

The old man's face showed an increasing glimmer of friendliness. "Allah akbâr!" he nodded.

"That's right, oh Bey!"

The old man put the mouthpiece of his pipe into the holder on the Nargileh's neck and pulled the crossed legs closer to him with his hands. "You're staying at Hansa House now?"

"Aywah, ya Bey!"

"Tayib - it's good. Where do you want to go now?"

"Allah knows. We don't."

Short silence. "Our friends have sent you from Tanja, you call it Tangier, to el Misr, to Egypt. You can't stay here. We

will help you further. For now, tell us where you're from!"

Gutmann interjected in English: "We are Germans, oh Bey!"

"Marhaba again - are you soldiers of Roumi - of Rommel?"

"No. We are aviators. We were last in the land of midnight!"

"Allah, wallah, tallah! - Then you are the men who jumped off the big metal bird over the land of the Fransawi?"

Now the three men were more than astonished. Gutmann asked, "You know that, oh Bey?"

There was a fine smile on the old man's face. "An old man, far older than I, informed me that we had to help two or three men who came from a metal bird from Midnight and might turn up in North Africa, be it wherever. We have since received more detailed news from Tanja!"

"Then you know Ali Sikh?" Gutmann asked.

"That's who I meant before! He's not in Cairo now."

"A few months ago, the Ali Sikh messengers were in the Land of Midnight. I saw them and spoke to them!"

The old man bowed low. "You are among those who know the secrets"

"It's a great pity that Ali Sikh isn't here," Gutmann regretted. "But we have confidence in you. You will know what we have to do next."

The old man reached for the mouthpiece of the Nargileh and took a few slow puffs. There was another short pause. Just then, Frêne reached into his pocket and pulled out the ancient ring he had received from Bastia in Cádiz. He held it playfully between his thumb and forefinger.

The eyes of the three Arabs were all fixed on the ring. Frêne asked: "What does this ring mean, O Bey?"

The old man took the piece of jewellery and looked at it briefly. Then he let out a cry of astonishment. Ya Allah! -  
Where did you get this jewel?"

The Carcassonner described the events as far as they seemed useful for explanation,

"Allah is with you" said the old man. It is a very old ring that dates back to the Moorish period in Spain. Its wearers are commended to the protection of Allah. These rings were considered a sign."

"And what signs are these?" Frêne leant forward.

But the old man remained silent, lost in thought. He turned the ring between his skinny fingers as if absent-mindedly, then handed it back to Frêne with a sudden gesture, "Keep it well, machbûb il Allah, favourite of Allah! He can still be of great use to you, you will come to Baghdad - there show him to old Jamil Ibn Bahri. But don't ask about his secrets."

At that moment, the carpet was pulled back again and a younger Arab put his

Head came in. He hastily mumbled a few sentences that even Frêne couldn't understand. On the other hand, Reimer heard the whispered name of Omar Sayid. The Egyptians exchanged glances with each other.

"Forgive us, O Bey, if we disturb your thoughts," Reimer interjected, "but I heard a name and spoke to this man on the train from Alexandria to Cairo. If there is any news about him, I would also be very interested."

For a brief moment, the old man could not suppress a wrinkle of displeasure on his forehead. "How could you have spoken to Omar Sayid, Efendi?"

"I spoke to him!" said Reimer firmly.

The old man's eyes flashed and he gave a quick wave to the messenger still waiting in the doorway. "Tell Omar Sayid to come in!"

"Aywah!"

The three men looked at each other while the Arabs peered curiously at the door. Hasty footsteps came closer, the slightly moving carpet flew aside in folds and suddenly an Arab stood in the middle of the room. His face shone with sweat, his suit was a little creased and his eyelids twitched nervously. Reimer recognised him, it was the man he had let go in the train,

At first, Omar Sayid only had eyes for the old man, whom he greeted respectfully. When the old man showed him to a seat, he came to sit just so that he was facing Reimer. At first he was a little put out, Europeans in

in this room. When his eyes fell on the Linzer, he let out a shrill cry. "Mashallah - hâdâ ragil kâna munqid - this man was my saviour!"

The Arabs were seized with excitement. The old man raised both arms. "Praise be to Allah Almighty! You spoke the truth, stranger, when you said you had spoken to Omar Sayid. The seemingly untrue has been confirmed. W'allahi!"

Omar Sayid had stood up and stepped in front of Reimer. "Allah yebarkek dajim - God bless you eternally for what you have done for me. You and your friends are under the protection of Achawîja el burnus aswâd - the Black Coat Brotherhood! You are certainly no Ingliz."

"Germans," said Reimer.

He broke off and turned to his compatriots. Only Frêne now understood part of his detailed description of the incident on the train from Alexandria to Cairo. While describing his arrest by the British, the threat of detention in Tanta and the foreigner's incomprehensible attitude, the narrator was repeatedly interrupted by exclamations of astonishment. During his subsequent report, Frêne translated quietly and in a short style that Omar Sayid, after jumping out of the window of the railway carriage, had hurried between the parked carriages and, after a short shout, had crawled into the vehicle of a fellah driving a cart, which was covered with a tarpaulin. This is how he got out of the



He got out of the city centre of Tanta and two hours later a truck with a mollah would have taken him to Cairo. With all due caution, he managed to get as far as here.

"Allah, wallah, tallah! - God's ways are marvellous!"

All eyes were on Reimer.

"By Allah, what motivated you to help Omar Sayid against the Ingliz?" the white beard asked.

"The inspector said it was about the man's head. I didn't want to be complicit in helping to hand over a man to a foreign justice system in this country."

"God has given you a good heart. And the friendship of the Black Coat Brothers to boot!"

"And what did the Ingliz say when he came back?" asked Omar Sayid.

"He was furious," Reimer said truthfully.

"Two men from the military police came with him and they all ran off to search. The inspector still wants to honour me here in Cairo!"

"The sheikh will get him! He won't be allowed to find you. We'll see to that. Where do you live?"

"In the Hansa House."

"Do you have any suitcases there?"

"No. Just rucksacks and a suit box."

Omar Sayid quickly exchanged a few words with the old man.

He gave an order to one of his companions and the Arab left.

"It's better if you live in Cairo without registering,

Otherwise Ingliz Maxwell may realise his intention, find you and visit you. Then he will soon know that you are German. That's not good," explained Omar Sayid. "There is a large camp on the Sinai Peninsula with captured Roumi soldiers who are all starving. And only Allah knows when they will be released."

"And where are we going to live?" Gutmann's question sounded like an aside.

"You can stay here today," said the old man, stroking his beard. "And we'll make sure that you get a quick connection for your onward journey. Cairo is not a good place for a longer stay at the moment. We will see to your well-being!" He clapped his hands together,

A boy with a fez stuck his head in at the door.

"Ahmed, bring Kahwa - coffee!"

The old man turned to Omar Sayid. "You'll find other clothes later! In the evening, when it is dark, go to Abd er Rahman in the village of El Kum el aswâd, but be careful when you pass the Nile bridge. Tell him to make sure that his car is always ready to go; we will need it suddenly. I expect you back that night!"

"So be it, ya Mohammed Raif - I thank you for your help!"

The servant soon returned and brought coffee. He placed a small, low table between the Nargilehs in the centre of the room and placed small fingers,

He placed the dainty cups on the plate and poured the strongly flavoured drink. Wordlessly, he moved a w a y again.

Now Gutmann turned to the old man again. "You know a lot, Mohammed Raif, - you know about our odyssey up to here, you know that we are from a metal bird - can you tell us now whether you also know what is with the metal bird and its men?"

The old man tilted his head back, indicating a denial. "We are all in the kingdom of Allah like a grain of sand in the desert. When the Chamsîn comes, it whirls up the sand and carries it far away. Even the metal bird with the strange sign of midnight cannot escape the fate already recorded in the Book of Destiny. It was fuelled in Maghreb, as Ali Sikh told us just a few days ago, and flew away southwards as Amîrikî military aircraft searched for a foreign plane that had been spotted over one of the bases. And our brothers in the Maghreb have received no news or other signs. We know nothing. However, before Ali Sikh left Cairo a few days ago, he gave instructions to help you immediately if you should turn up in Mist - in Egypt. And he also said that you should move eastwards as quickly as possible. That's why I said before that you would come to Baghdad!"

"On the magic carpet through the whole Orient," Reimer could not refrain from whispering, "Like a

Fairy tales ..."

However, Mohammed Reif and the other men had understood the words of the man from Linz, as he had spoken English. They smiled mildly and the old man said thoughtfully. "Everything is truth, whether it is formal or illusory. For Allah gave both to mankind to discern. And the fairy tales are the flowers in the meadow of being, they are also there, only Allah has provided them with delicious fragrance and colours of joy. Allah kerîm!"

"God is merciful!" nodded Omar Sayid and the other Arab.

Gutmann pushed forward again. "Have there been any signs in the sky?" His expression was tense as he addressed this question to the hosts. "That would also be important for us to know."

"You mean the flying tables that the Koran talks about," said the old man calmly,

"Yes, that's what I mean!

"They were not seen over Misr. But they shone over the Tower of the Ephemeral and were also sighted over Yemen."

"Wagt ei umm kebîr - sign of the Great Mother!" muttered Omar Sayid, while the other Egyptian let his eyes wander uncomprehendingly. He was visibly uninitiated.

Now Mohammed Raif stood up. "Beîti beîtkum - my house is your house! - Allow me to retire now, for I have many things to organise. Before

I hope you can continue your journey soon and don't get into trouble. The Ingliz will put you in a camp if they catch you. I am sending Ahmed with pillows so that you can rest for the time being. I will also organise food and drink!"

"May Allah reward you for your kindness," said Frêne, who knew the customs of the country best.

"You are the guests of the Black Coats!" said the old man with dignity and bowed.

After politely apologising, all three Arabs left the room. A little later, Ahmed appeared and brought a tray with food and date wine. Returning a second time, he spread out more of the cushions he had brought with him and, to everyone's surprise, presented newspapers printed in English. Reimer picked them up, but put them down again after a few minutes, while his companions smiled mockingly.

"Lots of rubbish! Abominable propaganda non-stop, so much so that even the great coffee comes up! ..."

Ahmed came again. He now brought in the luggage that had been left behind by the men in Hansa House. The old man's messenger must have been known, otherwise he would hardly have received the luggage from the room. The rooms also seemed to have been paid for.

After dark, the servant appeared again and lit the traffic lights, which gave off a strange, not unpleasant light. Already getting tired, the men adjusted their swelling cushions

to sleep together when Mohammed Raif unexpectedly turned up again.

"Is semah - I apologise for being late. But things are going better than we could have hoped. You must be ready to leave tomorrow morning. Abd er Rahman will take you back to Iskanderiye in a lorry and you can set sail for Beirût immediately on the Turkish freighter "Malatiya". Everything will be prepared and you can leave the ship in Beirut without having to worry about anything."

"And in Beirût?" asked Frêne.

"Keep it in mind," the old man warned. He sat down before continuing: "You take a small bus and drive up to Aleppo. There you must try to find one of the lorries that travel to Mosul at night with smuggled goods. From Mosul you can easily get a connection to Baghdad. There, seek out Jamil Ibn Bahri, whom you will find in the suburb of Adamiye. This man will know what to do!"

"We're getting further and further away from home or a ferry back to our base," Reimer said anxiously to his companions. "Baghdad - that's a thousand and one nights; all very marvellous and full of fantasy. But for us, at the present time and under the particular circumstances, it means an escape into the blue that will end somewhere ..."

"Allah's ways are marvellous!" said the old man with a slight rebuke in his voice. "His eye is with us, even when we cross it Sir, the bridge of death. Nothing

Whatever we do is in vain; it rises from the past and leads to developments as Allah wills. We are all but members of an event and our actions, which are predetermined, remain effective even if we are in paradise or in the Jehenna!"

"Our friend has no doubt about that," Frêne rebutted Mohammed Raif's explanation. "His words only betray restlessness, because as a soldier he has no clear orders, as he is used to."

Mohammed Raif stroked his beard. "Tayib - it's good. You now know the route and it is up to you to avoid any dangers that may arise. The more discreetly and quickly you cover the distances, the safer it will be for you. I have not given you any intermediate stops because it is better for you. Otherwise you would only have delays."

"And when do we leave tomorrow?" Gutmann asked.

"Ahmed will wake you up. Afterwards, I'll come and see you again myself, together with Omar Sayid, who wants to say goodbye!"

"We thank you, O Bey, for your kindness!"

"Allah grant you a peaceful night and paradisiacal dreams! May He protect you and keep you safe; Eschedhu en la illah il Allah, eschedhu enna Muhammedum Rasul Allah!"

"May your night also be sweet," thanked Frêne. "Es salâm aleikum!"

"Sâ'a es safâr hunâk - the hour of departure is here!"

woke Ahmed in the morning. Except for Reimer, the men were already awake. He brought steaming coffee, English white bread, butter and honey,

Half an hour later, Mohammed Raif arrived. "Jisid sabahak - I wish you a good morning!" he said, imitating European customs.

He had barely taken a seat on a pulled-up cushion when Ahmed stuck his head in again.

"Schufi - what's going on?"

"El utumbîl - the car is waiting!"

The old man immediately stood up again. At the same moment, Omar Sayid entered the room and bowed deeply. Then he walked up to Reimer and embraced him.

"My brother, may Allah be with you and be with you in all your ways. May He protect you and your friends! Remember that you always have friends in Egypt and that you are my brother. Allah jihfazak - God protect you!"

The farewell was quick but cordial, Mohammed Raif stayed behind in the room while Ahmed and Omar Sayid accompanied the guests. This time the men left the house by a different, shorter route. Omar Sayid, who did not want to show himself unnecessarily on the street, said goodbye in the hallway. Then the servant opened a gate and stepped out onto the street with the guests. A lorry with a tarpaulin was parked right in front of the house.

An Arab, obviously the driver, stood leaning against the side of the vehicle while an officer of the Saptieh, the Egyptian police, dozed in the cab. When the latter



White stepped out of the house, he pulled himself up and gave a curt military salute.

The three men looked at each other in surprise. An amused twinkle in their eyes and the driver's quick servitude, accompanied by a guttural laugh from the servant Ahmed, soon set them straight. Climbing over the back wall, they quickly climbed into the carriage, where they found blankets and cushions on the floor. Some crates formed inconspicuous niches that also allowed them to lie down comfortably. The driver folded up the back wall, then immediately rushed forwards and started off.

The carriage set off at a rapid pace and maintained the highest possible speed in the city area. The Saptieh officer riding along was an excellent protection against unforeseen disturbances and proved that the Achawîja ei burnus aswâd was an excellently functioning organisation.

They left the city, which had revealed only a few of its world-famous beauties in the few hours of the strangers' visit, through the Sharîa Shubra. As they drove through the suburb of Rod ei Farag, the Mokattam cliffs in south-east Cairo glowed in the light of the rising morning sun above the city's haze like a copper castle of the djinns.

With the engine howling loudly, leaving large plumes of dust behind him, the driver sped along in the car, constantly cursing when he had to ease off the accelerator, or when he had to steer round slowly plodding donkeys or stoically stomping camels and the drifting or

riding fellows.

It was just lunchtime when they passed through Iskanderiye and drove straight to the quay. The driver jumped out of the car and asked the men inside to wait a few minutes before dismounting. The Saptieh officer had also got out and strode around the car, shooing away the loitering people,

The driver disappeared for a short while. When he returned, he drove the car a little further and stopped right in front of the Turkish steamer moored on the quay. "Hunâ bâchira - here's the ship!" he told the passengers.

Two hours later, the "Malatiya" steamed out to sea, heading for Beirût,

## THE WAYS OF ALLAH

God opens his heart to those to whom  
he is gracious.

(Korân 6, 125)

A dark stripe grew up behind the waterline on the horizon. First a fine line behind the rear sight, then, slowly approaching and rising, the ridge line of the Deschebel of Lebanon.

The parting waves foamed in front of the bow of the "Malatiya". Seabirds squawked around the ship as it approached land, and on deck the crew's activity was greatly increased. The strip of land increased in height and slowly the distant shapes took on solid form and colour. White dots appeared beneath the grey and green of the mountain ridge, bright houses that merged downwards into a bright city.

The minarets of the large mosque greeted the expanse of the sea as the steamer entered the Bai de Saint André and passed the flashing light of the projecting pier into the inner harbour.

The three men passed through the passport and customs checks without a hitch. Once again it was Frêne who, as a Frenchman, was able to enter the former mandate territory with his companions without being questioned and quickly obtain the formal information.

Following Mohammed Raif's advice, the men did not stay in the city but enquired about the nearest connection to get to Aleppo. They were lucky in that after just a few hours they got a bus that could take them to Hornas. They quickly changed some notes into the local currency at the Banque de Syrie et Libanon, opposite the customs office, and had a snack in a small restaurant. After a short rest, they made their way to the bus departure point.

A good road led from Beirût to Hornas. Passing the ruins of Baalbek, they travelled north between the two mighty mountain ranges. The Jebel Libnân greeted them on the seaward side, while the Antilibanon ran out on the landward side. Travelling through El Kosseir, they then passed a small lake, the Bahr el Houmous. After that came the small town of Qatiné, just before Homs, and then the destination itself.

Hornas was a busy railway and road junction, with Syrians, Jews, Druze and even Yazidis showing up alongside numerous Europeans, including soldiers of British nationality who had occupied the country as security against the French Vichy government.

The men found acceptable accommodation in an inn. It was not until the next day that they found a connection to Haleb - as Aleppo was called by the Arabs - so that they were forced to spend the rest of the day in Hornas,

They set off again very early the next morning.

A good road led northwards through the lowlands to their destination. At Rastane, the old Arethusa, they crossed the Nâhr el Asî and half an hour later they arrived in Hama, Epiphania as it was known in ancient times. After a short break, the journey continued into the desert again to the larger town of Khân Scheikhoun. From there, the low highlands of the Jebel Zaouiye began, which the road cut through at a narrowing where the village of Maaret en Nâmane was located. Later, leaving Jebel Samâne on the right, the car travelled through Tefté Naz and onwards, almost dead straight, until Haleb was reached. On entering the town centre, a mosque, the Jâmi' Zakariya, greeted us.

The most difficult situation of the journey so far since leaving Cairo arose in this town. Following Mohammed Raif's tips, the men now had to try to locate one of the many smugglers' cars that were making the area between Haleb and Mosul unsafe at the time. Here, too, Frêne proved to be up to the task.

They left their luggage at a hostel and headed for the city's bazaar under Frêne's guidance. A not entirely untrained eye and good instincts soon brought about the contact they were looking for among the haggling traders, so that they could be recommended to a driver on the Mosul route. In return for a baksheesh, a dignified-looking trader escorted the men to a coffee parlour where chatting and smoking Arabs and Turks were sitting. The bazaar merchant waved

He called in a young-looking man and explained the three strangers' wishes to him.

At first it seemed as if the driver was reluctantly going to refuse. He looked suspiciously at the three men standing in front of him and shook his head gruffly.

"Ahmak - idiot!" hissed the trader, who wanted to earn his baksheesh. After some reluctance, the driver said. "I can't. I've already promised a man from the Jebel Sinjar region a lift. If you had come earlier ..."

"Allah has struck you with blindness and stupidity ya walad!" the Antakji continued to bicker. "The men pay well, what more do you want?"

The driver tilted his head when he heard the word payment. The addition of the word "good" irritated him and enticed him. "What do you want to pay?" he asked.

"Name the price!" Frêne now returned as spokesperson.

The driver picked his nose thoughtfully. After a while, he casually named a price that made Frêne laugh. "Ya ustâd el mubâlagha - you master of exaggeration. Allah has given you a witty tongue," the Carcassonner initiated the bargain, as was customary in any deal with Arabs.

Hussein, as the driver called himself, rolled his eyes. "It's dangerous to cross the border without authorisation. A madfa rashâsha, a machine gun, can suddenly start barking from somewhere, ya Allah ..."

"And it may befall you because Allah removes His hand from you, He does not love exploiters!"

"Oh Lord, you're insulting me, because I'm thinking about your safety at the same time," the rogue defended himself. "And the risk with the car ..."

"You're travelling to Mosul by car without us, aren't you?"

"W'allahi, you're right!" He quoted a price that was now much lower.

Frêne pretended not to have heard anything. He blinked into the hot sky, seemingly bored. Suddenly he offered an even lower sum in return.

"Na'am - yes, Efendi!" Hussein barked like a happy horse.

"When are we leaving?"

"Ghadan - tomorrow evening, Efendi!"

"Not today?" Frêne's voice sounded audibly disappointed.

"Lâ - It's not possible."

"Good, when and where should we meet tomorrow?"

"Temânja sa'a - at eight o'clock at the Bâb ei Makâm."

"And how long will we be driving, you master of the petrol car?"

"Two nights, Efendi! Tomorrow night we will travel via Seriye and Sichne to Deir es Sor, which lies on the Euphrates, and then through the Jesireh to Scheddade on the Khabur. We will be there in the morning of the next day and rest in a hân during the day. We won't cross the border until the next evening."

Frêne translated the negotiations to his companions.

They agreed.

In contrast to their previous accommodation, Haleb's hostel, deliberately chosen to be middle class, was not particularly clean or appealing. The three men therefore spent the next day taking a closer look at the bazaar, which offered a mixture of junk and treasures to the eyes of the visitors. For the first time, Gutmann and Reimer had the opportunity to observe the life and activity of the oriental traders in detail. Many Armenians and Jews were also busy doing business.

Many things were different in Haleb than in Tangier. Nevertheless, the city did not entice them to stay and the men were glad when they heard the singing voice of the mollah from a nearby mosque calling the faithful to ei Asr, the evening prayer. Afterwards, it was time to go to the Makâm gate and wait for the car.

In front of the gate, which closed off what was left of a section of the old city wall, stood a gaunt Arab wearing a black kâffiyeh and showing a closed expression. Judging by his demeanour, he too seemed to be waiting impatiently for something. Her patience was put to the test. Punctuality seemed to be a fairly unknown concept in the Oriental world. It already seemed as if the arrangements made the day before had been a failure when a small lorry appeared in the veil of the gathering darkness and stopped right in front of the people waiting. Hussein waved from the driver's seat. "Kawam, ya rigâl - quickly, you



Men!" Afterwards, however, he got out of the car and helped the passengers to stow their luggage behind a small pile of boxes. It turned out that the man with the black kâffiyeh was the Yazidi mentioned the day before, who was also travelling with them. Gutmann, who didn't have too much confidence in Hussein's driving skills, asked for the passenger's seat, so that the Yazidi had to join Reimer and Frêne. Without a word, he crawled into the car and huddled into a corner.

The connecting wall between the driver and the hold had a large window so that Gutmann and his companions could communicate at any time. Reimer had occupied the second corner, opposite Jesiden. Frêne had made himself a comfortable seat in the centre of the wagon, which made for a very pleasant ride. A military tarpaulin protected them from the wind and visibility, as it spanned the entire carriage and only left a view to the rear.

"Kul shê hâdir - is everything ready?" asked Nussein. Barely waiting for the answer, he stepped on the gas and the car lurched off.

The exhausting heat of the day had passed. A cool breeze refreshed the travellers, which almost became an unpleasant chill as the car's speed on the open road increased. The dawning night was bright and the moon flooded the landscape with a pale white light. To the right stretched the rocks of the Jebel el Hass, to the left ran the

elevations of the mountain range. After about an hour, they passed close to the shore of a large lake that stretched towards the east. After the village of Chanasara and the following Jebel Shbet on the left, the desert area began.

Hussein drove off into the night. He proved to be a fast and good driver, so that Gutmann's worries proved unfounded. The hours passed. On both sides of the road, the moonlit desert looked like a frozen sea in majestic calm. A magical power emanated from the dead landscape, which, despite the noise of the engine, brought its full magic to bear.

Hour after hour, the carriage travelled on. Now Hussein began to sing a monotonous tune to combat his growing tiredness, "Ya leîli - ya êni - ya leiî - ya Ani - jekulune Leîla fil Iraqî meridetum - Eja lejteni kuntul tabibel mudawija ..." The melody always sounded the same and Hussein persistently repeated his "ya leîli - ya êni ..." An old Iraqi folk song about girls and love.

Gutmann learnt during the journey that a continuous journey from Haleb to Mosul would be possible in sixteen hours, but Hussein split the route as he still wanted to stay in Scheddade. Smiling slyly, the driver confessed that he had loaded French smuggled goods. It would bring in a lot. But he didn't say what kind of goods he had loaded. And again and again he began to say in a whiny voice

sing.

They drove into Scheddade at the first early dawn.

Another hot day, which the men had to spend in a hân, as walking around the town seemed inadvisable. The Yazidi had disappeared in the morning without saying a word. Hussein had things to do and slept through the rest of the day. Towards evening, the muezzin called to el Asr to praise Allah. The sun sank like a red ball in the west and gilded the minarets and the crowns of the palm trees, which were already darkening in the sky. Now came the appointed hour that Hussein had set for departure.

The men walked slowly through the courtyard of the Hân, past sitting and chatting Arabs, and waited outside the gate. Here they found the Yazidi, who, unlike Hussein, was more than punctual. This time he made the effort to greet them briefly.

Hussein drove up, the men got in and then, smiling mischievously, the driver steered the car westwards along the road leading to Haleb and then drove into the open desert some distance from the village. He rounded the town in a wide semicircle and then sped eastwards through the pathless terrain towards the border. The lights were dimmed and the previously overtaken engine was singing steadily,

After an hour and a half, they arrived at Lake Chatunîye, at the northern foot of the Jerebeh Mountains. Like a milky

The salt-crusted surfaces of the shoreline lay shimmering, with large areas of green rushes moving between them. Individual reed tips stood out black and sharp against the velvety blue of the horizon. Only a few long, purple plumes of cloud were still sailing high in the sky. Some distance away, a black tent village, camel dung fires, individual huts made of reeds, testifying to the loneliness and poverty of the children of the country.

"Qûjûd - gangs," Hussein instructed the man sitting next to him. "There have been robberies here. That's why you sometimes see police patrols here." He steered the car past the lake through the steppe towards the dark Sinjar Mountains. The thousand metre high ridge of the mountains loomed up jaggedly,

Hussein raised his hand and pointed to the landscape. "When we reach the mountains, we'll already be in Iraq. In an hour we'll be far into the country and in the village of Samusha. The Yazidi will leave us there. May Allah protect us from the evil that the Yazidi invoke."

At that moment, a soft bang came from somewhere. Hussein stopped immediately. The engine stopped and the men listened. Now - several shots ...

Gutmann had spotted a movement on the side of the lake already behind them. A dark dot grew out of the night and approached in the direction of the car. Tiny tongues of fire flashed behind it, accompanied by short whips.

There - the fast dot turned into a dark

Bale. A rider had fallen. A man detached himself from the tangle and hurried on in the same direction. He zigzagged a little to make it more difficult for the pursuing marksmen to aim. As he approached, more dots appeared behind him, men chasing him. Some of them stopped running and fired. It was only a matter of time before the pursued man fell victim to the pursuers.

At this moment, just before the dramatic climax of the night's events, a short series of shots rang out further to the north. Still quite far away, two narrow, brightly lit eyes appeared, coming towards the shooters at an acute angle from the position of the men observing the events.

"Dâbitîja es sâhra' - desert police!" said Hussein excitedly. He made a move to drive off, but Gutmann held him back.

"Wait a minute! If we drive now, we'll be noticed immediately because we're in the other car's field of vision. Let them pass us first. If they then continue to turn their attention to the shooters - look - they'll turn round and run away!"

"Ya Allah, esch el musibe di - Oh God, what a misfortune!" Hussein moaned softly. "If our car is caught ..."

"Chalik mirtah - be quiet!" whispered the Yazidi from inside the carriage. Reimer and Frêne looked over the

The man, who was still walking towards them, albeit staggering a little, was on the back of the ship. Suddenly the Yazidi knelt between them. "We could save the man!"

"The car won't wait," Frêne said doubtfully. He crawled forwards and shouted through the window that they wanted to pick up the running man. Surprisingly, Hussein did not spread out, but looked backwards out of the window. The man was still about a hundred paces away, but the police car had already passed and was chasing after the now fleeing figures. A short burst of fire barked out and some of those running threw themselves to the ground.

There were still a hundred metres between the fugitive and the car. Now the Yazidi jumped out without further ado and hurried towards the man. In a few minutes he had reached him, grabbed him by the arm and pulled him along, Reimer and the Carcassonner waited and lifted both men over the side of the vehicle into the interior, Frêne shouted forwards that it was time to drive on.

Hussein didn't need to be told twice. The car took off like a startled animal, throwing the occupants against edges and walls without exception. As if that wasn't enough, the exhaust suddenly banged twice.

"Alf Schejatîn - a thousand devils!" cursed the driver, his foot firmly on the accelerator. Regardless of the possibility of a broken axle or tyre damage, he drove straight onto the dark

up the mountain massif to get out of sight under the protection of the black wall.

In the meantime, Frêne and the Yazidi had taken care of the man they had picked up, and Reimer was watching what was happening behind them. He saw that after the noise of the exhaust the strange patrol car had stopped and now seemed to be watching in turn. If the banging was repeated now, it was inevitable that the direction and probably the car itself would be discovered.

Just then, the men, who had previously thrown themselves to the ground, jumped up again and tried to escape into the nearby reed belt by the lake. This moment prompted the police car to continue the pursuit. It was clear that he must be able to reach some of the fugitives in a few minutes before they disappeared into the tangle of rushes and reeds,

When Reimer turned his gaze backwards for a moment and tried to penetrate the darkness in the wagon, he saw Frêne busy dressing a wound in the stranger's thigh, with the Jesidian helping him.

It was an Arab who was now lying on the floor of the carriage and had sustained a wound. "Just a graze shot," Frêne explained. "But the man has at least lost some blood."

Hussein chased towards Samusha. The desert police car had been left behind and had not performed well.

chosen. Some Arabs might have fallen into the hands of the crew, but a smuggler's car had escaped. With him was a man who had also almost fallen into their hands.

The moon hung high in the sky again as the wagon drove into Samusha. Nestled between steep and dark rocks, the village was built into the rising slopes, ending in the Hafa'ir valley, through which a mountain stream flowed as it seeped into the steppe. Narrow and steep alleyways criss-crossed the settlement and only a few trees tried in vain to conjure up an inviting atmosphere. The east-facing half of the village, which rose up in terraces and had plenty of greenery, seemed a little friendlier. Red and white oleander blossoms shone in the glow of the night sky,

The Yazidi now crouched near the window at the front of the vehicle and gave the driver quiet instructions. Hussein stopped in front of an almost windowless house on the valley floor, which only had a larger, now closed gate. The Yazidi jumped out of the car and banged on the wood of the gate several times. There were a few dark thuds that didn't penetrate too far through the neighbourhood,

"Min inte -Who are you?" came from inside,

"Jafar!"

When the Yazidi had said his name, the gate creaked open. The wooden leaf swung back to reveal the entrance to a spacious courtyard.

"Ta'ala - come!" the Yazidi called to the driver. Hussein immediately steered with an abrupt turn of the steering



wheel

the carriage through the gate, which was locked again, In this house the Yazidi who had travelled with him seemed to be the

to be master. He gave the old man who had opened the door a few instructions, which he acknowledged with a bow before shuffling off. Then Jafar turned to the other men: "We want to get the wounded man into a room first. I ask you to help me!"

Frêne took the stranger by the arm and saw that he had not yet overcome his weakness. Together with Reimer, he lifted him up using a hand bridge, then they followed Jafar, who led them inside. A small room with a simple bed took them in. The Yazidi pointed to the bed and said apologetically: "My house is only modest ..."

Next door was a second, much larger room, which Jafar made available to the Europeans.

"Selim will be here shortly with pillows and blankets," he said. "And I'll find a small room for Hussein."

"You're very kind," thanked Frêne. "You take us in without knowing us."

The Yazidi bowed. "Hospitality is sacred to us, Efendi!" Then he gathered up his robe, "It is already very late. May your night be happy and blessed - Leilkum sa'ide wa mubâreke!"

The Carcassonian repeated the greeting while his companions mumbled along out of politeness. Jafar left.

"In Europe, you could have a better view than here in the

sleeping in a ditch," said Reimer. "The hospitality towards strangers exceeds all expectations. Our first night in Iraq. Once again we got away with the famous black eye."

"We can be satisfied," Frêne said cautiously. Then he looked at the Linzer and smiled subtly, "Why mock Europe? That's where the democratic freedoms are now, about which my compatriot Anatole France said that even the rich are allowed to sleep under the bridges!"

Selim arrived with an armful of blankets and a number of pillows. He was loaded like a cargo camel when he entered the room and put the things down. A traffic light provided enough light to reveal a reasonably clean room,

The men had barely prepared their bed for the night when Hussein came scurrying in. "In the name of God, the Merciful," he whispered, "allow me to rest on the threshold of your room. It is not good for all believers to sleep alone in the rooms of this house."

"Are you scared?" asked Frêne.

Hussein stood there humbly, "Lâ - I am not afraid. But the place of Shamusha is ruled by the Lord of Evil, whom the Yazidis worship."

"Sit down! Who is this, the lord of evil?"

"Ya Efendi - you shouldn't say his name out loud. It is - it is - Malek Ta'ûs - King Peacock ..."

"King Peacock - the lord of evil?"

Hussein glanced anxiously at the door. "It is the god of these people in the Sinjar Mountains. He is the adversary of goodness, to whom only humility is shown, because he knows only goodness. King Peacock, however - may his name be forgotten - is the lord to whom these people only approach in fear and trembling and to whom they make sacrifices. They used to sacrifice children every year, and it is said that they still do so secretly today, O Allah! ..."

Frêne translated Hussein's words to his companions.

"I know some of it," Gutmann replied,

"This King Peacock, this Ta'ûs, with the emphasised U, is the evil spirit, the mischief, the implacable, the sinister, born of your magical sound of the called 'U'. It is the spirit of world evil that the Yazidis seek to appease through worship. Every year they celebrate the festival of the Extinction of Light, where they pay homage to their secret mystery customs. In the past, they used to impale children on burning petroleum spouts and roast them to death. But it is still not known exactly how far they bow to the strict laws of the Iraqi government. Part of this sect also lives in Syria"

"You can't tell by looking at these reserved people. This Jafar ..."

"Pah," Gutmann interrupted. "Not all that glitters is gold. But you can't condemn these people. They are at the mercy of a fate that has made them behave in this way, rockfall, landslides, disease, raids by the enemy, and so on.

all these are blows that constantly threaten them and which they attribute to the power of evil, which must be appeased. According to their doctrine, he is the true lord of the world, whose power can become corrupting and whose smile means death and destruction. The peacock king, in a dark iridescent robe and staring scornfully with one yellow and one red eye, who degrades the radiant golden wheel of his plumage, the shining disc of light, to the background of his rule. The Mürid, the people of this Yazidi nation, pray to him as common believers and his secrets are guarded by the Ruhn, the knowers of the mysteries presided over by the mysterious Sheikh Khan in the Taurus Mountains."

"You should be able to attend one of their parties now," said Reimer with interest.

Gutmann refused. "That's not advisable, and it's hardly possible. It could mean death for the fanatics of this closed faith, so we still know very little. Let's not disturb the people."

Hussein had not been able to follow the conversation, which was conducted in German. He assumed that the white men were talking about him staying.

"Allah protect us," he murmured, "It's not good to be alone. They say the Yazidis practise what the Christians call black masses. And individual Beni Arab are said not to be safe ..."

"That's popular gossip," Frêne fended off and

translated.

Gutmann agreed with his companion, then turned to Hussein himself, speaking English: "When will you be travelling on from here?"

Hussein looked at the questioner. "I understand some English, I can't speak much. Drive on - yes. In the morning. Sabân ..."

"Then let's get some sleep, we only have a few hours until then."

Frêne, who couldn't get a good night's sleep and was always thinking about Hussein's and Gutmann's descriptions, was wide awake as soon as Hussein touched his arm. "What is it?"

"Hush, Efendi?" Hussein breathed, "Listen!"

Frêne went to the door and listened. He felt as if he had heard a shuffling, then a creaking. He looked back into the room and saw his companions awake, watching his actions. "Switch off the lights!" he asked quietly.

As soon as the room went dark, the Carcassoner opened the door a crack. Nothing, about to pull it shut again, a suppressed groan suddenly reached everyone's ears. It came from next door, where the injured man lay. Frêne immediately pushed the door open again and stepped out into the corridor, which lay there in complete darkness. He groped his way forward until he felt the door to the next room. He already had the handle in his hand when the door was abruptly wrenched open. A man crashed into him and uttered a cry of surprise and horror.

It couldn't be the injured man. Frêne grabbed the

Surprised at the arm stretched out in defence and turned it behind his back. The man let out a cry of pain and squirmed. At that moment, the light of a torch shone on the man's face. It was Gutmann, who had followed his companion at his heels and was now seeking clarification in the light. Frêne had caught Selim.

The man was still squirming and slowly ran his free hand under his clothes. Frêne, warned by Gutmann, immediately tightened his grip and forced Selim to kneel. As he twisted his body, a dagger fell clattering to the ground. At the same time, the fist of the twisted arm had opened slightly, causing some crumpled papers to fall to the ground. Frêne put his foot on the weapon, while Gutmann picked up the papers and kept them. Then he shone the lamp towards the couch.

"Wake up - we've caught a thief," shouted the Carcassonner.

No answer. The wounded man did not move. Gutmann stepped over to the bed and shook the man. Nothing again. His face showed only a distortion of features. One hand hung limply over the edge of the bed while the other lay clutched to his chest. The man was dead.

A shrill scream rang through the night, freezing the blood. It was shrill and loud enough to wake the whole valley.

Frêne had involuntarily loosened his grip when he was surprised by the scream after seeing the dead man



became. Selim immediately tore himself free and leapt into the darkness of the corridor with a mighty leap that one would hardly have believed him capable of. As he did so, he ran into Hussein, who stepped out of the room full of fright and fell backwards to the floor. Selim jumped over him and disappeared.

Reimer helped the groaning driver up and hurried to his companions, then - another scream, shaking the marker, hurling all the suffering of a tortured creature against the sky.

All four men ran out into the courtyard. What they saw shocked them.

The full disc of the moon hung over the crest of Jebel Simjar. Its lower edge touched the ridges as if a silver ball were rolling along them. The disc seemed close by, overly large and magnetically attractive, and in the glow of the hypnotic star men stood on the roofs of the elevated houses and raised their arms in rapture and prayer. And from somewhere the sound of a child crying could be heard.

Hussein's face looked grey in the moonlight. He clung to Frêne, who understood his language. "They sacrifice and pray! ..."

"And the scream?"

"I don't know anything for sure," Hussein's teeth chattered. "They say they torture children to death to greet the full moon with the sounds of unspeakable pain. Especially at the festival of the Seventh Moon. They believe it satisfies the evil one ..."

The crying and whimpering increased and ended abruptly with a scream that surpassed the previous ones. The silence that followed lay like a nightmare over the silver landscape. The white figures on the roofs stood motionless like statues and stared after the wandering moon, which travelled unmoved across the wide sky, taking the worship of Samusha with it.

The four men in Jafar's court stood rooted to their places under the spell of horror and the monstrous. Images of horror danced in their imaginations, fuelled by their troubled souls. Images of a spell to which the people of Jebel Sinjar were subjected. It was only when movement appeared on the roofs of the houses that the four men's rigidity loosened,

"What now?" asked Reimer, breaking the heavy silence,

"We want to wait for early morning," Gutmann said.

"Tell the driver, Frêne, to be ready to set off after dawn."

The Carcassonner turned to Hussein. "Tulû' esch schems - we leave at sunrise!"

"Na'am," the driver nodded. "We'll stay in the car until then, oh Efendi!"

Frêne, spoke to the companions, who immediately agreed to take out the luggage and blankets. Hussein himself refused to take another step into the house.

After preparing their resting places inside the car for a few hours, Gutmann and Frêne went back into the dead man's room. They found everything unchanged. While Gutmann shone a light and listened for outside noises, the Carcassonner searched the body to find clues to the identity that might solve the mystery. It was obvious that this was not a simple robbery. Under the headrest, the Frenchman, who had made a thorough search, found a loaded English-made pistol. A few coins and banknotes were all that the search yielded. The latter alone proved that Selim's raid must have been for the papers. The question remained as to how Selim knew about the papers or could have suspected them. Who was the dead man, whom did Selim serve?

"War in the dark," Gutmann said with conviction, "Hot iron!"

Frêne had taken the pistol and put the money back in his pocket without counting it,  
"Allons ..."

In the car, they went through the papers in the light of the torch, having first warned Hussein to be careful. With blankets draped over them - the night frost was making itself felt - the men squatted together and smoothed out the crumpled pieces of paper. Shivering with excitement, the driver leaned against the side of the boat and squinted into the grey of the slowly fading night.

"Ah - English!" Gutmann took a closer look at the first paper "Listen up! - This is a recommendation from an English major to an Englishman in Mosul. The bearer - there's no name on it - has important news. Is to be treated favourably and supported." Gutmann grunted. "Hm, you might need that - but wait! - It says at the bottom that the man's name is Abu Bakrîn. So we would have that name ..." He furrowed his brows thoughtfully. "You could cut out the addition," he muttered. He folded it carefully and pocketed it. Now for the next piece of paper. "A list of names, on thin paper and in Arabic letters. Could also be a subject index. Set that down, Frêne!"

The Frenchman took the piece of paper. "A list of names, Gutmann! It's all Arabic names and places, but no other details. So you don't know ..."

"Then we'll keep this list for now, too." The piece of paper also went back into the bag. "So - and now one more! - Ha, manna fell from the sky! A neatly drawn plan. A fork in the road, a hill, a stream, a sign of ruins and, of course, another squiggly inscription. Again for you, Frêne, to decipher!"

The Carcassonner reached for it, "Arabic place names and designations. Here - near the ruins, a small cross and a meeting point sign. No clue as to which area it is. Should only be for insiders

of a narrower area."

"Give me that too! - Let's see if we can find a solution in Baghdad." Gutmann took out the slips of paper, folded them all together and put them carefully in his wallet. "A man had to die for three such pieces of paper. A son of a bitch and a martyr at the same time. Depending on which side of the front you look at it from."

A call from Hussein interrupted further discussions.

"The Yazidi!"

When the men looked out of the car, they saw Jafar in the courtyard, accompanied by two men, Selim was not there.

The men's features were quite recognisable in the night light. They all wore a black kâfliyeh with their white burnouses, so they looked strange enough. "You left my house?" Jafar asked with feigned calm.

Frêne put one foot on the side of the boat and supported himself. "We're still in your house! But the voices of the night woke us up and we went to your courtyard. We also believe that evil spirits are at work in your house. The walls are groaning..."

The Yazidi's companions made a violent movement. Jafar said: "I also heard a groan, but it was that of a human being. When I looked, I found a dead man in my house." The last sentence had a threatening undertone.

The Frenchman acted as if he had not heard the words.  
Calmly

he asked: "Where is Selim?"

Jafar took two steps closer, his eyes sparkling.

"Why are you asking about Selim? He is asleep because he has had a hard day. But I ask you: What do you know about the man who died in my house? Where are his things?"

"Ask Selim," Frêne replied, "He came out of the room where the stranger we don't know was lying. He had a dagger with him and fled!"

"Your claim, Efendi, may be possible, but it is not proven! Selim made a tour of the house and surprised you when you came out of the room!"

"Iftah el bâb - open the gate, Jafar! -You are insulting your guests!" The carcassooner's voice sounded imperious.

"You are clever! But remember: you are only my guests until you have left the house. Then you're free. Free for Samusha's men and for the police!"

"Jîb bulîs - Bring the police! We are waiting for it."

"Don't wish for that," Jafar tried to warn them.

"We actually really want it," trumped Frêne.

"But we believe that the police will not be welcome." An angry exclamation followed the reply. One of the two companions stepped next to Jafar. "You speak boldly, yâ Sîhdi!"

"Who are you?" the Carcassonner asked calmly.

"I am Nassr ed Din, Pirân of Samusha," said the interviewee confidently. Frêne turned back to Hussein and asked quietly: "What is a pirân?"

"That's the highest priestly caste," Hussein whispered back. The Pirân have a great influence on life in Beled Sinjar."

"Good, Hussein. That's enough." He continued loudly: "Put your foot down, Pirân! Bring Selim here!"

"Why do we need Selim here? First prove that you didn't kill the stranger. And that will be difficult for you!"

"Why would we have killed the man? We didn't know him. We even helped him when he was being followed. Jafar knows that!"

"Yes, you helped the man," Jafar confirmed. "But you robbed him in my house!"

"How can you speak of robbery? Did you search the man and find little or nothing?"

The Carcassooner's mocking tone made Jafar angry. Nevertheless, he realised the pertinence of the question. He said a few sentences in Kurmendji to his companions, which Frêne could not understand. He had never heard the Kurdish language before. "We examined the dead man because we thought he was still alive. We realised in passing that the man had nothing at all on him. That's suspicious, isn't it?"

"He didn't have anything on him at all?" Frêne's voice sounded insistent.

"Nothing!" said Nassr ed Din briefly.

"Strange."

"Hand over what you have taken from the man",

Jafar demanded again.

"You seem to care more about certain things than about the man's life!"

"You're insulting us in my house!"

"You are mistaken! I have already had to point out to you that we, your guests, are wrongly suspected by you."

"I already said: this has not been proven!"

Without any particular thought, Frêne said: "Your cheeks should be flushed if you Malek Ta'ûs -"

"Qu, qif - stop! - Don't mention the name!" All three men threw up their arms in horror. "He whom we serve must not be called ..."

"Oh, all of us here, we'll call him if you don't open the gate of this inhospitable house so we can move on."

"Don't do that, Efendi," Jafar said almost submissively.

"Look, we have taken in another guest besides you who stole from me. Now the man is dead and his property has also disappeared. Understand my excitement. I didn't want to offend you, but I'm driven by worry"

"You're not sincere!"

Jafar squirmed while his companions stood like rigid statues. "What's the point of arguing, Efendi? Let the night lie over what has happened. Give me what you have found and travel in peace. Here, the Pirân will see to it that the man's death is declared an accident. For you, all that the



man could have had with him would be of no use whatsoever."

"You speak very mysteriously and evade my questions. Nor did you call Selim, who was caught by me when he came out of the room next to ours. And now you are asking us for something that must be very close to your heart and for the sake of which you have accused us. Tell us what you are looking for and I will tell you if I have seen anything like it."

"You want to spoil me, Efendi!"

"Why would I do that?"

"Then give me the papers that the man must have had with him. They're private letters that only concern me."

"How can these be corrupting to you?"

"You're tormenting me, Efendi."

"Give Jafar the papers," Nassr ed Din intervened.

"Do not abuse the hospitality he has offered you. If you give these letters to your police, Jafar could get into trouble for his business. And it is very difficult to do business at all."

"Why our police?" asked Frêne.

"You Ingliz always pass everything over to the police straight away."

"Who told you that we are Ingliz?"

The Carcassonner saw that the Yazidis were looking at each other in amazement.

The Pirân asked: "Where are you from?"

"We are Swiss."

"I've heard of this country. It did not fight in the great war.

You are friends of the Ingliz."

"We are everyone's friend," the Frenchman improved. "But we have no interest in revealing your private secrets to the Ingliz."

"Blessings on all your paths!" Jafar exclaimed with relief. "So you'll give me the papers then?"

"I only found one," Frêne said slowly.

"Wait a minute, I want to see if I still have it. It's all crumpled up and looks unimportant." He stepped back into the car and whispered to Gutmann:

"Quick, a sheet of paper and a pencil. Vite, vite!" He immediately grabbed the paper and asked Reimer to cover the light of the torch with a blanket. Then he picked out the plan from among the three papers and began to eagerly sketch it out. It went very quickly, as there were only a few lines and markers and the labelling instructions were no trouble at all. The sketch was copied perfectly in just a few minutes.

"Is it a good idea to hand this over to the people?" asked Gutmann, who guessed Frêne's intention. He and Reimer had not been able to understand the conversation with the Yazidis, but they had a rough idea of the dispute.

"I'll explain everything later," the Carcassonner reassured him. He pocketed the copy of the sheet and crumpled up the original. Then he stepped forward to the ship's side again. "Here, Jafar, is a note. It was jammed between our luggage. There will certainly be nothing on it. You'll be disappointed. An old one,

crumpled up paper." He threw the paper ball to the Yazidi.

Jafar had caught it skilfully. He hastily unfolded it and held the crumpled paper up to the rising dawn. He must have been able to see enough to realise that he had a plan in his hands.

Again the Yazidis exchanged a few words in Kurdish.

"Was it worth insulting guests for the sake of this scrap of paper?"

"You're right, Efendi." Jafar crossed his arms over his chest and bowed deeply. "I have committed a grave injustice and I thank you!" He bowed a second time to hide the flash in his eyes, which did not escape the Carcassonner's notice,

Frêne interjected like a bolt of lightning: "And yet a man had to die because of that scrap of paper!"

All three men were silent. Jafar walked slowly towards the gate and opened it awkwardly. The wings creaked open. "We promised you that you could depart in peace. He to whom we are all subject will judge on the Day of Destiny."

"Then fear for yourself!"

"No," Jafar shouted wildly, "but perhaps it is the soul of the dead man that is now wandering in the dark, guilty because it has acquired damnation!"

Frêne called out to Hussein. "Come on, jump down from the wagon and get into the cab. We're driving!"

"I'm not getting in alone," Hussein defended himself.

"Hey, Gutmann, take the rabbit's foot to the front, we can leave. See to it that Hussein gets us quickly

out!"

Gutmann jumped over the back wall and pulled the half-reluctant Hussein after him. Together they walked forwards into the cab and got in. Hussein started the engine.

The Yazidis stepped aside to give the car room to turn. The sound of the car pulling up broke the spell of the night, the headlights describing a circle of light across the courtyard. Frêne had also dismounted and stopped the reversing gear by waving. Then, abruptly driving up, Hussein stopped between the gates to pick up the Frenchman,

However, he approached the three Yazidis. "The custom of your country demands that we thank you for your hospitality, Jafar! It was not our fault that we had to leave your house during the night. We do not care about your affairs, but we regret when the lights of life are extinguished prematurely. Whether the one to whom you think you are subject approves of your actions or not, you must know better than I do. Peace be upon you."

"Ma'as salâme - farewell!" Jafar greeted formally. His companions just crossed their arms.

The gate behind the car closed with a thud. Hussein, who had already driven through Samusha several times, was able to orientate himself easily and soon found the through road. The humming and intermittent coughing of the engine made the dogs yelp in the houses left behind.

An Iraqi soldier recognisable in the pale twilight

A military vehicle appeared and turned off the road to Skeiniye. Hussein immediately followed, keeping up the same, almost murderous pace. They drove through the narrow valley that cut the Sinjar Mountains in two and connected the two large Yazidi villages of Samusha and Skeiniye. The few kilometres were quickly covered and as they rattled through the still silent streets of Skeiniye, a pale green light was already peeking out from under the heavy, grey-purple sky in the depths of the horizon.

The car in front of them drove through the village without stopping and continued on the Mosul road. Gutmann turned to Hussein. "Are we going through to Mosul?"

"Yes, Efendi, it's about one hundred and sixty kilometres that we'll soon have covered."

As they travelled into the rising morning, Frêne described his conversation with the Yazidis to his companions, crouching by the ship's side window. In brief words, he repeated the details that cast Jafar in a strange light. The nocturnal events in the Yazidi's house were in serious violation of all the laws of sacred hospitality and must have had extraordinary significance. Even the customs of this sect, which was not fully known, could hardly allow such occurrences. The attitude of the men had been striking when they learnt that the Europeans were not English; everything indicated that the Yazidis had no particular love for the Ingliz. Nevertheless, the role of Abu

Bakrîns mysterious, his partisanship unclear. It is also unclear whether it was a smuggling story or about politics.

All the signs pointed to the latter, as Gutmann had immediately surmised. The Englishmen to whom Abu Bakrin was recommended were not involved in smuggling. This was about other things. It was tough agent warfare. The morning chill made the men shiver, and a plume of desert dust blew up behind the car in front, forcing Hussein to lag a little behind. The red sand made itself unpleasantly felt as they travelled. They had already passed the Sinjar Mountains, and after a while the part of Jemal to the right on the right, a already from the Hill caressed by the morning sun.

"About fifty kilometres to go," explained Hussein.

"Praise be to Allah that we are safe from the spell of the devil worshippers."

Gutmann neglected to explain to Hussein that the cult of the Yazidis was not devil worship in the sense of the usual popular opinion. It too deeply rooted were erroneous and prejudiced ideas among the local population for a foreigner, and a European at that, to have had an enlightening effect. In addition, the Yazidis harboured secrets that still did not allow for a completely clear picture of their popular religion. He therefore limited himself to brief questions relating to travelling from Mosul to Baghdad. Frêne and Reimer dozed off in their

Blankets wrapped.

The Arab drove very quickly. In the far distance, the peripheral mountains slowly rose from the horizon, and gradually the silhouette of a city emerged on the edge of the foothills. Mosul on the Tigris.

Brown-coloured kites and large storks flew loops under the blue sky. Minarets of old mosques jutted upwards like pencils, few palm trees, and little by little the houses appeared as old buildings with the typical oriental archways, numerous hâns in whose wide courtyards people and camels rested.

Sober life, everyday life in the Orient, nothing left of the breath of former greatness of the ancient empire of Assyria. Gone is the power of Assurbanipal, the empire of Sennacherib, Assurnasipal, the name of the upstart Sargon, all of whom ruled over the expanse of Mesopotamia. Nothing but the walls of Nineveh to the east of the city of Mosul. Pitiful remains and yet eloquent witnesses to a grandiose civilisation. Where once the gods Assur, Anu and the erosheic moon goddess Astaroth ruled and their magnificent temples stood, animals roam and prowl. Now Allah's name sings with the sands of the desert and the words of his prophet are the laws of the land.

"Amdulillah, hathi el Mussel - finally in Mosul!" Hussein grinned with satisfaction as he drove the car into a small hân and then got out,

"We've reached our destination, Efendi," he said to Gutmann.

"Good, Hussein. You shall have your reward now." He



called down the companions, who immediately unloaded their luggage and jumped off. On the advice of the carcassooner, he gave the driver a rounded-up sum of money, which he accepted with a gush of thanks and immediately made disappear.

Now the Hândschi came over, a simple-looking Arab in a brown burnoose decorated with white stripes. He greeted Hssein like an old acquaintance and welcomed the strangers. He spoke English out of politeness, as he thought his white guests were Inglîs who were honouring his Hân instead of visiting one of the more prestigious hotels. "Do you have any wishes?" he asked politely,

"Yes," Gutmann interjected immediately, "we need a fast onward connection to Baghdad."

The Hândschi bowed his head. "You can leave in a Chevrolet hire car in a few hours. I'll call Mahmud Saraj to drive the car!"

"How long do you drive for?"

"About eleven hours," replied the Hândschi.

"This is going to be an expensive affair," Gutmann said anxiously to his companions.

"Not like in Europe," reassured Frêne. "Prices are cheaper in the land of oil." He nodded to Hândschi: "Mahmud should come. As soon as possible"

"I will send my servant after him immediately, Efendi!"

In the meantime, Hussein was already engaged in an animated

It was hard to go wrong in assuming that these were the recipients of the smuggled goods. He had received his pay in abundance and his further interest in the Europeans was extinguished.

The Hândschi departed, leaving his white guests waiting after they had asked him to hurry. Mosul was not a centre of British interests in the Orient. A possible interest on the part of the Field Secret Service could be embarrassing. In Baghdad they hoped to attract less attention as the Iraqi capital was also a trading centre.

The rising sun sent increasing arrows of heat. The men waited in the shade of the already damaged courtyard wall for the new driver to arrive. The smell of fresh camel dung and the pungent urine of the animals hung in the air, every now and then one of the four-legged friends roared. Hungry dogs, shaggy-looking, hunted around for scraps. All around, over the top of the wall and behind the flat roof of the hân, the minarets rose into the sky.

After an hour, the landlord returned with a younger Arab, whom he introduced as the driver. He also spoke English and so an understanding was quickly reached. After the customary haggling, the Carcassonner lowered the fare he had initially demanded to two dinars. The satisfaction shown by the driver proved that he still had half a dinar in his favour.

which was higher than the usual price.

Mahmud Saraj differed little from Hussein in his manner. He showed his passengers the car parked in front of the Hân, which looked well maintained. It was a beautiful modern car, the kind that many Arabs in Mesopotamia seemed to own. Alongside the abject poverty of the fellahs, European luxury had already become established among the wealthy, revealing stark contrasts in the social structure.

A little later, we left the city. Gutmann again sat next to the driver, who drove the car quickly and safely through the streets. Exiting to the south, they gained the arterial road that led straight to Baghdad.

Mahmud was lazy with his mouth and that was just fine with the man sitting next to him. The Arab was amazed that the Europeans had no cigarettes with them when he asked for some. He smoked almost constantly and so he stopped in a larger town on the way to buy some cigarettes.

Gutmann took the opportunity to climb aboard after the short stay with his companions. The car was extremely spacious for the officers, who had previously only been used to the small, functional Wehrmacht trolley cars.

As we travelled on, Reimer lamented the desolate character of the country in places. "Nothing of a paradise," he said, "nothing of the beauties that the ancients praised, sand and stones,

some date trees, all from the realms of the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon."

"Nevertheless, it is an area with a great historical tradition and a crossroads of people-moving power," said Gutmann,

"This is where ignorance moved the centre of the Flood. And as correct as the two versions of the Chaldean flood saga are, they also mainly relocated the catastrophe to Mesopotamia. The Chaldean accounts are otherwise very precise and even mention the name of Xisuthros, the son of Obartés Elbaratutu, who ruled at the time of the event"

"You have a very good memory," Reimer marvelled.

"I already explained earlier that I was concerned with the questions of ancient history, which hold the key to the various contexts that displaced a real event with decipherable, directional roots into esotericism. And therein lies a great danger; the Hebrew magicians steal and conceal the force field of Aryanism. They banish the fertilising elements of the Aryan tradition, whose carriers were the Arctic Nordic and Atlanto-Nordic primal races with their later mixo variations, into their Ark of the Covenant and filter the power currents of the Aryan mission through the Hebrew pole in order to let them work in their favour in a decomposed form. Pisces is the cosmic animal of banishment in the zodiac, the ancient Tyr circle, whose influence through

the magical filter that elevated the two intertwined triangles to the enigmatic ruling symbol, which is discreetly reflected by the colours of the UN flag. And it is the sacred blue colour of the Atlantean tradition that should be disempowered by the foreign symbol in order to petrify the rightful bearers of the colour. I use the word petrification explicitly because it contains mythical concepts that are capable of neutralising life forces. In the German legends, compare the Sleeping Beauty, Emperor Karl, who was banished to the Untersberg, and similar tales, which become an open book of popular destiny for the wide awake. With the sinking of the fish sign from the cosmic dominant, the astral accumulator of the Ark of the Covenant and the power of the Ring of Peter become powerless, Sleeping Beauty's spellbound sleep ends ..."

"The last century of the fish sign is not yet over," Reimer interjected.

"But it is already the last phase, which expresses itself through the last irregular impulses of power before the effective current disappears completely. The most concentrated power is often a sign of the last rebellion, - the last working. It only remains as an effective impregnation if the previous infiltration of the recognisable opposing force has sufficiently decomposed it. Although it is not possible to prevent the change of lawfulness, it is possible to paralyse the effect of the force. Hence the race of the forces for the power of the midnight mountain, for the effective

Nordic high seat. The Piscean Age deliberately separated the more exotic circles of humanity from the Atlantean background with the aforementioned Chaldean flood saga in order to blur the trail to the Midnight Mountain and to allow Mount Zion to act as the magnetic mountain of oriental myths. The Chaldean priest's account in the holy books of Babylon says that the god heralding the Flood was Chronos, i.e. Saturn. Chronos, a mythical god of Atlantis, a legendary king in Italy long before the foundation of Rome, who was later recalled to the heaven of the gods. His name remained associated with a great Saturnian continent in the Atlantic Ocean, an empire that also encompassed the coasts of North Africa and the European coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. This is consistent with Plato's account, which describes the expansion of the Atlantean empire in the same way. The Romans initially called the Atlantic the mare chronium and spoke of the Pillars of Chronos before they were attributed to Hercules. This proves the accuracy of the Chaldean legend that the trace of the appearance of Chronos-Saturn leads back to Atlantis, but also that Mesopotamia was not at the centre of the terrible flood event, but only at the edge of it."

"It's all different from what you usually hear in schools," Frêne interjected. "I know a lot of it too, but only because I follow an old

I come from a heretic province. We are seekers who are not content with the crumbs that have been released."

"The Atlantean impregnation of the European continent is still present," Gutmann continued. "It is held by the descendants of the ancient Tuatha, who were Atlanteans. Even before the Great Flood, Ireland, the ancient Hiranga, the Isle of the Sun, was conquered by the Formarians and the Fir Bolgs, who were related to the Tuatha. The Tuatha also held the land of Brittany and continued to spread. They formed the blood remnants of the Atlanteans after the Great Cataclysm and the stem to the later Thiudisk Germans. Even ancient Sanskrit writings reported on Hiranga, showing a worldwide connection of the Aryan bridge. Again and again the circle appears closed, the radial lines of which all lead to the Aryan high seat, to the Midnight Mountain; from here, too, the oldest roots of a primeval tradition, the Archean, lead to the North." With a sweeping gesture, Gutmann pointed out into the land that the men were now travelling through.

"I remember an allusion to point 103," said Reimer vividly, "in which a reference was made to the Egyptian king Narmer, a conqueror in Nile country with Nordic features. Egypt too ..."

"That was explained at the time," Gutmann confirmed. "I would like to add to that. Among the Egyptian pictographs, there always seems to be a strange

Sign on. A T with a loop over the centre of the crossbar. Sometimes just the T shape alone. It is engraved on Egyptian and Coptic monuments and means the key sign of the Nile, the mystical TAU, representing the hidden wisdom, science calls it crux ansata. It is also the symbol of God and the life to come. If one searches for the origin of this interpretation, one comes across the ancient Arabic term TAU, i.e. a word of the same meaning, in the latter case, the year god. Compare the word stem TAU-TIU. Thus we find the root of the Egyptian key sign in the celestial key of the north, the T-hand of God representing his own symbol in a polyphonic sense, which closes the sky and opens it again after the turning of the light of midnight. This crux ansata, the all-Egyptian ANKH hieroglyph from the early dynastic period, is thus in its root the Od sign on the cross, which brings the new life. In archaic Chinese the same sign form exists - here the sign T with the phonetic value Ti or Tu is the symbol of Mother Earth. In this case, this is also an offshoot of the Atlantean linear script that Herman Wirth discovered and interpreted."

"You have to have a free mind and open eyes to be able to recognise," said Frêne thoughtfully, "And all that is important. Because even the mightiest crown of a great tree draws all its strength from its deepest roots. Recognising a destiny from what is connected



is the source of strength for every free and pure existence."

"Yes," nodded Gutmann. "For the people, it is the nobility of Mother Earth, the Odil; the Od, the connection flowing from the earth and thus the rootedness and attachment of the earth-born to his homeland. The prerequisite for strengthening the folk. Standing firmly above the oath and in the realm of the high seat, all power flows to the upright who live their destiny. It is the nobility of true being, the triumph of God, victorious over all that lives unconsciously, which after primitiveness and materialism sinks back into a black nothingness. For power is creation. Action is life and good deed is fulfilment. And everything is related to the environment and thus also to the sphere of action of the blood bound to destiny."

"Vraiment - we'll have a lot to say to each other. I'm thinking back to Belisse now. He, too, was said to have much knowledge of hidden things. It is good that not only the sun ships and signs of the Pyrenees, but also the Irminsul and the Schwanenfirste in Germany were and are reminders to remember back. This is how knowledge lives until it regains its power."

The men's reflections were interrupted by an exclamation from Mahmud. He slowed down and pointed to an approaching town. "Samarra!"

A shining white spot flew towards the rapidly approaching car. As it approached, a strangely curved minaret stood out conspicuously from the other arrow towers. An astonished exclamation from Reimer

prompted Mahmud to point out, "That's El Milwije, the Twisted One, from the Abbassid era of Harun al Rashid!"

The strange minaret turned out to be a spiral-shaped tower, the outer spiral of which tapered towards the top, Linz remarked in surprise: "A variation on the Tower of Babel! The old pictures of the tower look something like that, only wider and squatter."

"I was also amazed to see this tower for the first time," Gutmann admitted. "Of course, it seems to be a reminiscence of the historical tower building.<sup>1</sup> Ancient Babylon, actually the Bâb-ilu, the former capital of the Amuri, the men who came from the west, is not too far from here, near Baghdad. This Bâb-ilu is by no means, as wrongly assumed, of Semitic origin. It was an ancient North Atlantic capital that fell into the hands of Nordic-blooded Kassites in a later epoch. Bâb-ilu was also devoted to the sun god and the dragon-slayer of the primordial chaos was the son of the sun, Mardûk, a likeness of Magni, the son of Thor! Everything proves the Atlantean-Nordic roots."

"And the symbol of this strange spiral tower, based on the old one?" asked Reimer.

"Perfect symbols of the celestial or solar ladder. Also ancient, non-Semitic terms. In the North Atlantic area, on the British Isles, there are still fragments of the so-called revolving castles, which have similar

have traits."

"There's something else you could add," Frêne remarked. "The meaning of the word Atlantis is fatherland. Pointing to the father word Atta, Wulfila's Gothic Lord's Prayer also begins with 'Atta unsar', meaning both father and age. Atlantis-Atta-Land and the synonym Papi-lond, from which the common Babylon of the present name was derived, prove the origin of an ancient and widespread racial culture. And another thing: Greek writings often refer to Babylon as Chaldea. The Chaldeans were also people from the West."

"That's right," Gutmann confirmed. "The name of the Chaldeans is derived from the Caledonians, the ancient Scots. All roads point northwards. In the so-called Old Testament, there are references to a 'house of God'. This was a pillared hall in Lûz, from the cultural epoch of the Nordic Amurû. Just as the ancient Tuatha culture had erected two megalithic steles in their stone circle cult sites to observe the winter solstice, these were also erected by the Amurû as ancient reminders of the Mother Night in the Northland, as symbols of the eternal return and renewal of the year and of life. Emblems of the light coming from the north to illuminate the world."

"The Hebrews have two cultic pillars; Jakin and Boaz!" said the Carcassonian.

Gutmann nodded. "This is a Yahwistically remodelled

Amurû tradition. They were channelled into modern lodge esotericism in the service of the Star of David, the primordial, also Yahwistically transformed Hagall rune!"

The car drove into Samarra and Mahmud slowed down. Boys ran up to the car and shrilly praised dates and watermelons. At a hint from Gutmann, the driver stopped.

"How much do the watermelons cost?"

"Give fifty fils for one," said Mahmud. He reached out of the carriage window and let a large globular fruit roll into his lap, which he passed to Gutmann.

"Very appetising and fresh in colour," Reimer snapped with relish.

Frêne leant forward: "Drive on, Mahmud! Otherwise we'll have the cart full of pumpkins and dates in no time!"

In fact, the boys crowded up to the wagon, chattering.

The driver grinned and let the Chevrolet leap forwards, causing the Arab boys to screech and clamour and move aside. Just as quickly as we had entered, we left the city, which was exceptionally clean and white by Oriental standards, and continued on into the vast expanse stretching southwards.

The heat of the day was slowly ebbing away, but the metal parts of the car that were exposed to the sun were still hot. Slowly, the three travellers began to feel the effects of the lack of a good night's sleep and

The slackness of the hot day's journey made them long for their destination. The ball of sunlight was descending and purple-violet ripples sailed across the discoloured sky.

Interrupting a prolonged yawn, Reimer turned to Frêne, who was sitting next to him: "According to the time calculation, we're not too far away from Baghdad. The next free kick is due there, where we human balls will be kicked somewhere further again. I've already lost my curiosity and all sense of surprise. We hardly have a place to stay in Baghdad and I probably won't be coming home to Linz either. Damn it all! ..." Linz pressed his lips together and stared into the vastness of the desert.

"It's like the twinkling of a star in the blackness of the night; a point of light in the sea of hopelessness, remember, comrade: every night is followed by a morning. Bright and shining!" said Frêne seriously.

"May he soon come to our poor people," sighed the man from Linz.

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## A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

The night and the horses and the  
desert know me, and the sword and  
the guest and the paper and the pen.

(El Muntanabbi)

As the car drove through the suburb of Kadmija, the moon was already high in the sky again. Three minarets shone strangely in the light of the moon's cosy fingers. They were completely gilded and in the fire of the sun might have been a signal from Baghdad visible from afar. The final stretch from Samarra to the capital of Iraq had taken four and a half hours of brisk driving and, with the exception of the driver, the men had all dozed or nodded off.

Crossing the Tigris on a bridge supported by boats, the car turned into the suburb of Adamiya, the very neighbourhood where Jamil Ibn Bahri lived. At this late hour, the men could no longer drive up to the house of the recommended protector. Gutmann therefore decided to stay in a nearby hân for the night and gave Mahmud the appropriate instructions. He quickly dismissed the driver's surprised objections that Baghdad had excellent hotels where all the arriving Europeans stayed.

Mahmud had to drive a little further before he could stop in front of a hân. Collecting a little more than the agreed fare, he handed the guests over to the hândji with many blessings and wishes. He again thanked them profusely for the honour they had done his house.

The inside of the courtyard offered the same sight as all the hâns we had seen so far. Resting camels, a group of quietly chatting men, stray dogs. The hândschi assigned the men a reasonably clean room which, under the prevailing circumstances, had to fulfil their expectations.

Left alone by the innkeeper, the men set up camp for the night, only half-dressed, and after a few words they fell into a deep sleep of relaxation and fatigue.

All three slept long and dreamlessly. Only the persistent bleating and roaring of the camels, interrupted by the panting sounds of the farm dogs, scolding and shouts from the locals, all these noises of the dawning day made them wake up rudely.

Reimer was the last to sit up, groaning.

"The shabby magic of the Orient! Where are the slaves of the ruler of the faithful to anoint the foreign visitors from the Occident with rose oil and serve them all the delights?"

"You're forgetting that we've come in secret and don't have any presents with us," joked Frêne in the same tone.

"By the way, it's not all day yet



Evening, as one of your proverbs says. Almost everything has two faces. Certainly this city too, and its magic has not yet been revealed to us."

"Magic is good," grumbled the Linzer. "I hope it doesn't turn into a lazy spell ..."

"Unke, unlucky bird!" Gutmann rumbled in between.

"Despite everything, we've had a massive pig so far. Don't break the streak!"

"God forbid," Reimer defended himself. "It was just a grain of doubt, nothing more ..."

"That's it! Let's make sure we get to Jamil Ibn Bahri as quickly as possible. This is going to be a stupid search ..."

"Hardly," Frêne replied. "We're taking a hire car. It's up to the driver to take us to our destination. I'll go into the courtyard to the hândschi and get a car. Get a car." He patted off his suit and left the room

In a few minutes, those who had stayed behind were also ready. Not exactly dressed to the nines, but ready for a visit. A bowl of water had to suffice for the time being to wet their faces and shave. The men didn't want to stand out among the Arabs with a toilet.

"I've sent a boy out," Frêne reported on his return. He will be there in a few minutes with a car. May Allah continue to be with us!"

It wasn't long before the Arab boy spoke up. "The car is here," he said in reasonably good pronunciation in

English. He was visibly proud to speak the language of the supposed Ingliz. "Thank you very much," he added several times after receiving the baksheesh.

The driver of the car waiting in front of the Hân also spoke good English. The three men were no longer particularly surprised to find another beautiful and modern American car. The Americans and British brought all kinds of civilised goods into the oil-producing country in an extremely enterprising manner. And you had to hand it to them: they also delivered quality.

Gutmann said the street name of Adimiya. The driver nodded knowingly and drove off. In broad daylight, the men saw that they had reached a modern villa neighbourhood that stretched along the left bank of the Tigris and had lush gardens. Numerous palm trees swayed between the light-coloured houses.

On the northern edge of the suburb, children were playing in the street. When the car stopped, Frêne asked a tall boy from the open vehicle in Arabic for Ibn Bahr! The boy looked at the men in astonishment and pointed to the neighbouring house. Then he ran light-footedly into the building to announce his visit.

After paying for the car, the men made their way to the entrance of the house, the driver carried some of their luggage ahead and set it down. Before Gutmann could

When I managed to press a bell, the small gate opened and a corpulent Arab in native dress bowed low, not without first casting an enquiring glance at the visitors. "Nehârak sa'id!" he greeted in a melodious voice.

"Nehârak mubârak!" Frêne replied politely, "We come from Cairo, Mohammed Raif is sending us to you!"

The Arab straightened up and scrutinised the new arrivals again. "My house is yours," he said. Come in!"

He led his guests into a room that was furnished in the European style, but otherwise had many oriental artefacts and carpets. He offered chairs and only took a seat himself when his visitors were already seated. "I know you're coming," he began the conversation. "Mohammed Raif sent me an airmail letter announcing the visit of three merchants." When he said the word "merchants", he winked mischievously. The wink took all the dignity out of his otherwise stern features and added a brief trace of cosiness.

Suddenly he cringed and his eyes narrowed. "But how am I to know that you are the expected ones?"

"How are we supposed to know if you are Jamie Ibn Bahri?" Frêne replied.

The Arab smiled. "Wallahi - tajib! - You were shown to my house and I knew you were coming."

"We have the goodwill of Ali Sikhs," Gutmann said

in English. He had understood the meaning of the previous sentences,

"I know that too! Where were you before you came to Cairo?"

"In Tangier!"

"Tajîb. - I apologise for my questions. I was impolite. But the seriousness and importance of our task allows these exceptions. Have you just arrived in Baghdad?"

"We arrived late in the evening. It would have been inappropriate to disturb you then, Jamil Ibn Bahri!"

"My house is open to you at all hours. Where did you spend the night?"

"In a hân not too far from here."

"No motel?"

"No."

"That was clever. It would have been even smarter to come to me anyway. You will surely be hungry now. Allow me to bring you some breakfast." The Arab clapped his hands.

A servant poked his head in at the door. "You called me, Efendi?"

"Jîb akel - bring food. Hurry up." Turning to his guests, he continued: "You've travelled a long way. Would you like to rest after breakfast before we continue the conversation?"

"Thank you for your kindness," said Gutmann.

"For the time being, we're not feeling tired and we need to clarify the situation."

"Your wishes are my command. Allah was with you when you travelled from Cairo to here. Did you have any difficulties?"

"Generally not. Only in Samusha did an event rob us of the night."

"In Samusha?" Ibn Bahn was astonished. "You'll have to tell me during the meal or afterwards. For now, allow me to ask why you have come to Cairo."

"An embassy in Tangier pointed us in the right direction."

"I heard a hint about that. You are fliers of the sun?"

"If you mean the sun shining from midnight, then it's true," Gutmann confirmed.

"I also learnt that your plane continued south and could no longer pick you up."

"That is also true, as we learnt in Cairo!"

There was a short pause. The servant entered and served a sumptuous meal. He handled it skilfully and silently. "May you enjoy your meal," said the host.

"May Allah reward you," Frêne replied.

Gutmann now gave a brief overview of the earlier events, as far as he deemed appropriate. He was interrupted several times by astonished exclamations from the Arab, who marvelled at the guests' daring. Then, going into the last stages of the journey, he described the events in Samusha and the affair with Abu Bakrin, Jamil Ibn Bahri pointed out

Tension and excitement. When Gutmann mentioned the papers, he even jumped up. "Do you have the papers here?"

"There!" Gutmann took it out of his pocket.

"Ya Allah! - God's ways are strange." He looked at them carefully and read the list of names, the letter of recommendation to the English officer in Mosul and then the sketch plan.

"Can you explain that, Jamil Ibn Bahri?"

"Yes, I can do that. Abu Bakrîn was an agent in British service, but I believe he also worked for the Russians. The list of names you found on him contains names of people who are fighting for the freedom of the Arab cause. If it had reached Mosul, there would probably have been many arrests. We already had suspicions about Abu Bakrin, but no proof yet. We only knew that his name was an assumed one. Nobody knows his real name. Nor the place of his origin. Our Syrian friends had probably learnt more recently and tried to intercept him at the border ..."

"Then we took him away from this access for the time being by driving past and taking him with us," said Gutmann.

"Allah only played with his fate and gave him a few more hours. His kismet reached him in the Yazidi's house after all. Hamdullilah, what luck that you found the papers! Much misfortune would have befallen us. And you gave the copy of the plan to the

Yazidis, Efendi?"

"Yes. It seemed less important to me than the list of names. I had to give him something to avoid complications. Is that very bad?"

"You did the right thing, Efendi! The plan only refers to a meeting of men for an important matter. The Yezidis will be able to find the place easily, but their curiosity will be in vain. The meeting is not due to take place for another five days and we still have time to change everything. I will organise everything right after. Allah is with our cause and has made you his messengers."

"How do the Yazidis feel about this?"

"They are not in favour of the Ingliz, but they have their own interests. They're not against our cause either, but it's not good that they know much. They have their secrets too, and they're dangerous."

"We can't know all that," Gutmann replied. "We acted as the circumstances made it seem necessary. And we are pleased that we were able to do you and your friends a modest service after we almost caused misfortune through ignorance."

"You have also rendered a service to Achawija ei burnus aswâd and are under her special protection. Our friends from Cairo have also indicated this to me. All your wishes will be my orders and I will endeavour to fulfil them to the best of my ability. What will you do now?"

"We came to you to find out, Jamil Ibn Bahri."

"I have been informed of your coming and that I may assist you in any way possible. You are one of the mysterious men of the sun, which was previously black and has recently turned white. The sol nigra has taken on the colour of radiant light. But that is all I know."

"I was expecting to find an instruction for us from you," Gutmann admitted gloomily. "Now we're probably at the end."

"Why?" asked the Iraqi.

"We came here from Spain, always hoping for a message from our aeroplane, the one from midnight; hoping for help from our Arab friends who knew our fate. You are good too, but nobody knows what we have to do now. And there is no way we can stay here in Baghdad."

"I'll do everything I can to get more news. In the meantime, you will have to make do with the hospitality of my house!"

Jamil Ibn Bahri had not promised too much. On the day of his guests' arrival, he had issued warnings about the incidents in Samusha and issued new instructions, so he pulled out all the stops to make a connection for the three men. He proved to be an extremely attentive host and visibly endeavoured to ensure that nothing was lacking.



to leave.

And so a week passed. The three men only went for a walk along the banks of the Tigris towards evening, without leaving the neighbourhood itself or visiting the heart of Baghdad. They avoided any fuss and followed the well-meaning advice of their landlord.

On the eighth day of their stay, they were sitting in a room facing the garden, drinking tiny bowls of mocha served to them by the servant, when Ibn Bahri suddenly appeared. He sent the servant out of the room and said: "Praise be to Allah, I have news! Friends in the east have taken it upon themselves to take you back to where you came from. You can travel in two days."

"And where to?" Gutmann asked eagerly.

"To Bombay for the time being. Good friends await you there!"

All three men looked at each other in surprise. Reimer stroked his forehead with a disorganised movement, Frêne drew in his breath with a whistle. "Mon dieu! ..."

"It looks like we'll have to round the globe to get back to our station," Gutmann grumbled. "The whole thing is tricky!"

The Arab had perceived the men's consternation with slight astonishment. Time and space played a much different role in his oriental mind than they did for the Europeans. His simple and yet extremely intelligent mind told him that his guests would only have advantages if they travelled further east.

were able to set down. He did not take sentimental feelings into account.

Frêne suddenly thought of the old ring that Bastia had given him when he left Spain. Pensively, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the piece of jewellery. Holding it with his thumb and forefinger, he said: "It seems as if this ring summons spirits to carry us across seas and lands. It will both chase and protect us, what else might it bring us?"

The host glanced at the ring, but could not yet see any details. "May I see the ring?" he asked politely, showing interest.

The Provençal passed the piece of jewellery across the table. Jamil Ibn Bahri had barely taken a closer look when he let out a cry. He turned the ring and endeavoured to decipher the intricate characters. Then he fixed his eyes enquiringly on Frêne, "How did you come by this jewel?"

"We helped a man out of a bad situation," explained the interviewee. "He gave us this ring as thanks."

"You must have done a lot for the man, or the person in question was unaware of the value and significance of the ring."

"What did it mean?"

"It's an old piece from the former heyday of the Moorish empire in the west." The Arab did not take his eyes off the ring. "It bears a secret mark of the princely house of Boabdil and Abd er Rahmaas. The

The wearers or owners of these rare rings were trusted messengers or special favourites of the ruling house." Jimal Ibn Bahri stroked the ornamentation with a light movement, then added: "Later, the few rings became a special symbol of a brotherhood!"

"Does the sign help us?" asked the Carcassonner,

"A lot and a little," the Arab replied cryptically.

"If you have rightfully come into possession of the ring, then those in the know are obliged to you!"

"And who are the knowers?"

The Arab remained silent, he placed the ring in front of him and pondered. After a while, during which the men sat motionless before him, he said: "I myself have never seen such a ring. I only know that it is a sign of good spirits. But I immediately recognised its meaning when I read the characters, which you may not fully understand. They are ancient formulae to which powers are also attributed."

"Just like in the old fairy tales from A Thousand and One Nights," Reimer interjected half aloud. "So the fantasy of the Orient isn't dead after all!"

"Only that which falls out of the stream of the Eternal and leaves no soul behind is dead. Everything that solidifies in materialism and is destroyed because it displeases Allah. But all signs of the past are carriers of tradition and are sacred to us. Certain brotherhoods make use of them to characterise the worthy and to preserve wisdom.

preserve. They are also the keys that open the entrance to the Valley of Wisdom with the Castle of Secrets, over which the Guardians of Secrets keep watch. I can't tell you more, I don't know much more myself."

Gutmann nodded seriously. "Mohammed Raif also knew the significance of the ring, but he kept quiet. He advised us to show you the piece of jewellery, but not to ask any questions. Forgive us if we violated this commandment without thinking!"

Jamil ibn Bahri bowed his head slightly. "Allah is with you, who should be angry with you? Allah willing, you will stand before the black stone Anât and marvel at its powers. We do not know in advance where our destiny will lead us ..."

"The Ali Sikh messengers spoke of the Tower of the Perishable with the Anât stone," Gutmann confirmed.

"They came to Midnight Land to fulfil a mission. But I don't think we should worry about the secrets of the Brotherhoods. We have our own to keep and serve."

The Iraqi jumped up, his eyes shining. "Yallah! Your mouth speaks wisdom and your heart is open and without curiosity! Now I also understand why Ali Sikh's eyes watch over you benevolently. His hand is invisible over you!"

Frêne had followed the last sentences with excitement. Giving in to a sudden impulse, he also turned to Jamil Ibn Bahri: "If Ali Sikh holds his hand over us and we have the Black Coats' letter of march,

then that is enough for us. Just as every horse returns to its stable and every ship to its harbour, so may this ring return to the hands of the guardians. Keep it, O Jamil Ibn Bahri, and give it to the superiors of the brotherhood who guard these rings when the time is right!"

The Arab was deeply impressed. Gutmann and Reimer had immediately nodded their approval of Frêne's actions. He picked up the ring with a solemn gesture. "You sacrifice a lot, a lot! But I have no right to refuse this gift. It would be contrary to our custom, and besides, it is a gift addressed to a brotherhood. I will honour your wish and pass on the jewel. And you will reap thanks and appreciation!"

"Well, we'll be travelling to Bombay in two days' time. We hope we won't have to bother you then, because another organisation will probably take us over there," Gutmann asked indirectly.

"Na'am, Efendi, - yes! You get a recommendation to a Parsi!" Bowing, he added: "Our wishes are always with you and when you come back, you will see all your wishes fulfilled."

Gutmann thanked him. In contrast to usual, he seemed a little disorganised as he searched for more words. Then he asked, "How will we be travelling?"

"By sea, Efendi!"

"Simple thing?"

"Na'am. I'll take care of everything!" One moment

he thought, then asked: "Can I have your passports? I want to take you one way and later on to the Kerkh district over to Keradet Merriam, where the Iranian consulate is located. I'll get you the visas. I have friends everywhere and can arrange this easily and simply."

After handing over the requested papers, he gave them a cursory glance. "Two Swiss and one French passport, Taijib! That's no trouble at all. I will leave immediately so that no time is lost!"

Left alone, the three companions exchanged views. Gutmann endeavoured to dampen his nervousness. "If we had been given such distant destinations for our journey in the past, we would hardly have known whether we were awake or dreaming. Driven by the whims of fate as if by the wind, our inner attitude to external impressions is considerably different. Quite inevitably. What may still irritate us is our respect for distances in space. Here our view of life lags somewhat behind the pace of technology. To stay with the Bombay example: For the constructing technician, half a globe's distance is at most a question of fuel; for the romantic traveller, however, it is an advance into a new, completely different world. As we are still soldiers and have to serve technology, we have little time for romance and imagination. We have to get used to seeing a change of environment only as scenery. When we slip into romanticism,

we lose the instinct that ensures our return!"

"If you give up all illusions in life, everything that gives life spice and colour is gone," said Reimer sadly. "We had seen people die in the war and yet we were able to rejoice like children when flowers bloomed by the wayside."

Gut mann shrugged his shoulders mildly. "The two views are not opposed to each other, but stand side by side. They only vary in the way they draw the line ..."

Reimer's eyes took on a dreamy lustre.

"The journey to Baghdad was not only a rush, but also an escape into an illusion that anaesthetised the pain of home. But the harsh reality revealed itself without a veil. We no longer found Harun al Rashid's kingdom anyway. Not even a fluid of it."

"We mustn't get lost in our views," Gutmann said, his tone somewhat harsher than intended. "We must not escape into an illusion. We do not flee, we serve!"

"That's clear. We are not thinking of violating our duties. But let us enjoy the small privileges of our own show and hope for pictures of beautiful expectations. These are usually grey in grey anyway."

"The simplest recipe is to take things as they come," Frêne interjected. "And all the trimmings are then added to the palette. And as far as Reimer's disappointment with Baghdad is concerned, the fluid atmosphere of the Thousand and One Nights never disappeared here."

disappeared. Only we sober Europeans miss it because we give our imagination too little room for manoeuvre. And we can't make any judgements ourselves, because we saw a part of the city that was built recently and whose houses could just as easily be somewhere in a sunnier part of Europe. We didn't see an old town and we didn't see the people who still live their old lives in the nooks and crannies, where they still listen to the storytellers and whose imaginations are populated by good and evil djinn. Incidentally, one of these old fairy tales has become reality in a modified form. Sinbad's travels have become the adventurous journeys of Gutmann and his companions!"

Gutmann, usually very serious, laughed uproariously. "Yes, and the sea serpent is now called a submarine, birds of prey are now buzzing around in the skies in great numbers, all other dangers also exist in similar forms, good spirits take us across lands and seas, so we are standing in the middle of the old fairy tales with a new guise inside. And if the famous storks had placed the ruler of all believers, the great Khalif Harun al Rashid, in a waiting cradle at the present time, he would of course have to receive his guests in an impeccably fitting evening suit or in a uniform with an English cut."

"Strange perspectives," Reimer smiled with amusement. "Just comparisons that are part of my illusions. One to zero for me, dear comrade Gutmann."



After two hours, Jamil Ibn Bahri was back. He reported in his calm manner that he would receive the visas for Iran the next day. "That's good in any case," he added emphatically. "Everything went smoothly."

On the last evening, the Arab went out with his guests and showed them around the old part of Baghdad. He took them to places where the tiny bowls of strong coffee were served, where musicians played strange, lilting yet stirring melodies on their native instruments, where belly dancers tried to conjure up an erotic atmosphere and where the old world of the Orient still retained some of its original ways of life.

Jamil Ibn Bahri was very open-minded and knew exactly what the foreigners from the West were hungry for. They were all looking for the colourful world and the rest of the magic of the old days. Hardly any of the travellers from further afield thought little of the name Baghdad, even the dry and mostly humourless Ingliz sniffed around the old parts of the city in fits of five-minute romanticism, not without wrinkling their noses when they found something too original. The hordes of flies and odours usually drove them away again quickly.

In contrast to the behaviour of many foreigners, Jamil's guests showed Ibn Bahri satisfaction and interest. They were not sparing in their appreciation of the local amusements and pleasures on offer

and they openly expressed their impression of the spacious and beautiful layout of King Faisal Square in the heart of the city with the equestrian statue of the ruler, whose premature death in a car accident was attributed by popular rumour to the work of the Intelligence Service ...

It was long past midnight when the men made their way home. They had spent a more relaxed evening than they had for a long time. Two different worlds had become closer in human terms, allies had reaffirmed their friendship.

Just before his departure, a young Arab from the city came to Jamil Ibn Bahri and gave him some news. After his departure, the landlord came to his guests and told them that recent events had confirmed that the papers found at Abu Bakrin's had been used by agents of the Ingliz. A British military patrol had shot two suspected Yazidis near an old tower on the banks of the Euphrates in the northern part of the country, who had made themselves suspicious by roaming around and then trying to escape.

"This is precisely the place where the original meeting of some of our men was planned and which we had changed in time thanks to your warning," explained Jamil Ibn Bahri "The two men who were shot were observers of the Yazidis who were using the plan given to them in Samusha to gather their own information.

wanted to obtain information. These scouts fell into the trap of the Ingliz, who must have already had advance notice of the meeting. They knew about it, even without having received the papers intended for them from Abu Bakrîn."

"Couldn't that be a coincidence?" Gutmann asked.

"Lâ - not at all! Security in the country is left to our desert police and the Ingliz mostly only drive transports. Otherwise, they keep their troop contingents fairly concentrated. They don't occupy Baghdad either, but a troop division and air force are stationed near here at the Habbaniyeh airfield on the shore of the lake of the same name. The appearance of a patrol near an old tower in the north is hardly coincidental.

"Abu Bakrîn was sussed out by Syrian Arabs at the last moment," Frêne remarked. "But why might the Yazidis have been suspicious?"

"The Yezidis have their men even in Esh-Shâm, which you call Damascus, in Beirût, as far as the borders of Anatolia; they are scattered, though scattered everywhere, as far as Basra and the Iranian border areas in the west. And they all send messages to your Emir in Sheikh Adî, which lies north-east of Hond, or to the Ruhân, the priests. And now there are two possibilities: either the Yezidis were warned about Abu Bakrîn from Syria earlier and they tried to get rid of an informer, or the Jafar you mentioned drew his own conclusions when he witnessed the border interlude.

The neighbouring tribes around Ma'ra Sinjar are well known to him in terms of their attitudes and he may also have noticed something that has escaped your attention. Where many interests overlap, there are watchful eyes!" The speaker softened his voice: "And the Yezidis are very careful that nothing happens to harm the privileges of their community. That would be the case if the Ingliz or Russi were to bring laws ..."

"The incident on the banks of the Euphrates will therefore hardly help to promote Yazidi sympathy for the Ingliz," said Gutmann.

"The Ingliz are not unskilful, but they have overstepped the mark," said the Arab, using a European proverb that he must have heard on some occasion.

The men were due to travel to Basra by train on the same day. As the host informed them, the train left at sixteen o'clock. This time they packed the uniforms and their contents in suitcases that the Arab had organised. This removed a conspicuous travelling requirement and also provided them with suitable clothing. Nothing now distinguished them from other travellers.

After a sumptuous and good meal served by the servant Mansur, Jamil Ibn Bahri gave his guests all the necessary instructions for the journey. He also handed them a sum of money in English pounds, which, according to his explanations, did not come from him, but from

The money came from fraternity funds. It was a significant sum, which considerably increased the three men's remaining capital. He then handed them a note with the address of a Parsi in Bombay, to whom the arrival of three "merchants" would be announced. The travelling instructions given were easy to remember and the intermediate stops would not cause any difficulties.

A carriage arrived in good time to take the travellers to the railway. As a precaution, Jamil Ibn Bahri stayed behind in his house and gave them his servant, who was less conspicuous. The old Arab bid farewell to the departing travellers with both warmth and dignity and wished them all the blessings of Allah on their journey. "The hand of Allah and our brotherhood is with you!" he said solemnly and embraced the men.

The car drove from the suburb of Adamiya towards the city, then through the magnificent Shâria er Rashid, a wide street separated in the middle by a flowery lawn with majestic rows of palm trees. The houses on either side had shady colonnades, and policemen regulated the traffic, which was not too heavy at this hour.

The journey went over the Jisîr el malik Feisal, the modern, wide Feisal Bridge that spanned the broad Tigris, to the Kerkh district and the railway station, Mahâtat el Kerkh.

Mansur was very intelligent and skilful. He had

He got tickets on his master's behalf and, together with the driver, brought the luggage to the tracks. The train was ready and the men found a compartment for themselves, which probably promised them an undisturbed journey.

The train pulled up on time. Mansur had stopped in front of the carriage and bowed low, bringing his right hand to his forehead and heart. Then they headed out into the plain, which stretched out everywhere.

The wagon worm ate its way through the desert for four hours until it reached Hilleh. After a short stop, it drove on into the slowly emerging night. On both sides, the silhouettes of date palm forests stood out against the opalescent darkness, showing contours like silhouettes. In between, the water mirrors of shallow lakes glistened and wide reed belts showed their slightly sloping tips, gleaming silvery. Every now and then, for a fraction of a second, you could hear the whining of dogs, making an upset noise as they passed villages.

The train arrived in Basra in the morning after an eighteen-hour train journey and with the heat already rising. The men immediately had a carriage take them to Fau, the harbour, where they found a dhow bound for Kuwait according to the instructions they had received from Jamil Ibn Bahri.

"Kuwait!" With a shrill shout, Fadil, the dha leader, had pointed to the bright dots of houses that lay behind the narrow surf line on the horizon.

line of the sea washing up on the shallow beach. The shallow coastal waters caused long, low crests of waves to ride against the approaching land, and the dhow travelled slowly towards its destination, light in the wind.

Fadil and a second coastal Arab ran their boat well. Grinning mischievously, they had told Frêne in a burst of familiarity that they were picking up American Camel cigarettes from their destination as contraband. Now, after the end of the global war, surplus goods, weapons and cigarettes had become profitable black goods.

The harbour of Kuwait was actually just a landing place. There was little traffic and the three men were lucky to find a small steamer anchored in the shallow waters outside the city. Its destination was Bender Buschihr, a practicable Iranian harbour.

Here too, the Persian captain, who had a Norwegian engineer on board, agreed to take the three passengers with him. He was already on the point of departure.

"Scheduled connection," joked Reimer, sighing and wiping his sweaty forehead. Sweating and snorting, the men had boarded the small ship, whose anchor chains soon rattled upwards.

The crew of the ship was a colourful mix. The helmsman was also a Persian who was very taciturn. The Norwegian was hardly ever to be seen and when he was, he swayed above deck,

he left behind a fuselage flag, indicating that he had drunk plenty of raki. Two Arabs came from the Oman coast and looked like real gallows birds, clearly betraying their pirate ancestry. There was also a skinny Indian and some individuals of indeterminable origin. All in all, it was a remarkable boat that lacked European organisation and a little care.

Rickety deckchairs under a sun canopy stretched across the rear deck were the captain's only efforts to offer his travellers comfort. An almost unbearable heat drove the sweat from the pores of those reclining in the creaking chairs and drained them of all mental strength and energy. Gutmann and Frêne lay there apathetically, the man from Linz occasionally cursing in his Upper Austrian dialect.

The ship travelled slowly and a faded cloth hung limply from the flagpole of the rounded stern. A few fishing sails stood on the receding horizon, only imperceptibly smaller.

Towards evening, a cool breeze came up. Gutmann had stood at the railing for a long time, gazing out into the distance. After a while, he returned to his deckchair. "A land will appear before our eyes again in a few hours," he said, "which has special significance for the Grail myth."

"I've been thinking along the same lines for hours," Frêne admitted.

"When, a long time ago in the far north



When the serpent of winter rose and the onset of the Arctic climate drove the Aryans southwards," explained Gutmann, "the peoples of the Arya sought a substitute for the lost paradêsha, the paradise, in their new homeland, which they had reached after a long journey, and sanctified a mountain that is recorded in the ancient Rigveda as Mûjavat. A parallel to Munsalvatsch, the mountain of the Pyrenees. It rises next to the marshy shores of Lake Hamun, which Alexander the Great was able to reach and which he called Aria palus, the Aryan Lake. This Lake Hamun is the Lake Brumbane of the Song of Ashen Brook, on whose shores the mythical Parzival reached before he found the Castle of Salvation. In the Indo-Iranian myth, Parzival finds an easy explanation as the Iranian Parsival: 'pure flower' or 'Parsi flower'. Think of the 'Parsi', the 'pure ones'; this is what the Cathar Goths called themselves."

"And the other interpretations and comparisons?" asked Reimer eagerly.

"There are surprising results! Parzival's father Gamuret has the same name as the ancient Iranian king Gamurt. And when Richard Wagner created his Lohengrin, he had the knight appear in the swan boat. In the ancient myth of the Iranians, there was a god called Lohrangerin; the name means Red Courier. Also think of the boats with the swan prow, the ancient Ingvaeonian symbols that still occasionally adorn old Frisian roof ridges. These ancient traditions are also found in the Manichaean song of the

pearl. It is believed that this profound song was written by the founder of Manichaeism himself. The Manichaean symbol of faith, the mystical pearl, is mentioned in this song. Since ghr-al also means gemstone, Wolfram von Eschenbach has not made any deviation from the original Iranian text. There is also a parallel between the Day of the Highest Love from the Cathar Epic, which is also said to have been the Christian Good Friday, and the Manichaean Nauroz Festival, the celebration of the equinox in spring. And in this tradition, a turtledove carried the sacred Soma seed on the Ghr-al at this festival, just as the dove later carried the olive branch in the Christian myth. One sees that the Minne, the remembrance, is a memory handed down from the forefathers, the bond to the Nordic origin and from the Nordic paradise, a bond, regardless of spatial distance among the Aryan people, which binds the traditions and writings of the Hellenes, Celts, Germanic peoples with those of the Oriental Aryans in a Minne community!"

Frêne nodded, "Our old Provençal Troubadoure knew about many of these myths - especially your German Wolfram von Eschenbach and his guarantor from my homeland: Kyot. And a beautiful tradition from long ago: our Pyrenean peasants say that the Grail is effective and moves further and further away from people when they become unworthy of it. But it draws nearer again to those who become enlightened and conscious of realisation

live!"

The men were silent. They were absorbed in their thoughts, completely under the spell of the Grail's power. It was a strange feeling that crept over them; as if their senses were flying through the expanse of the matt-sparkling sky and drawing the Grail spell towards them ...

Her thoughts and reflections were abruptly interrupted. A call from the forecandle made them look up.

A narrow shadow cut through the sea to the side of the course. A plume of smoke stood off to the side like a thin line and a foaming bow wave glittered like spray in the rising moonlight. Flashing signals flashed. The Persian captain seemed to have been asleep. Still half dozing, he stumbled across the deck, cursing and gesticulating as he shouted instructions while the foreign ship rapidly approached. The sailors trampled barefoot across the deck and looked curiously at the cause of the disturbance.

In a short time, a sleek destroyer roared in front of the Persian's bow, describing an elegant turn and stopping broadside.

"What for ship?" came a megaphone call over the sea.

The captain, in between clamouring indignantly Answer. A few more sentences passed through the evening darkness, then the voice from the warship announced that a boat was coming. "Cursed and sewn up," Reimer raged half aloud, "if only the investigating command doesn't find a fly in the ointment ..."

"Just keep calm," Gutmann warned. "Wait and see."

The Persian steamer had also turned round in the meantime and was waiting for the arrival of the reported boat, which was not long in coming.

Quick strokes of the oars brought a dinghy closer, which, after practised manoeuvring, moored against the ship's side. An officer and some sailors climbed on deck via the halyard ladder. The three companions remained at the stern of the ship and watched closely. They could not understand what questions were being asked of the captain. After a brief argument with the Persian, the officer and a sailor went into his cabin, where they stayed for a while. Stepping out again, the captain approached the three men in the stern accompanied by the two of them.

"Excuse me, sirs," said the officer. "Can I see your passports, please!"

The three companions looked at each other briefly. Then, one after the other, they reached into the inside pockets of their skirts dangling from the deckchairs and pulled out the required identity papers. While the British man leafed through the papers, the sailor shone a large torch. He read the papers carefully and also looked at the travel stamps and, finally, the Iranian visa in each passport. Then, looking up, he said. "Sorry, you are suspicious - unfortunately you are suspicious! ..."

"What are you saying?" Gutmann exclaimed, miming excitement,

"What's wrong with us?"

"You've travelled through Iraq?" the Brit ignored Gutmann's interjection.

"As you can see, yes"

"We received a report that three men had travelled through Iraq from Syria and at the same time a man disappeared at the border."

"That's very interesting, but what does it have to do with us?" Gutmann asked coolly.

The Briton scrutinised those standing in front of him sharply. "You will have to come with us and prove that you have nothing to do with this!"

Now Frêne pushed forward. "Mil diables! What are you doing? - Question people first before suspecting them! Take a closer look at my passport first. Besides, I myself am an officer in the French army with the rank of major. If I report this treatment, it could be very unpleasant for you. I honour your commission, but I think we can ask for a little more caution."

The British officer stared. "And the other two gentlemen?"

"These are Swiss merchants that I have joined. I can vouch for their reliability!"

"Well, that's very nice what you say. It all sounds very certain. But you'll admit that a three-man signalling system isn't exactly common. Besides, you could use the official lines and routes for your journeys!"

"I can't afford to stand out in my job on large ships," the Carcassonner bluffed.

"I have a very specific purpose, which I'm afraid I can't explain to you in detail."

"We can still talk about you. But what about your companions?" the officer continued.

"I'll tell you something," Gutmann interjected, "It doesn't mean much if we transfer from this box to one of Her Majesty's ships if you just take us in the same direction. The next consulate representing Switzerland will give you the necessary clarifications once we have presented our papers there and enquiries have been made. Naturally, however, I must first protest formally, that Swiss citizens without Swiss citizens have been harassed and detained without sufficient justification!" The Brit stepped from one foot to the other. Before he could say anything else, the Persian captain had grabbed him by the arm and shouted. At the same time

shouts from the crew sounded across the deck,

"Injâ - here!" shouted the Persian in his native language. His outstretched finger pointed to the sky.

Three bright, large discs flashed across the firmament in a triangular shape. They emitted an intense light with a bluish-white glow and advanced from the north-east towards the location of the two stopped ships.

In a matter of seconds they were above the seacraft, slowing their lightning flight and hanging in the air like glowing traffic lights, then abruptly changing colour to a glowing orange as they descended.

The men stared upwards in fascination. The first disc pushed ahead and slowly circled both ships. The orange glow was so strong that no details could be made out. After circling three times, the leading disc rose steeply again, emitting a fiery tail. Then the luminous bodies reformed into the old triangular formation, rising diagonally into the celestial expanse, the colour of the fire changing to a Bengali, metallic green. At a great height, they seemed to stand still again.

A white flare rose from the destroyer's superstructure, aiming for the discs. In response, a meteor-like piece, detaching itself from the first disc, came flying seaward at an angle towards the warship. Initially bright white in colour, the piece also changed to orange and smashed into the sea with a hiss, just next to the destroyer's side. At the same moment, the discs rose even higher and then flew off to the north as star-sized bodies.

"Hudajâ - oh God!" whispered the Persian, startled.  
"What was that? ..."

The whites were silent. The British did not know what to make of the apparition and the officer in charge of the investigation was visibly shocked despite the time of night. A megaphone call came over from the destroyer, warning them to hurry. A previous noise from over there made it easy to deduce that the alarm had been sounded.

"What should I do with you now?" the Brit asked uncertainly.

"Catch the wanted!" mocked Frêne, deliberately showing a superior attitude. He called all the cards on the bluff.

"If you had questioned us politely first instead of treating us like prisoner candidates, you would already know more!"

"Why?"

"We saw three men in Baghdad who appeared to be Levantine. They didn't make a trustworthy impression, but judging by their behaviour, they had a lot of money. Was the missing man perhaps wealthy?" The last sentence sounded curious, naive.

"Where did you see these men? On the street?" asked the Briton, ignoring the last counter-question.

"In a small coffee house!"

"And were they particularly noticeable? In general, I mean?"

"I don't know about that. I myself had a bad feeling when I saw these men. They spoke a language I didn't understand and they spoke very quietly. The furtive glances indicated a guilty conscience. I have an eye for things like that."

A howling sound came from the destroyer. Like the rumbling of a primeval beast. The ship warned.

"Well - I'll make a note of your names!" While the accompanying sailor lit up again, he wrote the names of the three men in front of him in a notebook and made a few notes. "One more question: where are you travelling to first?"

"According to Bender Buschuh," said the Carcassonner



truthful.

"And your goal?"

"I have to go to Saigon."

"And the other gentlemen?"

Gutmann thought quickly, as he had to answer the question himself. He was not exactly familiar with the still strict post-war censorship and visa requirements. Combining logic and luck, he answered lightly: "Bangkok!"

The officer had already made a half turn and was about to leave. He stopped abruptly and asked sharply: "Bangkok? Travelling there is so complicated and time-consuming? ..."

"We are looking for the old magic of the Arabian Nights," Gutmann said pathetically. "It's not just a business trip, but also a holiday for us."

"That's foolish," grumbled the Brit. "Have you found any of the idiotic magic yet?"

"Not yet," Gutmann said, this time changing to a plaintive tone. "We hope in Bender Buschîhr ..."

The officer casually tapped his cap visor with two fingers. "I hope your information is correct. For the sake of order, we'll organise a check. If there are any doubts, you won't get far!"

"That's a very strong thing to say to us!" Gutmann showed obvious indignation, "What you allow yourself to do is bordering on assault."

"Sorry - sorry! - the British interests ..." He made another vague movement, then strode away from the

Sailors followed, amidships to the halyardreep.

The Persian followed right behind. From the railing, the three men watched as the shadowy figures of the British commando descended on the halyard ladder and climbed into the swaying boat. Then it pushed off and set course back towards the British ship.

In the meantime, a searchlight flashed its beam. It scanned the cargo ship and then went out again. It was then quite clear to see the commando boarding and hoisting the boat. Shortly afterwards, light signals came over, the siren blared again and the destroyer picked up speed again. Thick clouds of smoke billowed out of the bulky funnel.

"He's leaving," said Reimer with relief.

"Yes, it was critical!" Frêne rubbed his chin. "Who knows how it would have turned out if the surprise in the sky hadn't been a distraction ..."

"So far, we've always got off lightly," Gutmann interjected. "But I fear that serious difficulties will now begin. Inspections could cause us inconvenience, which would be the end of our odyssey, and finally we can't make ourselves completely invisible ..."

"Go into hiding! Go into hiding again and again," the Carcassonnier retorted. "Your friends won't let you down."

"Not only that - I'm almost tempted to believe that the illuminated discs - to use a vulgar expression for the moment - came just in time."

"We thought about the Grail and the Mani in detail beforehand!" said Frêne,

"Precisely for this reason! It looks as if our focussed thinking has established a connection. Our thinking became a kind of call transmitter. And it was undoubtedly an auspicious phenomenon. A sign for the knowing or the ancestors, a signal for the others.

"Many things remain in the room," said the Carcassonner. "Why not thoughts with intense powers? You never know where causes and coincidences will intersect."

"Everything we saw suggests that they were biomachines," Gutmann continued.

"I remember now," Frêne explained, "that in 1942 the crew of a French destroyer reported an exact description of an M.O.C. - Machine Outre Connaissance - and caused quite a commotion. There was a similar encounter back then!"

"Certainly under different circumstances, as long as they were similar phenomena. We already know a lot, but still too little!"

Now the Persian's voice shrilled in between. He interrupted Gutmann's intended explanations. "Bâ-pîs - go on! - Forward!"

The lounging crew began to move. At first, the people must have been shocked, but now they were huddled together and

chattered animatedly. The extraordinary event of the strange celestial phenomena meant that they no longer even noticed the sleek warship, which was now ploughing through the sea quite far away. It had taken a northerly course and now showed its low stern, under which the spray wake ran like a torpedo track.

Now, disturbed in their various and most outlandish speculations by the captain's intervention, the crew literally crumbled away. The whole movement of the people did not look like they were on duty. Rather, it looked as if they were all on free watch.

As the captain he passed the three men, they heard him murmur. "Hudâra sukr! ..."

"What is it?" Gutmann asked.

The Persian stopped, "Oh, nothing. I just said: Thank God! Now the Ingliz are gone and so is the strange spell. So much terror. We Persians have a saying: barân nâxn nâm mîajâd, âukâtâmra talch mikunâd - that means: the rain comes in drops and makes my life bitter ..." He was still grumbling. "The Ingliz are looking for counterbands. Especially for weapons. And they weren't friendly to you either. You're not Ingliz?"

"No," Frêne replied briefly in Gutmann's place.

"But one question: the officer went into the cabin. Was everything else all right? We don't want to have any surprises like that again ..."

"Everything's fine," the Persian reassured his passengers. "He just looked through the loading papers and didn't make much of a fuss. My ship is well-known, as it has never been the subject of any complaints. And I don't just sail in the Persian Gulf, but from the land of Hind westwards to Massaua and Suakîn." He beat his chest with his right hand in affirmation. As he walked on, he called back, "God grant you peace and his blessing!"

"A solid captain in these old pirate waters of yore," said Reimer, "that would actually be the famous exception to the rule when it comes to the word tradition."

"You never really know," Frêne said briefly. "These fellows are clever and gruff. The Oriental would first have to be born who didn't somehow put business before the law. There's rarely a criminal element behind it; it's usually a tolerable sport!"

"By the way, you did a great job before, Frêne! The Brit promptly fell for your bluff and your information. The thing with the major's rank worked well. Lower ranks usually collapse in awe before higher ones. Otherwise he would have had to be a corvette captain, or at least a captain at sea, and he probably still has time before that. It really was all about the sausage!"

"No praise," the Carcassonner defended himself. "Gutmann parried just as well. For me as a Frenchman with a passport, that was

simply ..."

"No order, if I may," Gutmann cut in.

"It goes without saying that we have to be on the ball. Now let's think about how we can best dissolve into nothing in Bender Buschihr. It's quite possible that the Brit will make good on his threats and organise an investigation."

"Not much comes out of it," sneered Reimer.

"Precisely for this reason! All the more eager will be the search for dubious individuals. Now it's time to keep our eyes and ears open. We'll see!"

The old ship's box was a real sea tramp. Its speed was slow and it was in no hurry. Allah brought everything to its destination that was pleasing to him. From this point of view, the captain and crew didn't need to do much.

Towards morning, the sea began to roll a little and the steamer lurched heavily. However, there was no storm. The three men had slept little and now, in their state of relaxation and slight exhaustion, found the rumbling of the sea very unpleasant.

As the day progressed, things calmed down and the sky cleared up again without any clouds. Heat and little breeze again.

The ship then arrived in Bender Buschihr quite late.

Three Europeans went ashore in Bender Buschihr, followed by curious eyes. They were seen in the evening; one

knew that they spent the night in a Han and left it early in the morning; it was no secret that they had bought plenty of provisions for the journey, they walked around the city seemingly aimlessly and a little later they suddenly disappeared. As if they had disappeared off the face of the earth, travelled away through the air, there was plenty of room for imagination ...

The next day, an Iranian coastal sailing ship set sail. It was loaded with cargo and sailed to the land of Hind, where golden-bronze-skinned women with blue-shadowed and coltish eyes waited for the scent of fine Persian rose oil and the Parsi waited for carpets and other products from their ancient homeland. To that strange land of Hind, which worshipped gods with elephant heads, many-armed goddesses, a monkey god Hanuman, the snake-bodied Nagas and other gods.

And in the direction of the land of Hind, three Persian merchants looked expectantly from the foredeck of the sailing ship and whispered occasionally. Judging by the colour of their skin, they must have come from Tabriz or, even further north, from Azerbaijan. The Nahudâ, the captain, treated the three men with exquisite politeness and the crew had been given plenty of baksheesh so as not to disturb the guests ...

Life on this ship was the same as it had been for centuries. The design had changed little and life on board remained monotonously the same. Just like the three merchants this time, the famous Sinbad had once travelled in Scheherezade's tales, from the bow to the stern.

looking towards the goal of his hope. There was still a trace of the Arabian Nights here, albeit sober. Very sober though ...

The wind carried the singsong of the ship's crew across the expanse of water: Hudâ kâstî anga kê khahâd bârâd,âgâr nahudâ jamâ bâr tân dârâd - God will take the ship wherever he wants, even if the captain tears his clothes off his body ... ntâ'alâ shâynûh - He is God, exalted is his reputation!



# THIRD BOOK

## AGNI'S FIRE BURNS

Then Bharadvâja said:

"That light which is in the disc of the sun and always revolves and shimmers and glows and is very bright and directs everything towards itself - this I know as the Brâhaman."

Coming from Karachi, a small freighter pulled up to the harbour entrance of Bombay, dotted with emerald islands. Sailors and yachts billowed their white canvas wings and cruised in front of India's gateway. From the background, the bodies of large ships loomed in front of the roadstead.

The ship sailed past Malabarpoint, the rocky tip of the Malabar Peninsula, with the British governor's palace visible from afar. Behind it stood groves of mulberry and teak trees, their green walls concealing the Towers of Silence. Behind the beach of Back Bay, the cremation grounds of the Hindu population, the houses of the native town were visible, with the protruding, strangely exotic lines of the Hindu temples and, further still, the pillars of the mosques. Fort George became visible, which also gave its name to a part of the city, then the Colaban peninsula was circumnavigated with the lighthouse island in front of it, its prongslight tower like a raised pointer.

finger greeted us. From the harbour bay itself loomed the still old installations of the small island of Oyster Rock Battery, behind it Cross Island Battery, and to the side lay the island of Elephanta, the Indian Gharapuri.

The Portuguese explorers called Bom Bahia the ideal bay when their caravels first docked at this pearl of the Indian west coast, which was already known and praised by Ptolemy as Heptanesia. The main part of the town was pushed out to sea on a flat spit of land. White house fronts in a predominantly modern, functional architectural style represented the new face of India. In the background, palm trees, oaks, mulberry trees and sprawling clusters of teak trees were everywhere. The western Ghats mountains closed off the horizon, shimmering bluish through the heat haze.

Gutmann, Reimer and Frêne stood behind the freighter's bow suit, still dressed as Persians, and endeavoured to silently enjoy the new beauties of a life they had previously only dreamed of. Their eyes were as if drunk.

When the ship had moored in the harbour, the three men stayed on board for a while so that they could go ashore a little later without attracting attention. Unshorn and hardly noticed, they entered the harbour area and followed a Hindu porter who was carrying some of their luggage and led them to the nearest car park.

"Yahan - here!" said the Hindu, pointing to some cars whose drivers were lounging in front of them.

"Shaitanghari - kâfi - enough automobiles!" He always improved in English when he realised that the supposed Persians didn't understand Hindustani.

"Shaitanghari - devil's chariot," Reimer translated logically and couldn't help but laugh softly. "These people are almost right ..."

A driver with an orange turban greeted them and hurriedly opened the door when he noticed the approaching men. Frêne addressed the man in Arabic, which he probably understood and which was less conspicuous to Persians than an English form of address. He gave the address of a Parsee in Juckeria Bandar, which they had received from Jamil Ibn Bahri in Baghdad.

The driver nodded. As soon as the men had stowed the luggage and paid the porter, he sped off in the car. Despite the heavy traffic, they reached their destination in less than a quarter of an hour. In front of the abruptly stopped car stood a friendly country house in white with a terrace in front, slightly overshadowed by palm trees. Similar types of houses on either side, surrounded by colourful flowerbeds, pointed towards a suburban street inhabited by wealthy people, and a servant peered curiously out of the garden. Gutmann called him in English and asked for Azîz, the master of the house.

"Hân Huzûr - yes, Your Honour," the man served. He added a few words in Hindustani, which remained incomprehensible to the visitors. So the men followed his inviting gesture to cross the garden and

to enter the house.

The servant had hurried ahead to announce the arrival of the strangers. As he did not return immediately, the men waited outside the entrance to the country house. Suddenly a man emerged who resembled Jamil Ibn Bahri in many ways, except that he had a deep black beard on his upper lip. Large almond-shaped eyes gave his face a strange allure. He wore white clothes of European cut, but greeted in the Oriental manner when he saw three men with black kalpaks standing in front of him.

"We bring greetings from Baghdad!" Gutmann said carefully in English after the men had exchanged the usual greetings.

Azîz, the Parsee, bowed low. "My house is open to you. Please come in!"

"We are strangers here. Please guide us!" asked Frêne, who was more familiar with oriental customs.

The master of the house let his guests into a nearby room, which caused surprise among the guests. In contrast to Jamil Ibn Bahri, there were few European touches to be seen here and the Parsee had taken it upon himself to furnish the interior of his home with oriental lavishness. Colourful carpets, works of art from Fârsistân and the land of Hind were displayed side by side, all testifying to wealth and artistic flair. A small, skilfully crafted lamp with a twitching flame stood in a niche.

The men took a seat on the stools provided, Azîz sat down too, "You've travelled a long way," he said.

"Yes, and above all a bit cumbersome," explained Gutmann.

"I received an airmail letter from Baghdad. It hinted at a few things," Azîz said. His voice still sounded reserved.

"The British stopped our ship on the route from Kuwait to Bender Buschîhr," Gutmann replied. "It looked very difficult for a while."

For a brief second, the Parsee half dropped his eyelids. Then, showing a noticeable coolness, he asked:

"What could have happened?"

"Enough! - We don't want to have travelled through all the Arab countries under the most diverse difficulties for nothing, only to suddenly end up behind barbed wire or even in prison!"

Now Azîz became friendlier again. "Forgive me if I was a little cold. I can see from your subsequent concern that I have the right men in front of me, forgive me again; I must be very careful!"

"So do we," Gutmann confessed. "We're even pleased that you're exercising caution. It's a confirmation for us that we can trust you!"

"You can!" Azîz affirmed and put his right hand to his heart. His gaze was full and unfeigned. "Tell me how your journey was ..."

Gutmann gave a detailed account.

The Parsee listened devoutly and occasionally nodded his head.

"There's not much more to say," Gutmann concluded slowly as he described the journey on the Persian coastal vessel and the transfer to the freighter in Karachi. "The last part of the journey was smooth and easy."

"It was good that you disappeared in Bender Buschîhr with Ali Shir without anyone being able to trace you back to him. And it was just as good that Ali Shir dressed you as Persians. He did a marvellous job, so the Ingliz will be in the dark if they should become suspicious and search for you later. For you are safe here with me if you follow my advice."

"We will gladly comply with them," Gutmann assured us.

"You have great protectors and many friends," Azîz said respectfully. "It is a great obligation and responsibility on me at the same time. And I can see from your expressions that you are eager to see what will happen next."

"Yes," Gutmann confessed. "Restlessness and uncertainty are bad travelling companions. We feel like balls in a game!"

"Everything is uncertain; what is hidden in the future is rarely revealed beforehand. Fate plays ball with all men, and the less willing they are to act, the

less will their ability to resist be able to change that ..."

"So far we've heard more fatalism!"

"We are an Aryan branch of the people," Azîz said emphatically. "We still guard the old, sacred fire of our people and faith. But back to you: no path has yet been mapped out for you to follow from here. And you will impatiently await the opening of a destination. Is that not so?"

"You speak to us from the heart, worries and longings drive us!"

"That's understandable. I understand you have travelled far. Further and further away from where you came from. We want to help you find your way back to Midnight, where you are once again close to the homeland of our people. It's just very difficult, because your base is silent and has closed itself off."

Gutmann and Reimer leant forward at the same time in dismay. The former asked: "What suspicions do you have in connection with this?"

The Parsee raised both hands with a vague movement.

"All assumptions are vague and easily lead to false conclusions. But I believe that many people are now going astray and no longer believe in themselves. In addition, the banned blue and white colours with the pole sign in the middle are moving ever closer to the midnight point. A hermetic sealing off of the base seems understandable as a consequence."



"Then how are we supposed to be brought back?"

"Brahmins and Mongols have agreed to take care of your repatriation. The Brahmins consider it an honour to help you. They see it as their duty to restore the long-torn bond between the Aryans of Asia and the West. This was not possible with the Ingliz, as they have lost their soul. And now India will soon join them!"

"And the Mongols?"

"That's puzzling, they just know you're on your way. I don't know what drives them to offer their help. But they are certainly capable of a great deal. Far more than the Brahmins at the moment."

"Whoever wants to help us should be welcome." Gutmann's voice sounded deep.

"I understand that," the Parsee interjected. "But it's not always wise to think like that!"

"You're right. Do you have any objections to the Mongols as one of the two options?"

"Only as far as I can follow my own reasoning. Behold, Sahib, the Brahmins are close to us in root of origin and in essence. They serve the Aryan consciousness insofar as parts of them have not degenerated through the influence of the Ingliz. But it is different with the Mongols. They follow their own interests!"

"Do you see this as a danger to us?"

"You must judge that for yourself, Sahib! Not so long ago, you sent an expedition from Germany to Lhasa. These men had runic

signs on their cork helmets and they searched for the spirit and secrets of the Potala."

"A scientific expedition," Gutmann tried to deflect.

"So they said," Azîz said ambiguously. "These men have certainly made good friends. But the archives in the Potala kept many secrets from them."

"We know that," Gutmann admitted. "Unfortunately..."

"Isn't that understandable? A prophecy has promised Inner Asia the resurrection of a new Khan and a new world empire. The high seat is then not the Midnight Mountain, but the Pamir, the roof of the world. Do you understand now, Sahib, what I mean?"

"I understand very well what you are trying to say," Gutmann nodded. "But at the moment, I believe the Mongols are still threatened by enemies and their interests are inevitably on our side."

"Friendship of convenience," Azîz smiled finely, "After all."

"And what decision has been made in our favour?"

"None yet. But whatever the outcome, you will be travelling to the Indus Valley in the next few days and from there to your destination in stages by aircraft."

"After midnight?"

"Yes, sahib. God willing."

"We thank you for this message, Azîz! Now our long journey has made sense again."

"It was marked out in the book of life. But forgive me, Sahibs! You will be hungry and tired!" The

Abruptly breaking off the conversation, he pressed a nearby bell and ordered a naukar, a native servant, who entered immediately afterwards, to have the khitmaghar carry the food. The khitmaghar was the kitchen servant. He brought spicy Indian curry rice, white bread and fruit. To drink, iced fruit juice, which was very refreshing.

"You will have good accommodation in a nearby bungalow," Azîz explained during the meal. "It belongs to me and is intended for guests who come to me from time to time. I have made it as comfortable as possible."

"You are very attentive to us and we thank you very much!" said Frêne. Reimer also added a few kind words.

Later, the Parse offered coffee and sweets, which the Khitmaghar served in abundance. Afterwards, fruit again. In order not to hurt the host, the men had to help themselves again and again.

Afterwards, Azîz gave Khitmaghar some instructions and a little later the Naukar called again. Azîz said politely, "If it's all right with you, we can go to the bungalow now. There's a cart in front of the house that can take your luggage right away."

"Gladly!" Gutmann stood up and the companions followed his example.

The Parsee drove a little way out of town with his guests until the carriage stopped in front of a very beautiful country house. It was surrounded by greenery and offered a beautiful

From the top of the hill, the location offers a wonderful view of the sea. A wide terrace promised pleasant siestas.

"My house is entirely at your disposal," said Azîz, pointing to the beautiful dwelling. "Come in!"

"God meant well with you," said Frêne. "He gave you happiness and wealth."

"He only gave me the reward for my hard work," Azîz said modestly.

"You're a trader?"

"Yes, like most Parsis. A Saudâgar, as they say here in the local language. I deal in silk and other textiles. My father already ran the same business."

The men entered the house after passing flowerbeds that exuded an intoxicating fragrance. In contrast to the Parsi's actual home, everything here was predominantly modern and functional. It had a more sober European feel, but without losing any of its homely flavour.

"Two servants and a boy will be at your disposal in a short time," said Azîz. "They are already on their way here. You will want for nothing, I hope."

"It's more than we could ever have expected," Gutmann assured us.

"You can wear your usual clothes here. It won't be noticeable. If you wish, I'll get you white linen suits tomorrow. You can wear the kalpak

keep it. Maybe it's even better."

"You are very kind. We ask for it!"

Azîz stayed with his guests until bedtime and paid them all the attention that good manners demanded. He had listened with great interest to the Germans' accounts of the European theatre of war and admitted that only scant news of the real events had filtered through to India. When the officers told him gloomily about the surrender, he said: "Today dark clouds hang over your country. Everything seems to be without hope and without a way out. But things look different from here. You have only lost one battle and received wounds that will heal again. Afterwards you will be stronger and wiser than ever before. But the supposed victors are the real losers. For know this: England has sold and lost its world empire for this victory and the other nations have lost their colonies and their reputation. These powers have mobilised the whole world against a single nation and will therefore lose all their previous power. Everyone was struck with blindness when they wilfully shook the centre of power of the West. Inglîstân declared war on Germanîstân because it was possessed by arrogance and arrogance. It is also known that forces behind the scenes, forces storming towards midnight, have their share in this."

"You know well," Gutmann nodded, "I didn't realise that the Parsi watched world events with open eyes."

pursue. You are also well-disposed towards us."

"Yes, that's us." The Parsee casually glanced at his wristwatch. "It's getting late and you'll have to get some rest soon. I have been with you too long and have disturbed you!" He rose and made a deep bow in oriental greeting. "You are wise and brave men, I must say Sahib Log to you! May the Lord of Good protect you and grant you a good night! Ap tashrif la'e the mera ghar men - you have brought honour to my house!" Greeting him once more, he pushed his lambskin kalpak into his forehead and left.

Reimer stood up after the Parsee left and leant against the balustrade on the terrace. He looked up at the starry sky and then lowered his eyes to the sea, where the lights of Bombay ran like strings of pearls in the dark water, creating a magnificent illumination. Behind him, Gutmann and Frêne sat in comfortable cane chairs.

"There was a time when I was jokingly called a stargazer," Gutmann said from the background. "It's been a while since I heard that nickname and I think I can now apply it to our friend Reimer!" A soft laugh followed these words.

Reimer turned round: "Sometimes you two are terribly sober. You act as if we'd travelled from Berlin to Bombay on a short-distance tram ticket, flipped through half a newspaper on the way and then quickly returned to Bombay.

jumped off at the second ring of the conductor's bell. Didn't you notice the big gate on the land in front of the entrance, the magnificent gate with the raised centre section and the Indian-style corner turrets? Did you miss the lettering? Bombay. Gateway to India? When we were mustered in front of the medical officer after the outbreak of war, we dreamed of getting to know Europe. And now we were already travelling halfway around the world ..."

Frêne stood up and approached Reimer. "We all have the same feelings and admirations for the strange beauties, which unfortunately we can only enjoy in a kaleidoscopic way. But understand, dear friend, that Gutmann must first suppress all impulses and is obliged to be a constant admonisher in his own way. You Germans are great romantics and you are to be envied for that. But everything has its dangers ..."

"No offence," Gutmann's voice came over.

"Jokes as little signs of respect will be allowed at any time, hey? Aren't I also thinking about this new thing here, about India, about this country, about the cute Nautsch girls ... "

"You remain a constant mocker," the Linzer interrupted him, jokingly threatening with his fist. "Remembering Nautschmädchen now, of all times. But what do we know about it? About their sociological position? Her duties? ... We learnt nothing about it at school, we read too little about it in books and so the terms in

around our knowledge ..."

"That's not all that important," Frêne interjected, "It's enough to know that these girls have velvety brown and welcoming arms ..."

"So a confirmation of the ghostly knowledge," laughed the Linzer. "The French perspective ..."

Frêne grinned with amusement. In a cheerful mood, the men went to their sleeping quarters.

Days passed again, bringing peace and relaxation. The Parsee was an attentive host and clearly endeavoured to make his guests happy. He also took the opportunity to show them the beauties of Bombay. He led them through the bazaars, through the wide modern shopping streets, through the magnificent Marine Drive, which ran along the sea and somehow resembled Rio, and he showed them the city's university, whose tower was a strange mixture of Gothic and Romanesque styles and did not fit in well with the rest of the cityscape. The mosques offered little that was new, but the architecture of the many Hindu temples was captivating. The fakirs loitered around here, one standing on one leg and constantly raising a slowly withering hand, another piercing his arms and cheeks with long needles. Bairâgi, ash-stained beggars with long, matted hair and beards, shouting the names of Indian deities, begged for their livelihood. Dignified Brahmins crossed the path of the walkers,



recognisable by their proud posture and the caste markings. On their foreheads they wore the symbol of Vishnu: two white lines rising diagonally upwards from the roots of the eyebrows, with a red vertical line in the centre. Half-naked priests sitting in front of the temples also had their chests, stomachs and upper arms painted with the same colours, symbolic rectangular ornaments.

In the indigenous quarter, the Black Town, jugglers performed magic, donkey drivers shouted, sacred cattle and ox carts pushed their way through the crowd. Chinese, Malays and all the other peoples of Asia gathered here. Azîz showed the guests the magnificent tomb of the great Parsi Djamsedji Jijiboi and did not miss the opportunity to visit the Towers of Silence with them, which served as a burial place for the dead of his faith, who were thrown to the vultures inside the towers so as not to contaminate the sacred earth.

On another day, the men visited the rock temple of Karla on the slopes of the western Ghat Mountains, which were lined with a series of pagodas and monasteries. Some of the hilltops had a similar structure to the views from Arizona in America. Lush greenery shone from the lowlands, and a fast train sped along like a white arrow on a railway line leading to the interior. From the temples of the ghats, the infinite expanse of the shimmering sea and the sky arching over it in a deep blueness presented itself to the eyes.

On these excursions, Gutmann and Frêne also showed enthusiasm that they had always suppressed. The force of the ancient reliefs, the depictions of the Indian world of the gods, sculptures of mighty elephants, skilfully carved columns, all of them strange and reminiscent of ancient cultures, could not fail to enchant them.

On the same evening that the men from Karla returned to the bungalow, Azîz also joined them for the evening meal, which was served by the Khitmaghar assigned to the guests. After the meal, the Parsee was very open-minded and spoke more freely than before about the problems that formed a bridge between his people of the old faith and the traditional men of the West.

"Our traditions are also ancient," said Azîz.

"Around 200 years after the turn of the European era, the emergence of the Sassanid Empire marked the beginning of a new redaction of the ancient writings of the Iranians. We also count ourselves among the Midnight Tribe, for our people broke into Iran through the gates of the Caucasus and brought with them the god of light, whom we later worshipped as Ahuramazdâh. Half a millennium before your era, the philosophical moral teachings of Ahuramazdâh dominated the Iranian region. After the invasion of the Arabs, most of the ancient scriptures were destroyed and from the scanty remains we painstakingly compiled the Avasta Zend, the basic text and explanation of our faith, and rescued it with us after the invasion.

India, when we had to emigrate in order not to succumb to persecution. Ahuramazdâh is great, greater than all the gods, it says in the ancient scriptures, and in the Elamite version of the Bagistân text he is proclaimed as the god of the Aryans."

"There has always been a single god in the Aryan root, the ancient Thor of Tuatha," Gutmann confirmed.

"Yes, Sahib Log. There are also Indian traditions that have mythical parallels to our Iranian texts and thus also point to the same original sources that come from the Aryana vaejah."

"Mithra is also anchored in your teachings," said Frêne.

"Certainly, Sahib Log. At a later time, a cult of three gods developed in our doctrine, Dewaism. In this, Ahuramazdâh remained the representative of the sun, while Mithra is the lord of the moon, alongside a female-maternal deity, Anâhita. He is the hero of many myths, the Parthian Heracles with the club, equated with Indra by the Indians. He had nine mythical mothers, in one Avasta chapter he is called Aptija, 'the one who comes from the waters'"

"This is a trace that leads back to the Atlantean Poseidon," said Gutmann. "And the nine mothers have a parallel in the Heimdall account of Eddic lore."

"I'm not aware of that," the Parsee admitted openly. "But I know that a bridge connects us, that ancient myths bring us together. Few know about the ancient truths and a prayer from the Avasta says: rtam

wahu wahistam - truth is the highest good! - And verily, Sahib Log, truth is in space, it is destiny and yet few fight for it. May the fire illuminate the world!"

"You speak from the heart," Gutmann said sternly to the Parsee. "You are truly a Parsi, a pure one who lives by the law."

"All the conscious live by the law," said Azîz. "Only the cudras, the lower ones, rebel against it because they have no mystical soul and pay homage to totemism. They do not strive for order, but for unleashing."

"Then we're already experiencing the age of the Cudras anyway," Reimer interjected. "Isn't chaos and unleashing already everywhere? Hasn't the bottom already turned to the top? ..."

The Parsee stood up. "We'll talk more about this tomorrow. Be ready to visit the Brahmin Mulji Madharji with me tomorrow morning, who is aware of your presence here. He is a wise man and will be able to tell you even more than I can. His help is also valuable to us."

"It is as you say," Gutmann replied, using the oriental idiom. As he spoke, he suddenly had the impression that a shadow was hovering beneath the darkness of the trees in the front garden. He faltered in his sentence.

"What is it, Sahib Log?" asked Azîz, who had followed Gutmann's eye movement but saw nothing.

"I think it was just an imagination. A shadow that seemed to move ..."

"Thakur Das!" shouted the Parsee.

The naukar appeared immediately. "Tum ko kya hukm hai - What do you order, Huzûr?"

"Go into the front garden and see if anyone is standing near or behind the trees. Quick, get out of here!"

The naukar jumped light-footedly down from the terrace. The men heard him call out: "Ko'i hai - is anyone there?" The white of his clothes shone out of the semi-darkness of the surroundings. Describing a wide arc, he hurried through the garden, keeping an eye out, and came right back. "Kuchh nahîn - nothing!" he reported.

Azîz was reassured. "A deception, of course. Who or what should it be?"

Thakur Das withdrew again. The Parsee exchanged a few more words with his guests, then asked to be allowed to take his leave.

The three men watched him walk slowly and gracefully away. As they did every evening, they stayed on the terrace and looked towards the city, drawn as always by the sea of lights of the great city.

A light wind blew from the ghats and brushed through the crowns of the trees and palms. The leaves and fronds rustled. From somewhere, the sound of hulman monkeys could be heard, and in the garden itself a small animal roamed through the bushes without becoming visible.

"You must have seen white mice before," said

the Linzer said lightly to Gutmann. "The Naukar therefore had to do a special run through the garden and interrupt his leisure time."

"Aziz called him," Gutmann defended himself. "By the way, isn't there an old saying that to err is human?" Without any real reason, he turned away in a slight huff to enter the bungalow. Before he had made a full turn on his heel, he froze. "There!"

Reimer and Frêne wheeled round and followed Gutmann's pointing arm with their eyes.

A figure in a toga-like robe stood in the middle of the path between the road and the bungalow. The moon's rays glided over the motionless man and cast a dull blue glow on his shaven skull, giving him an almost unreal aura.

"What do you want?" Gutmann called out in English.

A sound came back that meant nothing. The man slowly came a few steps closer.

Reimer went to meet him, his companions followed him. He approached the strange stranger again.

"You are guests of Azîz?" the stranger asked in poorly accented English. The tone of his voice was very quiet.

"Why do you ask that?" said Reimer. The men were able to take a closer look at the figure and saw that it was a Mongolian wearing the yellow robes of Buddhist monks. His head showed ascetic

His features and a strange fire flashed from his narrow eyes.

"Perhaps I have a message for you," came cautiously from the monk's barely moving, thin-lipped mouth.

"We are guests of Azîz," Gutmann admitted. "Tell us what you have to say!"

The cowled man seemed to overhear the request. His narrow eyes suddenly widened. "You come from the region of Paradise Lost and are now travelling in circles..."

Gutmann stepped very close to the monk. "If your sentences really have the profound meaning that you have described, who sent you and how do you know anything? ..."

The eyes of the speakers facing each other crossed like sharp knives. "Buddha's ears are every- where - Buddha's ears are everywhere!" the monk sang in a nasal tone.

Reimer let out an unrestrained cry, "Buddha's ears ...!"

The cowled man's dark eyes glittered as he scrutinised the men in front of him in turn. A bony hand emerged from the folds of his toga, which he raised slightly. "Friends of yours are waiting! I want you to see them! ..."

"You mean the point we came from?" Gutmann asked sharply.

"That is still a long way off, O Faringhi! But before that

You speak to those who belong to you and have disappeared from your circle of vision."

"How many men are there?" Reimer asked breathlessly in between. A hope glowed in him, improbable, even fantastic, but directed towards the barely possible precisely because it was ignited under equally improbable circumstances.

The Mongolian let a few seconds pass before answering. Then he said: "You must know, two men and a woman!"

Reimer took a disappointed step back. "Two men and - a woman? ..." He secretly thought himself a fool that his impulsive thinking gave rise to hope. How would the men he was thinking about come to be accompanied by a woman? ...

"Now - go on!" Gutmann urged the monk. He, too, was gripped by restlessness and tension.

"The Monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms awaits you. You will also find your friends there. Do you want to come?"

"Where is the monastery?"

"It's a long way from here," the monk evaded. "But we'll make sure you get there!"

"Explain yourself more clearly, monk!" Gutmann demanded.

"Why so many words? Follow me and you will find the answer in the fulfilment of what you are striving for!"

"How are we supposed to understand that? Do you mean that we should go with you immediately?"

"That would be easiest, O Faringhi!"

"What would our host Azîz say if he



would come tomorrow and not find us? How do you imagine that, hey?"

"Write a letter," the monk demanded. "Azîz will find it tomorrow and show understanding."

"I doubt that," Gutmann said dryly. "And besides - how are we supposed to get away from here? Should we go on a pilgrimage?"

"I said before: why so many words? You Faringhi have lead on your feet. Do I not stand before you as a messenger, knowing things that must otherwise remain hidden?"

"Come back tomorrow evening, O monk! Perhaps we will go with you then, if you tell us where and how we should travel."

The cowed man lowered his hand, which was still raised. "I can't do that. I can't wait ..." His eyes narrowed into slits again, hiding his thoughts completely. "I'm telling you, Faringhi, you're coming to the Monastery of the Seven Lotuses! It is not up to you, but Buddha's will decides. Think quickly and make up your mind. The monastery's messengers only come once! You are as free as the birds, why don't you fly when a voice calls?"

"It stays the same: come tomorrow, monk!" Gutmann's tone was firm and unmistakable.

The yellow man raised his shoulders in resignation. "It would all have been very easy. The Faringhi are hard-headed. But think about it. Buddha's ears are everywhere! ..." He gathered up his robe and turned to go. Staying exactly in the centre of the path, he walked with a slurping

gait along the

road without turning back. His bald skull shone like a large, smooth knob, traced by the rays of the moon.

"Buddha's ears ..." whispered Reimer. "I already heard that on point 103!"

Gutmann wheeled round. "What are you saying?"

"It was then - at the time of the Great Assembly; Recke and I were sitting in the dining room. There was no one there except a few Japanese and a strange Mongolian. A llama. And then - Recke and I had exchanged a few sentences - it seemed as if the lama had overheard our thoughts. He couldn't understand us. And then - then the Tibetan stood up and said clearly to us: Buddha's ears are everywhere!"

"That's very interesting," murmured Frêne, who had been listening with interest. "The monk should be questioned in more detail!"

As if by appointment, the three men turned their heads towards the road to look for the cowed man. Nothing. The street was empty.

The Carcassonner ran to the garden entrance so that he could peer along the street. He saw only two women walking, wearing the low sari, and a little further on a man with a light-coloured turban, but no one else.

Thoughtfully, he returned to the terrace, waving to his companions.

"We should actually inform Azîz through the Naukar now," said Reimer. "It seems extremely important to me, as there is obviously a

connection with us came about."

"It's too late for that today," Gutmann replied. "The Parsee is coming early in the morning anyway to go with us to the Brahmin he was talking about today. Why should we worry him today?"

"Didn't he warn us about the Mongols?"

"In a way, yes! But not in a hostile sense. I am convinced that we will receive a message when the monk reports on today's conversation. So let's wait and see!"

Frêne intervened: "The messengers from the monastery only come once, said the cowled man. So we can hardly expect to see a monk any time soon"

"That's right," said Reimer. "But whatever the case may be, I have a strange feeling."

"Unke!" Gutmann grumbled. "Good night!"

When the men stepped out onto the terrace of their bungalow the following morning, there was a large, shallow bowl on the small table in the centre of the wicker chair set.

"What's that?" asked Frêne, pointing. The bowl was filled with water and seven lotus flowers were floating in it ...

Azîz arrived later. His expression was very thoughtful when he heard the report about the monk and saw the bowl. He called the naukâr and scolded him for not having checked properly that evening. Now it seemed reasonable to assume that Gutmann had not been deceived and that the

shadow might be connected with the subsequent sudden appearance of the monk.

"We should check again during the day," suggested Reimer. "Maybe we'll find something that gives us some clues. If we're lucky, the monk might have lost a note..."

The Parsee waved him away, "There is no such thing with messengers like this. They stand up to scrutiny without any traces or hints of a mission or message to be found. Unless you uncover the memory centres of the brain behind the temples and can read them..." He turned to Naukar, who was still standing there: "Chale ja'o - go!..."

"What now?" Gutmann asked.

"All the more reason to visit Mulji Madharji, the old Brahmin," said Azîz. "He also needs to be informed quickly and will know what to do."

"We're already ready!"

"Good, I've left a car on the road anyway and we can drive. We have to visit the Mahalakshmi temple at the foot of Cumballa Hill. We will meet Mulji Madharji nearby."

Before the men left the house together, the Parsee told his Naukar to make sure that no strangers entered the bungalow. The khitmagar was also to take careful note and listen for any noises.

During the carriage ride, the Parsee did not hide

his concerns that the Mongols had tried to overplay his mediation. He interpreted these endeavours as proof that the men from the roof of the world and beyond the Great Desert were willing to go their own way. He also openly admitted that he did not really trust them.

"We thank you for the unvarnished presentation of the facts," Gutmann said kindly. "We will have to be very careful and continue to follow your advice. You have won us grateful friends, O Azîz!"

"Your friendship is a great honour for me," the Parsee replied, putting his hand to his heart with a solemn gesture. "We have a saying in India: Ek sadîq dost bha'i se afzal hai - a loyal friend is better than a brother!"

The car drove slowly. After a while, he turned into Warden Road, which led past the rocky seaward side of Cumballa Hill. At this point, the surf of the sea broke on the offshore reefs. The silhouette of the Mahalakshmi temple rose from the shoreline, the fronds of individual palm trees swaying in the breeze.

Azîz told the driver of the wagon to stop and wait for them to return. The men travelled the last short distance on foot.

They passed in front of the large temple, where fakirs and penitents were loitering. They shouted and sang to the gods or begged for offerings. Brahmins in

white robes with the signs of their caste stood out from the crowd in front of the temple. After a few steps, Azîz turned off to the side and led his companions behind an inconspicuous building and through a rear entrance into a courtyard. A shaven-headed Brahmin, also dressed in a white robe and with a caste mark on his forehead, was sitting under an eaves. His face was wrinkled but did not allow a more precise estimate of the man's age. Expressive and intelligent eyes gazed out at the visitors.

Azîz greeted them respectfully and the three men followed his example.

Mulji Madharji stood up. "Namasté - greetings!" he said with a friendly gesture of greeting. His eyes darted from one to the other, scrutinising and memorising the individuals. "It's good that you've come at last," he added.

"We would have come to you today in any case," Azîz explained. "Even if we hadn't made an agreement yesterday!"

"Has something happened?" Mulji Madharji raised his brows slightly.

"Han - yes!"

"Come inside the house," the Brahmin asked.

"It's cool in there and we're undisturbed."

The guests followed him and entered a room that was almost bare. In one corner was a charpoy, a low, wicker-covered sleeping frame, a low

Table and some stools, the latter obviously a new acquisition. A large clay jug filled with water cooled the room slightly through the evaporation of moisture.

"Baitho - sit down!" the Indian invited. He repeated his invitation in English when he realised that the whites did not understand his Hindustani. Then he turned to the Parsi: "Report, friend Azîz!"

"A chaprasi, a messenger, came to our guests yesterday after I left. He came from a monastery of Tibetan monks somewhere in the north ...", Azîz reported and gave a true account of how he had experienced it himself. At the end of his story, he didn't forget to mention the bowl with the seven lotus blossoms that stood on the terrace that morning.

The Brahmin thought for a while, then he said: "We must now act more quickly than intended, but we must show no haste. They will be aware of your every move now and have intentions we do not know. It was not good that we negotiated joint relief measures for the Sahib Logs."

"There's nothing we can do about that now," Azîz admitted.

Mulji Madharji waved his hand. "Of course not." He said confidently: "Ram hamare satti hai - Ram will help us!" And after a pause of seconds: "The white sahibs are not just our friends, they are Ram's favourites and their knowledge stands above time ..."

Gutmann looked at the Brahmin in astonishment: "Where



Do you know whether our knowledge is authoritative?"

"Don't you often know more than might be expected," was the calm reply. "You are masters of machines that will be hidden from the world for years to come. You control flying discs that resemble the Biomachina, the Mani, in the sky! And don't you know just as well that we fly with Vimanas?"

..."

"We know about it," Gutmann replied in surprise.

"But it's not much. And we will hardly ever get to see a Vimana machine."

"Maybe!" Mulji Madharji looked past his visitors. "We will have to take you away in the most secret ways to bring you back to where our minds are directed. We, who are knowers, have tasks to fulfil. And although I am only just getting to know you, Sahib Logs, I have faith in you because you are brothers on the same path."

"It's a long way to go," Reimer said involuntarily.

The Brahmin smiled. "Chota Sahib, tumhara kya nam hai?"

"I don't understand ..."

"Sorry, Chota Sahib, young sir! I asked for your name!"

"Reimer!"

"Rei-mer?" Mulji Madharji closed his eyes as if to memorise the name. "Yo kuteh Meru se aya, wo Meru me phir jata -" Improving in English,

he repeated: "What came from Midnight Mountain goes back to Midnight Mountain! ..."

"If I understand correctly, I have been granted a return?" asked Reimer.

The Brahmin looked at him closely. "Yes!" The tone of his voice gave the short word certainty and weight. His guests recognised that behind the man's initially inconspicuous appearance was a strong and internalised personality and that the Indian was far more than he seemed. "You will see sveta dvipa, the white land in the far north, again. You came here on your pitr-yâna, the path of the ancestors, and will return to where the seat of Narayana, the son of God, the Purusha, the divine primal man, who is in the sun and in the year, is. Lokomânya Tilak only recently showed us Brahmins again the arctic home of the Vedas, the original home of the Bhaktas, the ancestors!"

"I know Tilak's tips," Gutmann said in between.

"May the Shining Ones be with you!" shouted Mulji Madharji.

"So your knowledge also builds a bridge to us! We all need this bridge that brings us together again through the primordial tradition. Are we not all waiting for the return of the primordial Aryan Cakravârti, the Lord of humanity, to become sons of the sun again? ..."

"Ah -" Gutmann exclaimed in astonishment. "You know the root?"

"Whoever lives according to the rta, as it says in the Vedas, lives

according to the world order of Brahma. Whoever lives according to the order must also know the root!"

"You are right, Mulji Mādharji! To live according to Rta means to have the right custom, i.e. to live according to one's destiny so as not to violate the order of creation."

The brahmin nodded. "And yet people deny in themselves what they cultivate in dogs and horses. Is not the world today a house of un-

breeding? ..."

"Today, people will say that you can't compare humans with animals."

"Hai mai, - aren't all beings God's creatures? - God's law is only one law and everything is subject to it. Look, the religion of the West is calling for redemption because the earth is a realm of sin. People are wandering on a path of insecurity, they have violated the laws, they have become impure and their lost species-pure consciousness is causing them to languish in degeneracy. Only an outdated subconsciousness warns them and makes them feel that their existence is a sin; an offence against discipline, against order. Our Vedas say: We need redemption because existence is the realm of error. Man is threefold; namely outer self, inner self and highest self! What destroys delusion is knowledge!"

"The shining ones speak from you!" Gutmann said to the Brahmin, adapting to the manner of speech. "We also affirm the Rta, the order. In our Nordic Edda, the gods are called Rat and Rater. God is therefore the root

of everything, the rata. And a closer examination reveals that the Aryans are sons of the sun, we also have an etymological connection here, which was reflected in the Edda and the Vedas."

"Who hears the counsellors of your Edda?" asked the Indian.

"Breedlessness out of base lust, turning away from any kind of breeding and thus the decline of the noble is the life of the present time. A departure from the cosmic, from the divine law of rearing all organic, living things, from the bottom up."

"Starting from the megalithic age, the Aryans have carried the light into the world and have gradually bled to death from their mission, not without first having bred a part of humanity. The racial decline that has been going on for a long time and the partial merging into mixed races is forcing a new awareness of the spiritual and mental aspects of Aryanism. Since the spirit forms the body, a new root race with the old values would have to develop from your new spiritual renaissance and physical foundation, as the researcher Gorsleben logically concluded. According to his indications, the dying or depleting world will have to breed new aristocratic races if the creative is not to peter out."

"O Vishnu!" The Brahmin nodded approvingly.

The others had listened attentively. "Who is supposed to maintain this consciousness?" asked Frêne, little hope in his voice.

"Who else, if not us!" Reimer fell like a

Fanfare in between. "The white people of Europe and America, just like the conscious Brahmins and Iranians, will have to make a reflective selection!"

"Aren't there signs that the world is on the brink of a turning point?" asked Gutmann.

"You mean the manis?" asked Mulji Madharji. "Yes, the signs in the sky are signs of the times! - Han, akash mai jo chimno, wo kalka chimno hai," he repeated again. His thoughts flew on. "The mother cave is still the beginning of Brahman and as long as there is a beginning, paths lead everywhere! Agni, the son of dyaus- pitar, your Zeus-Jupiter, the heavenly father, and prthivi-matar, the mother earth, is born from that of the world mountain, the uterus mundi with the occidental designation. And Agni's fire burns, illuminating the world where darkness reigns! He is the Son of God, in heaven is his supreme birth, in the air his navel and on earth his home, as recorded in the Vājasaneyi Samhita." The Brahmin's hands made an imploring motion. "Agni is the sacred, purifying fire that rises to the brilliant flame, God's spark and the sun's glorious soul! Agni is in the white sun-grand Dadhikrâ, Agni is in the swan!" His voice sank. "Agnis, fire burns and therein lies hidden hope and all becoming ..."

Gutmann asked gently: "You spoke of a swan, Mulji Madharji. What do you know about it?"

"Just ask me, Sahib Log! In our Cvetâçvatara

Upanishad it says: In this great Brahman wheel that animates everything, a swan roams! That is Agni."

"An old Nordic symbol," Gutmann explained, "which still appears in your writings. Thus the Ingvaeonian swan boats, as escort ships of the Son of God, carried the Indo-Germanic myth from the Hyperborean land, from the North Atlantic circle, to the south!"

"Hari bol!" With an exclamation of joy, the Brahmin, heedless of his dignity, slapped his hands together. "This is the way of the gods, the Nordic way. And the swan, our symbol ..."

"We have another root that deserves to be emphasised among others," Gutmann added. "Agni is like our Heimdall of the Edda, the guardian of Asgard, who lives on the heavenly mountain, the Himinbiörg, from where he has a clear view over the world and over Bifröst, the rainbow bridge. Bifröst, the bridge between Asgard and Midgard, connects the gods with the humans, whose mediator is Heimdall, the strong and wise protector of the world order and the friend of the humans."

"O Vishnu! - O Trimurti!" Respect spoke from the Indian's eyes. "There is a bridge that lives in our books and it is the same bridge that connects us. And the great knowledge. I know the Aryan mission is eternal - yah to jante hain, arya jat k' sadhana!"

Azîz nodded in agreement. "Did I not tell you, O Mulji Madharji, that my guests come to you as the knowing ones

become? Do you still have reservations about transporting our protégés by secret means? ..."

"Nai - no! The Shining Ones are with them and have protected them on their paths."

"And now? Remember the seven lotus blossoms in the bowl! A warning!"

"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, it says in the Brihadâraṇyaka Upanishad," the Brahmin quoted. "We can do what is in our power. The other lies with the shining ones!"

"Didn't you say a little earlier that you were flying with Vimanas?" Gutmann asked the Brahmin, directing the conversation to the things that lay ahead. The things they were discussing together captivated him immensely, but the Parsi's concern also worried him.

"Yes, I didn't see them myself, but I know them. There are old works in which many details of our flying are recorded. One of Bhâradwâja's works, the Yantrasârwasam, also talks about the Vimanas. People who have read the books and do not belong to the chosen ones know a lot, but they do not benefit from it. - Hai mai, the Inglist were much behind it, but in the end they felt fooled themselves!"

"We all don't know the books in question," Gutmann admitted regretfully. "Of course we would have

seriously studied!"

"The heart of things will remain hidden from you," smiled the Brahman. "And all those who only hear instead of seeing will be gripped by doubt or will not find out the crucial details. Hidden is what is open!"

"Indian aviation is very old, I think," said Frêne, "if it appears in old writings ..."

"Han - yes! There are also references in the Mahabhârata and the Ramayâna. At this time of writing, the culture bearers of India were already at a very high level. What the masters of the Faringhi in the West today claim as their own ideas, we have already partly solved earlier.

As far as our ancient flying is concerned, oriental scholars were long of the opinion that it was a matter of imagination. However, anyone who follows the scriptures carefully will realise that the ancient Hindus were able to develop perfect flying machines. In the chapter Vimanadhi Karânam of the book Yantrasarwâsaman, Maharshi Bhâradwâja describes in detail the construction and control of flying machines. Not only that, in another work, the Akasa Tantra by the same author, even the different atmospheres are described and studies on the gravitational pull of the earth and the effect of the heat of the sun are made known. Other references to atmospheric peculiarities are also given."



"You know the scriptures of your country very well!" Gutmann praised him appreciatively.

"Must I not know them as well as you know the writings of your people?"

"According to your description, the flight conditions have already been studied in detail," Gutmann admitted. "Frankly, I'm very worried about what the next few days will bring us. Nevertheless, you have aroused our interest and we would still like to listen ..."

The Brahmin dropped his eyelids for a moment. A slight twitching of the facial muscles suggested that he was endeavouring to concentrate. To everyone's surprise, he suddenly said: "Listen then, Sahib Logs and you too, friend Azîz, to what else is written in the books: there are three types of vimanas; these are the mantrica vimanas, the tantrica vimanas and the kritaka vimanas. The first two types of vimanas belong to the celestials. The Kritaka Vimanas, however, are creations of the human spirit. There were eight varieties of these, each of which had a different propulsive force. The books Vimanachândrika, Vyomânya Tantra and Khete Vilasa also report on this. There was an earlier Saktyudgama Vimana, which was powered by electrical energy. Such flying machines were equipped with various types of lenses that were able to collect or reflect the sun's energy, thereby giving the machine the power to float in the air. The Amshuvavavâragam were directly connected to

powered by solar energy. Just as balloons are now floated by hydrogen gas, our books also report on chemical compounds that were used to power flying machines. There were also dhoomayânavargams that were set in motion by steam and smoke."

"Vapour and smoke, you say?" Gutmann repeated.

"That interests me to the highest degree. Somewhere in Western Europe sits Russian-born Professor Braghine, who has devoted a lot of his time to the Atlantis problem and who, while travelling the world in Costa Rica, discovered an old pottery shard in a private collection on which a cigar-shaped body was carved, flying over palm trees, with a plume of smoke in the rebound. Despite precise findings, science knew nothing about it!"

"Where the spirit does not learn to fly, doubts remain."

Mulji Madharji made a disdainful movement

"I will tell you more: the Bhamâniviniana consists of twelve sutras or short aphorisms as construction details. Metallurgy was also an important part of our knowledge and use. In his work Loha Tantram, Sakâtayana Rishi reports on three types of metal; Vajrakantam, Ayaskantam and Suryakantam. These, fused in a certain ratio, were moulded into plates and used for the base plates of the vimanas. In this book, precise details are given about the process of mixing and melting. Nevertheless

Without further research and information, it is not possible to do much with the recipes given. This peculiar base plate has the property of being able to increase the lift of the flying body. The previously mentioned lenses, which we call mani, also have the special ability to utilise certain forces of the sun and are also described as mirrors made of certain types of glass. The most important thing here is a sensible arrangement of the manis, which have to be harmonised in several ways in order to be able to develop attractive or repulsive forces. In the Vimana in question, there is also a lens near an oil container in the centre of the flying ship, which transforms the oil into a gas through the effect of the sun, making it easier to move in the upper spheres."

"Very sensible, indeed..." muttered Frêne, astonished beyond measure at what he had heard, and the Linzer also showed a tense curiosity.

The brahmin continued: "The mani that is capable of converting oil into gas is called Agni-Netra! The motion-generating lenses have the property of flowing and developing an upward course, just like sunbeams, while after reversing the direction of force, the landing of the aircraft can be caused."

"Strange," Gutmann muttered.

Mulji Madharji had heard the remark. "And notice, Sahib Logs! Bodhananda Vritti also described the individual processes involved in making the lentils. He named

also the individual doses of additives for the Manis material."

"We thank you for your explanations, Mulji Madharji!" said Gutmann, when the Brahmin fell silent for a moment. "Your old books still contain the laws and ethos of alchemy!"

"You have deduced correctly from individual clues, Sahib Log! As far as I am informed, you also recognise the Mithra Mysteries in your communities by projecting archetypes and mandalas and obeying the individuation laws of alchemy. We are following the same tracks here!"

Reimer jumped up in surprise, but a grip from Gutmann forced him back into his seat. "Ah - I already heard about that at our base ..."

The Parsee had also followed the explanations with great excitement. Immediately after the Linzer broke off the sentence he had begun in the impulse, he interjected: "Thus Mithras initiations are fertilising on the path of the Mystery! This is how Ahuramâzdâh's grace flows over things that move us and mean progress, this is how the Son of God Mithra is with us!"

"From the non-existent, Brahman leads to the existent," said Mulji Madharji emphatically. "He is the beginning and he sends those who have to serve creation. Whoever becomes the centre of the mystery in the name of Brahman is also Brahman. So is the equivalent of Mithras!"

"What do names mean if the meaning is the same?"

agreed the Parsee. "Are we not all children of the sun, children of the One, from the Ur? Are we not from one root, the Rta, thus from one blood? How could we possibly think differently?"

"Han!" the Brahmin agreed.

Gutmann led the conversation back to the heart of the matter. "You have spoken very insightfully, Mulji Madharji! Your references to alchemical fundamentals confirm the importance of Met-All knowledge in the context of All-Chemistry. These are the seven seals of the secrets of the invisible-visible nature, which we have to vomit one by one as our realisation progresses. In our Nordic Edda, in the book *Skaldskaparmal*, there is a passage that speaks of a law that is one of the foundations of physics and chemistry. This passage has to be deciphered several times! When read correctly, it leads to surprising clues. It speaks of a Flod net that envelops ether vortices and stores power currents, of Flod threads that guarantee the chemical stability of an elementary atom. Much is encoded in the Edda and much is still not completely clear today. It only reveals its secrets to those who seek and follow correctly."

The Brahmin listened attentively to the counter-explanations. After a brief consideration, he said: "This is probably the original substance that we have known in India since time immemorial as *Apas Tattwa!*"

"That's very obvious!" After this hint from the Indian, Gutmann continued: "The all-chemistry tempted me to

The idea of producing gold from dark lead and the chemical science of modern times actually owes its origins to this endeavour. While this idea is no longer an unsolvable problem in profane, modern nuclear physics and is more a question of cost in the production process, alchemy is not concerned with mere transmutations, but with the restoration of a perfect original state."

"And what for?" Azîz asked shyly. His curiosity was stronger than hiding his ignorance.

Mulji Madharji looked at him and replied in Gutmann's place: "All development is fuelled by the root. Can a tree blossom and bear fruit if the root does not give off the sap that is necessary for life? Do you not know our proverb: He who does not know where he comes from does not know where he is going!"

"That's very nice," Frêne murmured again. "Whoever finds the beginning has the starting point of all paths and possibilities ..."

"Whoever is able to produce the original state or knows his matter has not only taken up a material position of creative possibilities, the spiritual correspondences also lean towards an ethos elevated by initiation," Gutmann also instructed the Parsee.

"That is the core of alchemy."

"Are you an alchemist?" the Parsee asked back.

"No, Azîz!" Gutmann shook his head. "We are soldiers who fly with new types of flying machines whose shapes and principles are based on Mithrian laws.

were developed. Even profane technology often touches on them unconsciously and strives for archetypes because the starting points of natural correspondences are felt to be beneficial. We found the correctness of this realisation in the technique of a flying gyroscope, which we have already flown!"

"Mithras Mysteries and the protectorate of Uranos, the lord of the super-intellect, the spiritual and mental faculties, would therefore be recognisable in the results," Frêne commented, showing quick understanding and reflection.

"Let's close the ring of considerations," Gutmann said, picking up on Carcassonne's interjection and confirming his words. "What our friend Frêne said is true. Uranos, the oldest god of the Greeks, who has survived from the distant grey ages, is the lord of dynamic technology and upheaval. Chronos-Saturn is a son of Uranos and was a mythical king of Atlantis. The celestial Saturn is the initiator of the subject's egoistic attitude, the actual cause of the apostasy, the separation of all illusionary multiplicities from unity. And this is exactly the image of the earlier paths of the Aryan race, which, after its worldwide migration, disintegrated into mixovariations of a new assimilation and biocenosis and lost its connection to unity. The blood petered out after it had bred other races from the bottom up. The illusionary multiplicities, however, retained the myths of redemption as unquenchable longings, in the inner

Core striving for the fulfilment of the Aryan mission. Chronos-Saturn, the lord of the Atlantis epoch, stepped down after the onset of the great catastrophe that led to the fall of the Atlantean empire. Now Uranos, the lord of the dynamic upheavals, himself takes hold of the spokes of the world wheel. Considering his origin, it can be stated that a ruler of the Atlantean tradition lends his protection to those who serve an Aryan mission in his spirit!"

"Uranos is like our Varuna, the ruler of the cosmic world order, an Aditya!" nodded the Brahmin. "They are just two names for the same person!"

"And those," Gutmann concluded, "who serve the Uranian technology with a knowing ethos will always keep their measure of things and be able to usher in a new epoch. Those who do not realise this and offend technology and its protector will be driven to self-destruction by unleashed forces, losing all control over matter."

Gutmann's last sentences were spoken in a sustained tone, so that there was an interruption and the men pursued their own thoughts. So it was he who, after a short while, took the floor again to make use of the time. "We now know that we are all brothers of the same path, as you, Mulji Madharji, said earlier. We have exchanged views and knowledge and have become allies of the Aryan spirit. Time is now pressing. People who do not recognise us  
Azîz



know of our presence here. And you yourself said at the beginning of our visit, O Mulji Madharji, that we should be taken away by secret means. Act quickly and you will really help us!"

"Han - yes," the Brahmin readily replied. "I will immediately see to it that you get an opportunity to travel to the southern part of Punjab, which you can best reach from Karachi and through the land of Sindh."

"We came from Karachi," Gutmann explained. "Now we're supposed to go back there ..."

Mulji Madharji deliberately ignored the objection.

"The railway circles the Thar desert in a wide arc around Jaipur. At Marwar, a junction leads to Hyderabad. The northern diversion is much longer. And you must come to the Panjnad River, which flows into the Indus. There on the bank lies the small village of Nûrwala, still belonging to the province of Ahmadpur, in the centre of the diagonal axis of the larger villages of Sitpur and Tarind Muhammad Panâh. And near Nûrwala lives Ramkant Bishambar. You will give him a sign and through him you will be flown out of the land of Hind!"

"If you can fly, why travel so far to get there," Gutmann asked. "Isn't the long journey to get there dangerous? It would be easier ..."

The Brahmin cut the begun sentence off.

"It is more dangerous to expose our secrets to the danger of a

discovery. I have thought everything through, Sahib Log. I can give you no better advice and no better help!"

"Good, Mulji Madharji. So we will wait at our friend Azîz's house for your message as to when we should travel."

"I think that could be tomorrow, maybe with a ship ..."

"It would be very good if it could be done so quickly!" the Parsee remarked emphatically.

The Brahmin wanted to say something in reply, but suddenly looked fixedly at the small window that led into the courtyard of his house.

"What's wrong?" asked Azîz, who first noticed the change in the Brahmin's face,

Mulji Madharji pointed to the window. "Wahan - there!"

The men all looked at the designated spot. They didn't notice anything unusual.

"Rikâbî - a bowl!" the Brahmin remarked briefly.

"Someone has put a bowl on my window. It doesn't belong to me."

Azîz stood up and went to the window. He turned round with an exclamation. His eyes flickered nervously.

"Well?" Gutmann also asked.

The Parsee did not answer, but carefully took the bowl from the edge of the window and brought it to the centre of the room, where he placed it on the floor. It was filled with water and seven lotus flowers were floating in it ...

Although the Brahmin had acted immediately after the incident in his house, Azîz had been even quicker. Since both men were influential and respected in Bombay, one of them must have been able to find a prompt means of travelling in an urgent case. Extraordinary luck had also favoured the Parsi when he learned that a freighter was leaving for the north that same evening,

Azîz knew the captain of the ship personally, as he usually travelled the coastal routes and had repeatedly transported goods for the Parsi. It was therefore easy for him to arrange for the captain to pick up the passengers to be transported in Gharapuri in order to cover their tracks as far as possible. For the same reason, the luggage was to be brought onto the ship in advance.

As evening fell and the lights came on in Bombay, the Parsee took his wards to the harbour area and there to the landing stage of a small ferry that was crossing over to Gharapuri. When the men arrived at the harbour, the Brahmin was already waiting for them.

"Greetings, Mulji Madharji!" The arriving men nodded to him in a friendly manner.

"Namasté - greetings!" he returned gratefully, crossing his arms over his chest.

Azîz looked round enquiringly. The Brahman made a reassuring gesture to him. "Ko'i

nahîn âtâ aur ham kuchh nahîn sunte - No one is here and nothing can be heard ..." Then he reached underneath his white coverlet and took out three small silver medallions, on one side of which God Agni was depicted riding a ram. "Here, Sahib Logs, show these signs to Ramkant Bishambar and he will know what to do. If he asks you questions, you can answer them with confidence."

"We sincerely thank you, Mulji Madharji! A single day has brought us together and separated us again. This day has made us friends and we will always think of you. May the shining ones be with you!"

"My thoughts will also accompany you! I now know that Agni's fire is burning everywhere. May the lights be with you too! - Namasté ..."

The ferryboat took the men on board, only the Brahmin stayed behind after saying goodbye. While the ship set course for the open bay and headed for Gharapuri, he stood like a stone statue on the quay, becoming smaller and more and more indistinct, and followed them with his eyes. After a while, he was only recognisable as a pale white speck, holding out until the ship too became nothing more than a dark dot in his eyes.

During the crossing, the Parsee, turning to Gutmann, asked him to accept a wicked filled with rupees so that he would not have any difficulties on the way. Although the men still had plenty of money and had little opportunity to spend it, they could not refuse their host's offer in order to make it easier for him.

not to offend. The most common of all human worries, money, stayed away from them as a blessing in disguise.

A little later, Azîz had also taken his leave. Dignified, like the Brahmin. Only in his eyes there was a sad lustre, exposing his soul. Out of his spiritual solitude, socialising only with those who knew little of his faith and working in the background, he had received an inspiring impulse that tore open the apparent seclusion of his sect. He also loved the people to whom the three men belonged.

"Germany ki jai - long live Germany!" were his last words, spoken warmly and without pathos. In doing so, he showed his respect and sympathy for the three men.

At night, the ship weighed anchor and turned its bow out to sea. The three companions stood at the stern and memorised the images of the beauty left behind for later memories. To the north, the beacons of the slender tower of Prongs flashed across, guiding the way for shipping. The countless lights on the coast reflected like shimmering golden threads in the water, behind them rose the night-black ridges and humps of the ghats.

"We made good friends in the Arab countries," Reimer said quietly so as not to disturb the magic of the night. "But here, in Bombay, we found brothers of our origin."

"Vraiment," Frêne affirmed. "Truly! ..."

Gutmann remained silent. A previously unknown feeling of anxiety had crept over him

## SEVEN LOTUS BLEEDS

Just as the lotus blossom, born in water, grows only in water, yet unweathered by water only sweetly spreads its fragrance, so the Buddha is born in this world, once among us, yet the world does not touch him, as the water falls from the lotus.

Buddhist monk song

The sun sent its mercilessly burning rays from the azure sky and behind the coastal land coming up from the horizon, a bright white bank of clouds clumped together, drifting majestically. Out of the dark strip of land made up of low sand dunes, the spit of Manora Headland emerged with three old forts on it. Karâchi was in sight.

In front of the entrance to the harbour, a tall lighthouse rose out of the lowlands. All around, the land was flat, the surroundings of the capital of Sindh consisted of marshes apart from the dune strips. The first image of the city presented the men standing on the incoming steamer with a Muslim face, emphasised by towering minarets.

The three men had their white clothes and their

Kalpaks, so that they appeared to be Parsi merchants. According to a tip-off from Azîz, there were about two thousand Parsi in Karachi, so they did not stand out. Also, the past weeks had been enough to give the men a good tan, so that their skin colour was not too light. Only Reimer had to wear his kalpak low to cover his light blonde hair.

It was embarrassing that there were many Englishmen in Karâchi, which seemed understandable given the importance of the harbour. Even though Azîz had spoken in Bombay that the days of the Ingliz in India were numbered, at that moment they were still firmly seated here, hatching the egg that would in the near future tear the unity of India into two religious domains.

The men did not stay in the city for long. Apart from Frêne's Arabic and their common knowledge of English, they could not communicate with the Sindhi here and the predominant languages were Hindhi, Pûschtu and Persian. And three Parsis who could only speak English and Arabic were bound to attract attention. It was also to be feared that the British, through their FSS, the Field Secret Service, had the signalling of three suspicious persons in evidence all over India and were on the lookout, in this case with success.

The two greetings with the lotus petals had also worried the companions, as Gutmann could not conceal his uneasy feelings. Even if their deliberations did not give rise to any well-founded



Although their fears were not entirely unfounded, there were always factors of unpredictability that disturbed the balance of their mental planning. So there were compelling enough reasons to take the next train northwards, which went to the railway junction at Bahawalpur. After a detailed description by Mulji Mahardji, they knew that they would have to reckon with a day's journey to Khanpur and from there another fifty kilometres to the small railway station of Tânwâri.

In a white carriage on the Indian Northwestern Railway, they travelled just under three hours to Hyderabad, a city with the same name as the great princely state in central India. Then it was about three hundred kilometres to Khaipur, whose people were already beginning to resemble the type of tall, proud hill Muslims and Afghani.

The second part of the railway journey via Ghotki and Khanpur to the small town of Tânwâri also went without incident. They arrived at the destination of their railway journey relieved that no one had noticed or disturbed them.

The three men did not find any tropical beauty here. All around is scrubland, interspersed with tall grass steppes. Occasional trees or palms. Here they realised that they had no direct road or means of transport to Nûrwala. With an ox cart they were able to cover the eight kilometres or so to Allahâbâd, another small town named after a more famous sister on the Ganges,

west of Benares. From there, a not very good road led northwards to Tarind Muhammad Panâh through untravelled bush and steppe landscape.

In Tarind Muhammad Panâh, the men stayed in a hân. They were already quite tired and resigned themselves to the fact that the place was not as clean and comfortable as the Parsi's guest bungalow in Bombay. Since they did not find any Europeans in the village, they were unconcerned and pretended to be Europeans so that they could make enquiries more easily. When they asked questions in English, they did not receive very friendly information. The warlike and liberal spirit of the mountain tribes from the north and north-west of the country, which had always been a problem for the British, was already blowing through here.

Although the men had instructed the Hândschi not to disturb them and wanted them to take a long rest, their restlessness drove them on ahead of time. The next day, they were once again able to travel five kilometres in an ox cart to the small village of Jhallânwâli, where two roads intersected. In a north-westerly direction, a path also led five kilometres to the Panjnad River, on the banks of which lay the sought-after village of Nûrwala. They had to walk this last stretch on foot, cursing in the heat of the day, their luggage causing them unaccustomed trouble. They passed the two small hamlets of Basti Mahfam and Basti Wasâia Langar on either side of the path,

they reached Nûrwala, which was also only a small town.

Here Frêne asked about Ramkant Bishambar. He had to ask several people before he learnt that the man he was looking for lived alone in a modest hut on a dead branch of the river to the south. The distance might be half an hour's walk.

Even the usually self-controlled Gutmann whined discontentedly as they had to continue their journey along the river. They silently hoped that they would at least find the Indian. The man whom the Carcassonner had asked for information and who had led the way had strangely refused to serve as a guide and help carry the luggage in return for an offered bakshish.

Heaven may have had mercy on their hopes. They found the dwelling described and, fortunately, the man they were looking for at home.

It was an older man who wore a large orange turban with black stripes with his blue loincloth. Bushy grey eyebrows made it easier to estimate his age. He was sitting on a tree stump next to the low, palm frond-roofed house, whittling away at a piece of wood.

"Namasté!" Gutmann greeted, using the greeting he had learnt.

Ramkant Bishambar interrupted his work

and looked up. After a brief inspection, he thanked them with the same word. As the three men stood waiting, he asked: "Kahen tum ho?"

"We don't understand Hindhi!" Gutmann explained in English.

The Indian repeated his question: "Who are you?"

Instead of replying, Gutmann pulled out the medallion Mulji Madharji had given him. His companions followed his example.

Ramkant Bishambar's eyes travelled from the coins to the men's faces and back again. "Where did you find these coins?" he said cautiously.

"We received these from Mulji Madharji with the order to show them to a certain Ramkant Bishambar, who would then help us!"

Now the Indian stood up and bowed low. "Vishnu be with you! Make do with the modest things I have to offer." He rolled some wooden blocks from the wall of the hut and offered his visitors a seat. If his eyes had not betrayed great wisdom and intelligence, one could easily be tempted to pity the man as a poor pariah. In fact, however, he showed himself to be a Brahmin of extremely high spiritual calibre, who in his seclusion and simplicity could be considered an Indian Diogenes.

"I wasn't expecting you today," Ramkant Bishambar apologised. "I wasn't expecting you to come until the day after tomorrow and then I would have

sent a messenger to the railway station."

"You knew we were coming?" Gutmann asked.

"Han! - Your protector sent an innocuous telegram to a friend in nearby Sitpur. This is how I learnt of the task to be of service to you

...."

Reimer couldn't refrain from interjecting in German: "Potz, Donner und Blitz! Instead of landing at the magnificent Taj Mahal, which I know from the picture book, we crawl around in a sparse meadow and find this strange doghouse with a guy who has his wardrobe on his head and only a handkerchief in front of his stomach. Heaven, hell and steerage! The guy is literally on the ball with the technology and gets his mail as quickly as a councillor in a town hall ..."

Gutmann waved him off. He politely thanked the Hindu for the friendly welcome he had now received and, when questioned, reported on the last part of the journey in a more concise manner. He did not refrain from describing the matter of the lotus blossoms in detail so that the Brahmin would be urged to act. For this reason, he gave the whole thing a threatening background and as if they felt persecuted,

Ramkant Bishambar immediately interjected: "And did you notice on the way that you were being followed or that eyes of curiosity were after you?"

"Not that," Gutmann admitted. "We took all the precautions on the sea voyage and have been on board since

Karâchi, we were on our way to you without interruption and in a hurry! We didn't notice anyone. At the railway station, we got off alone, apart from one or two locals who didn't give us a second glance."

"You will have to stay in the Hân for a few days, in the rest house. Maybe in two days, maybe in four, you will be picked up at night and taken away." The Hindu made a warning gesture. "One thing we demand: silence!"

"That goes without saying!" the three men assured him almost simultaneously. Driven by curiosity, Reimer added: "Our friend in Bombay spoke of Vimanas ..."

Ramkant Bishambar's eyes were fixed on the Linzer. "We'll see what happens next! The thing without a name blows away or suddenly appears out of nowhere. But what has a name and is called out finds its echo in many ears ..."

"I understand," muttered Reimer.

"Then it's all right, Chota Sahib! Let's not talk about anything concerning the journey, the destination is known to the men who will come for you."

"We didn't see any Hân in Nûrwala," said Frêne, "Do we have to live further away?"

"Nai, sahib! There is a small rest house in the village. I will take you there myself. It is small, for few strangers come here. It is very rare that we see Faringhi."

"So we'll have peace and quiet," Gutmann said with satisfaction. "Everything has been agreed and the watchword now is: wait and be quiet! So we can set off again, Ramkant Bishambar!"

"If you wish, we can go!"

The men stood up. At that moment, a silver-grey animal scurried out of the Indian's house. It made a few cute jumps, spun around lively and eyed the men curiously. It stood sniffing slightly in front of Reimer, who looked a little embarrassed at the strange animal. He still didn't know what to do.

"It doesn't do anything!" smiled Ramkant Bishambar. "It's a mongoose!" He had realised that the Faringhi were still strangers in the land.

"Ah, I've heard of it," said Frêne and Gutmann nodded. "You keep it as a pet?"

"Yes, Sahib! There are always snakes by the river and the mongoose keeps them away from my house." He whistled and the animal, the size of a small dog, made a leap towards its master. One clawed front paw lifted slightly out of the long silvery fur, while the hind legs disappeared almost completely under the long hair. His tapered tail tapped the ground several times. His eyes glittered cunningly.

"Snakes here? Brrr...", said Reimer. "I missed these critters in India," he mumbled half in his Linz dialect. "So I actually like this strange four-legged friend here."

At first I thought a new breed of dog had appeared and wanted to bite ..."

Led by the Hindu, they walked back along the banks of the Panjnadi. The water was quite narrow at this point, but the Brahmin pointed to two larger islands that squeezed the river into a narrow bed.

"You live very far away," Frêne said, turning to the Hindu. "You love peace and quiet and being alone?"

"Han - Besides, there are mostly Muslims living here who are not well-disposed towards Hindu believers."

"Then why are you staying here? India is big and you have brothers everywhere!"

"Hai mai," said the Brahmin, half-singing. "India is big, that's true. But can a tree wander when its roots are anchored in the earth? When we wander, all of us who are of our caste wander."

"What do you mean?"

"The spirit of the Ingliz is destroying our caste order. The Cudras are breaking the order and the Aryan ruling class is disintegrating. Four out of a hundred of the population are Brahmins and two-thirds of them are no longer conscious. Before we perish, the last of us will have to migrate."

"Where to?" asked the Carcassonnier.

Ramkant Bishambar looked across the river. His eyes followed a procession of birds flying northwards.

"Do you see, Sahib, the flock of birds there? Their flight indicates the direction from where we came to this land several thousand years ago. Shouldn't we go back there



find our way back to where the Mother of Nations gave birth to us?" Frêne refrained from expressing his scepticism. Problems  
mational matters should not be dismissed superficially. The conversation would only lead to dramatic aspects and it was better not to touch on these things now.

The Indian seemed to be able to read Frêne's thoughts. Turning to him, he said: "We have an old proverb in the land: God sleeps in the stone, breathes in the plant, dreams in the animal and awakens in man!" And raising his hand slightly, the Brahmin continued: "When man enters the path of the gods with knowledge, he receives the powers that support his firm will! When our time has come, what the law of our kind commands must be done ..." -

Conversation on the way back became sluggish and the three men endeavoured to suppress the resentment that was setting in again in the presence of their Hindu guide. Tired and thirsty from the heat, the little hardships of travelling around now seemed to them to be a superfluous chicanery of their fate.

In Nûrwala, the Brahmin went to the head of the village and then led the three men to the small guesthouse. Everything here was simple and rural. Travellers were not allowed to make any demands. Well-to-do travellers would not have stayed here for long.

The place itself offered nothing attractive either. The men bought cheap fruit, which they carefully sorted before eating.

to avoid falling prey to the diseases that abound in the tropics. They then retired to the rest house, while Ramkant Bishambar left with the promise to come back the next day.

The next morning, the men met a black-bearded Pathan, who eyed them curiously out of the corner of his eye and then walked past them into the roadhouse. He pretended to be looking for someone, then hesitantly stepped back and stood waiting outside. As the men walked on, they instinctively felt the pursuing eyes of the black bearded man behind them.

"Funny bloke," grumbled Reimer. "Acted like he was from some maharaja's secret police."

"A Muslim fanatic," Gutmann said lightly.

"I didn't like the turban boy either," Frêne confessed, taking Linz's side. "I have a feeling ..."

Reimer stood still. "We are actually reckless birds! Our luggage is lying unattended in the house and besides, the Brahmin could turn up at our place in the morning while we're strolling around elsewhere. I'll go back and wait until the rising sun drives you back into the shade of our dwelling."

Gutmann stood still, undecided. He gave Frêne a quick glance, then said: "Reimer is right. It will therefore be best if we all turn back together."

They turned round and strolled back in silence.

Pathane had disappeared; apart from children playing at the top end of the street, there was no one to be seen at the moment. While Gutmann and Frêne stayed behind, keeping an eye out, Reimer entered the semi-dark room inside the house alone. An indeterminable noise made him stop.

His eyes, impressed by the bright daylight, were only just becoming accustomed to the twilight inside. As if driven by an inner command, he turned round abruptly and just at that moment he saw a figure leave the room in a leap. The man must have been standing at the side of the doorway so that he could scurry away unnoticed; Reimer had noticed him a second or two too soon.

With a springy leap, Reimer jumped after him. The pursued man was unlucky. He suddenly stumbled over a leaning stick that came between his legs. He hit the ground with an angry sound.

The Linzer was immediately on top of him. Before the man, it was the black-bearded Pathane, could get up, Reimer had grabbed him firmly by the back of the neck and pushed him to the ground again. At his short call, Gutmann and Frêne came in and prevented an incipient scuffle with their quick appearance. The man from Carcasson twisted the bearded man's forearm backwards so that he had to give up defencelessly.

Predatory teeth bared from the twisted undergrowth. The narrowed eyes blazed with fury and rage.

"What's with you?" Gutmann yelled at him. "What are you doing in our dwelling, hey - ?..."

Pathan remained defiantly silent. When Frêne yanked his twisted arm up a little with a painful grip, he briefly grimaced, but remained stubbornly silent.

"There's no point in keeping the bloke under pressure," Gutmann said with a shrug. "These guys would rather bite their tongues off before they reveal anything. With this one, we can't work out who his clients are or what he was looking for. He doesn't look like an ordinary thief. Let him go, Frêne, so he can get away!"

The Frenchman followed the instruction. "Go on! ..."

The Pathan lay still for seconds and even kept his bent arm. Only his head lifted slightly and his dark eyes slowly travelled around, scrutinising the faces of the white men.

"Go on!" Frêne repeated his order.

"Yallah!" The black bearded man jerked up and then suddenly stood in the doorway with a cat-like leap. His eyes searched again. Surprise and mistrust were both evident in his expression. He mumbled a few sentences in Pushtu, which the men did not understand. Then, hesitantly, almost reluctantly, he brought his right hand to his forehead and slipped out into the open. Gutmann, looking after him, noticed that he quietly crossed the village street and then disappeared between a few houses standing apart.

"Strange visit," Reimer babbled. "Wherever you step, there are roses and thorns scattered all over the colourful carpet of the globe. Hai mai, as the Hindus sing, the interest in us is almost overwhelming, but unfortunately they're not glowing-eyed Huris and Bajaders, but always just well-meaning or ill-meaning men."

"The world is not a carpet of flowers now, but a battlefield," Gutmann growled. "And there are always many enemies alongside a few friends. And women have no place there."

"Just because you're a misogynist," Reimer spat back, "With the Teutons -"

"Rubbish!" said Gutmann. "Now we're with the Indians..."

As if Gutmann's last statement had been a call, Ramkant Bishambar appeared. He came through the main street at a measured pace and bowed with the native salute.

"Khwushkhbari! - Good news; you will be able to continue your journey in two days. I already have the connection through a Chaprasi, who by the way is a Parsee. There are some secret Parsi families in this area. They have an adhuran fire nearby and they invite you to their service tonight. I told the Chaprasi that you are friends of the great Azîz from Bombay. And that was a great recommendation for the keeper of the pure fire when he heard this news from the Chaprasi's mouth."

"That pleases us too," Gutmann thanked them kindly. "We, on the other hand, have no good news to report.

"Kyuni - why?"

"They're spying on us!" Gutmann told the Brahmin about the previous event and also described the Pathan in detail.

"Bari afsos-ki bat hai - that's a bad thing!" Ramkant Bishambar confirmed anxiously. "It would be better if you could leave this place as soon as possible."

"We'd like that too," the men confirmed at the same time.

"If you don't spurn a free camp, I will take you away immediately. You can't be too careful," said the Brahmin.

"Go ahead," Reimer encouraged him.

"And the explanation for the Pathan's visit?" asked Frêne.

"Yih - there are many explanations," Ramkant Bishambar said. "But none of them are good..."

"Then let's get our luggage out again straight away and go!" Gutmann decided briefly.

As the men left the village, the inhabitants watched them furtively from their huts. Only a few dogs barked. Otherwise it was as quiet as if it were night ...

The sky stretched out like a blue-coloured blanket. The moonship hung like a slanting traffic light and bathed the land in a mild twilight. The branches of the

Forest trees reached skywards, bizarre and twisted, like black, crippled fingers. A procession of bats fluttered along the edge of the clearing, pursued by the angry cawing of startled birds. An animal call in the distance.

Just over twenty people were standing in a clearing hidden in the forest around a small, dilapidated building. They turned their heads in anticipation as a call rang out from the edge of the forest. Several men emerged from the darkness. A gaunt Parsee, followed by three white men ...

Quiet calls and counter-calls alternated. The three whites followed their leader across the small clearing towards the group of people, who were standing still. Small flames flickered towards them from there, blazing like short, nimble tongues from small mangals standing scattered on the ground. Some men also held small lamps with small lights dancing above their openings, occasionally protected from the breeze by hands held in front of them. All those present stood around a dilapidated four-arched building, in which an altar-like pedestal could be seen, on the upper surface of which a small fire spread a twitching glow.

"What's that?" Reimer asked his companions quietly.

The gaunt Parsee, who had served as their guide, heard the question, which was usually asked in English. "They are the remains of a tshahar taq that has been hidden for a long time. A ritual fire house, like the ones that were built many ages ago.

served to preserve the sacred mother fires throughout Iran."

"And here -?"

"We are a small, completely remote Parsi community that still maintains a community here, unnoticed by the rest of the neighbourhood. And so we also keep a small Adhuran fire, a mother fire to purify the other fires, which serves us in the household. That is the will of our ancient law."

There were only two men inside the Tshahar Taq. Both had their mouths covered with the paitidana, a mouth cloth, and gloves on their hands. At a call from them, the Parsi congregation approached the building in a circle, holding their mangals and lamps, but without entering the interior. One of the two men in front of the fire altar grasped a log with a long pair of tongs, which he slowly fed to the mother fire. The whole action clearly showed an endeavour to avoid any contamination of the flames by avoiding direct contact with a limb or breath.

The fire crackled and died down slightly after the draught. One man began to sing, the others joined in. A rising melody, a chanting recitation and then a falling away again to an indistinct murmur. Strange, poignant, casting a spell around the mother fire.

The three white men stood in awe of something



sideways so as not to be a nuisance. The gaunt man had stayed with them and gave them a friendly look. "These are ancient chants of the Avesta," he explained quietly, recognising the eager listening of those invited. "So - and now they pray the old Atash nyayistin, the song of praise by fire! ..."

The chanting and the litanies stopped, only indistinct murmuring remained. The men performing the priestly office in the Ateshga, the holy of holies of the Adhuran feuet, now received the mangals and lamps offered to them and briefly married their flames with the flickering mother fire, performing a symbolic purification. With a solemn gesture they handed back the purified house fires. The main act of the fire ceremony had come to an end.

Strange night. Ancient custom, practised with fervour in the diaspora. A sacred fire in a hidden grove, the past brought to life, outlasting the long-gone eras of the Achaemenids, Arsacids and Sassanids. The overrunning of Iran by Alexander the Great, the late Islamic invasion that followed, all drastic changes in the religious and spiritual spheres of the country, were unable to completely destroy the chain of ancient tradition. Like a foreign flower in the mysterious bosom of India, the Adhuran flame blossomed in its unsullied purity.

Strange night ...

Slowly, the Parsi wandered off with their house fires.

One by one, the men lost themselves in the darkness of the surrounding forest after greeting each other in silence. After barely a quarter of an hour, the three white men stood alone with the gaunt man in front of the old building.

While one of the firekeepers stood in the centre of the Ateshga and pushed the ember wood together with the tongs, the other approached the spell circle of the building. He greeted the gaunt man and then looked intently at the strangers. "I understand you are friends and protégés of Azîz from Bombay?" he asked.

"That's right," Frêne and Gutmann confirmed at the same time.

"I welcome you again!" said the Parsee with a bow. "It almost never happens that we allow guests to participate in our sacred act. But at Ramkant Bishambar one of our brothers learnt that you are not only friends of our great Azîz, but also knowers of ancient tradition. May the pure fire always illuminate your paths!"

"We thank you, oh friend!" Gutmann said with dignity. "Your trust has our trust. If you have any questions, we will answer them openly."

The firekeeper did not answer. His features were still obscured by the Patidana. His eyes suddenly looked past the visitors somewhere into a void. It almost seemed as if he was listening for something inaudible.

"We don't want to disturb you any longer," Gutmann whispered to the lean Parsi. "Thank you on our behalf for the

Tolerance of our coming!"

The guardian had undoubtedly heard the words, which were spoken quietly after all. Nevertheless, he remained silent. He only raised his hand, as if to indicate that he was not out of the world. A gesture that might also signify a greeting.

"Let's go!" Gutmann said to his companions. After the first two steps, the leading Parsee turned round again and called back a few short sentences, following Gutmann's previous request. Only now came a short but incomprehensible reply. As the Parsee did not repeat the sentence in explanation, the men also refrained from asking him.

The dark wall of the night-black forest stood before them like a wall. The Parsee pushed forwards and took the lead. With admirable certainty, he found the course of a path that led through the matted forest undergrowth. The high treetops blocked the light of the moonlight. The men followed the advancing Parsi with an uneasy feeling, especially because of the snakes, as he must have had an unerring instinct apart from his eyes.

A soft murmur betrayed the proximity of the river they were walking towards. A narrow channel divided the forest. Ahead of them lay a narrow, primitive footbridge, just wide enough for a single man to cross with some care. It connected a larger river island, which they were now leaving, to the mainland. Not far from here stood Ramkant Bishambar's hut.

"What prompted you to invite us, foreign Faringhi, to your sacred feast?" Gutmann asked the leading Parsi abruptly.

"Hai mai," he sang, falling into an Indian habit, "are you not friends of Azîz? Have we not already repeated this to you? We honour with our trust those who have the trust of the great Azîz. Didn't the Firekeeper welcome you by saying so? It is a modest honour, but one that is rarely bestowed on white men. Are you not standing on the same path that leads from one beginning to many common ends?"

"Asia really is a strange country," Gutmann said cautiously. "Wherever you go, everywhere things murmur in the great space and everywhere the seeker is opened up to recognition and realisation. Like manifold patterns in the carpet of time, woven into an eternal meander, everything that is bound lives down to its roots, which in the Occident is only a schematic image. That is Europe's weakness. Its infirmity and its end lie in the renunciation of tradition." Just at that moment, a treacherous ray of moonlight slipped through the now sparse tangle of branches and revealed the speaker's slightly elegiac features.

"If I understand correctly, you are lamenting Europe, O Sahib?" asked the Parsee. "But if there are still many men in Eruopa like you and your companions, then you can hope as much as we do. For always

again the light comes and it is always victorious!" Bending aside a few branches, he continued: "It is the great tragedy of the tradition-forgetting history of your continent that the Ingliz did not come to India as Aryans, but as their empire destroyers. They mobilised the Cudras and thus initiated the world's revolt against itself."

"I hear the same thing in similar words everywhere," Gutmann admitted.

"It's all easy to see, only the Ingliz themselves are blind as newborn cats." The Parsee laughed softly, "And we know that they won't be here in our country for much longer."

After travelling a short distance, the men finally stood in front of the Brahmin's modest hut. Ramkant Bishambar was sitting in front of a small fire and had obviously been waiting.

"Namasté," he thanked as the new arrivals greeted him. "Take a seat!" His skinny hand pointed round the fire.

While the white men followed his request, the Parsee stopped and asked for permission to say goodbye. It was already getting late and he still had a while to walk before he got home. Rejecting the guests' thanks, he left.

Ramkant Bishambar waited until the Parsee was out of sight, then he said abruptly. "I had a strange visit at dusk that I can't keep from you!"

"Who was it?" Gutmann asked eagerly.

"The black beard you told me about," said the Brahmin sternly.

"Was he spying here too?"

"No. On the contrary: he came to warn!"

"What?" The three men looked at the Indian in astonishment.

He nodded. "That's right! He came and told me that you had been magnanimous. He also said that he knew you weren't one of the Ingliz. He also mentioned in passing that he had already fought under the Saint of Ipi. And he wanted to warn you through my mouth to stay here longer, where you are threatened with disaster. He was not allowed to say more. You may leave for the south without delay!"

"Well, well," said Reimer, "the blackbeard looked so much like a scoundrel that you wouldn't think him capable of such an impulse. Was that supposed to be true or the start of a new rogue's play?"

"I advise you to believe his words," said the Brahmin. "It is a misfortune that you cannot be taken away this night, perhaps tomorrow ..." He slowly poked at the fire and threw a few dry branches at it. His expression was worried. "There are still forces at work ..."

"I don't trust the Pathan to have good intentions," Frêne also interjected. "It might be a good idea to keep our stowed weapons handy again now."

"Only use force of arms in the most extreme cases!"

warned Gutmann. "In all countries, this always leads to

unpleasant entanglements."

Birds screeched piercingly from the riverbank. The chittering of small animals and monkeys followed. A dark train of startled feathered folk streaked across the now high half-disc of the moon.

"Trouble on the river," said the Brahmin after listening for a moment. His eyes bored into the darkness of the riverbank, but could discover nothing more. Again his gaze caught the dancing play of the fire.

Half an hour passed in gloomy silence. The nocturnal life in the forest had calmed down again, only now and then a short night bird call could be heard and once a distant hissing. The flame of the fire grew small and tiredness fell over those sitting around.

The cracking of a spindly branch at the edge of the forest interrupted the silence. Frêne, who had lazily turned his head towards the sound, nodded upwards and uttered a call.

The increasingly clear silhouette of a man came striding across the clearing. As he stepped into the outer circle of light from the stoked fire, he revealed himself to be Mongolian-faced, dressed in a closed suit similar to that of a monteur. He also wore a headdress that resembled the fur hats worn by the Russians. All in all, he seemed unexpected and strange in this environment.

He stopped a few steps in front of the seated passengers. A brief gesture indicated a greeting. The one



The words he mumbled were a guttural English.

"What do you want?" Ramkant asked Bishambar in the same language.

"I'm coming to the white sahibs!"

"So?" Gutmann turned to the stranger.

"I've brought you something you forgot in Bombay!"

"And that's -?"

Instead of any further explanation, the man slid his right hand under his suit and produced a medium-sized, stiff envelope, which he handed to Gutmann as he approached.

Reimer and Frêne approached Gutmann, who curiously opened the envelope. He pulled out a folded sheet of paper and when he unfolded it, seven pressed lotus blossoms lay between the blank paper ...

Gutmann jumped up in agitation. "What are you doing?" He folded the envelope wide and looked inside. Nothing more inside. He turned to the man again: "Why did you find us here?"

"Buddha's ears and eyes..." the man began to rattle on.

"... Yes, yes, they're everywhere!" Gutmann interrupted him. "That borders on witchcraft."

The stranger ignored the irritation that came out of the white man's mouth. He calmly explained: "Friends of yours have been waiting a long time. I'll come and get you!"

"To the Monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms?"

"Yes, Sahib!"

"Who are the friends?" Gutmann enquired.

"You will see them and be satisfied!"

"Pah - some kind of trick," Frêne interjected.

"No!" the stranger defended himself.

Gutmann looked at his companions and then at the Brahmin. The latter sat motionless, only his eyes fixed on the stranger. Frêne took the floor again and addressed the visitor: "Whose messenger you may be, you come at a late hour, which is not good to think about. Come back tomorrow morning. By then we'll have discussed it and things will be easier by day!"

"Tomorrow morning you will no longer be in India. You have to come now!"

"That's crazy!" Gutmann rumbled.

"No - it's the way of fate!"

"We command fate - not you!" Reimer shouted belligerently.

"No!" The stranger raised his right hand steeply. At the same moment, three more figures emerged from the dark background, approaching in a separate line. They wore the same clothes as the caller, two of them had half-holstered submachine guns in their bent arms.

"Heda!" Reimer and Frêne also jumped up and stood next to Gutmann. Only the Brahmin remained motionless except for his face, which now looked doubly wrinkled and decayed.

"This is - a somewhat strange - invitation..." Gutmann's words, uttered in bursts, betrayed both surprise and anger in their colouring. Despite the red-coloured reflections of fire, the colour of his face was pale.

"Close your eyes and let only your ears hear," said the one who came first. "Then my message will become music to your ears."

"And the armed calling card?" There was open derision in Gutmann's defence.

"Don't take your eyes off ..."

"Save it, man! We're not dreamers. What are the weapons for?"

"Only in defence against resistance," said the stranger coolly, "Let's go now!"

"And if we refuse?"

"Then the Ingliz will have you tomorrow!"

"We'll take our chances!"

The stranger's face showed a typical Asian smile. "I have instructions to deliver you to the Seven Lotuses Monastery under all circumstances. Do not force us to use any means that could tarnish our friendship." One of the armed men raised the barrel of his submachine gun slightly, but the speaker waved him away. "Take your luggage and follow us! Let the old man make some noise, we'll be gone in no time."

"I won't make any noise because it's useless," Ramkant Bishambar retorted. "I will not give you

I will not chase after the village policemen, but I will make sure that there is a response to your actions at the right time. The Shining Ones are with my guests!"

One of the strangers chuckled softly. The spokesman of the people began to urge. "Make haste, Sahib, and your companions too! We can't be here in half an hour."

"I'm afraid there's nothing we can do at the moment but give in," Gutmann said half aloud. "Our weapons are in our luggage. We also don't know what these guys here will do if we go to extremes. We can be sure that they will carry out their mission with all the means at their disposal."

"Merde!" cursed the Carcassonner angrily. "Getting us like this."

"And if we jump on the MPi people?" said Reimer in German.

"Don't do that!" Gutmann warned. "The other two also have pistols in their pockets. Why don't you take a closer look at these brothers?"

"Horrible rubbish story," raged the Linzer. "So in Belzebub's name, let's go with these lotus blossom monkeys to where the pepper grows."

Gutmann turned to the Indian: "We thank you, O Ramkant Bishambar, for your kind welcome and all your good intentions. But as you can see, your friends and ours have arrived too late. We are bowing here to a force that is stronger than we in the

Just a moment."

"Han," nodded the Brahmin. "Yih sharm ki bat hai - this is a bad event. Nevertheless, go quietly, for you are under the protection of the Shining Ones. Your luggage is behind my hut under the rush mats. Don't forget anything ..."

Reimer and the Frenchman, accompanied by a submachine gunman, collected their packs from the designated place. Flanked by the Mongols, they all walked together towards the riverbank with their luggage shouldered, followed by the gaze of the Brahmin, who had called out a solemn Namasté to his previous guests.

The small group of men marched to a narrow arm of the Panjnadi, crossed it over a small footbridge, always keeping to the same order of march, with the white men in the centre. They followed a bush for a short distance, then came to a large sandbank around which the river made a wide arc. And in the middle of the sandbank stood a strangely silhouetted aeroplane, its protruding cockpit bearing two horns reminiscent of a buffalo. A few steps in front of it stood a man dressed in the same clothes as his brothers who were now approaching, also holding a rapid-fire weapon in his hands.

The Panjnadi rushed close to the flying machine. Silver squiggles bounced over the rippling waves that pushed towards the nearby Indus River. The exposed sandbank was covered with moon glass and shimmered like bright

Velvet blue, and the quartz particles in the sand glittered like diamonds. The stationary alien machine heaved like a pre-worldly beast on the bench.

A call and slogan brought the men together at the flying machine. The man on watch opened the entrance and the Mongols forced the white men to climb in behind the leader. The others followed and slammed the door shut.

Two men went to the front of the cockpit. The others stayed behind with the involuntary passengers in the cabin, which was equipped with seats. There were six seats, all of which were now occupied. The seats at the back were again occupied by Mongols, who put their submachine guns between their knees.

Now a quiet humming sound began. Then a whine as if from a turbine, interrupted by a few staccato bursts, the machine began to vibrate and all of a sudden the familiar pull that always sets in when a flying ship starts to move became noticeable.

The German flight officers pressed their faces to the round window hatches with every sign of extreme tension. To take off on a river sandbank in the dark required not only great flying skill but also a portion of luck.

To their surprise, the aircraft had only advanced a very short distance, detached itself from the ground with a sudden jerk and set off surprisingly quickly in a steep dive

high.

An ah came from Gutmann's lips. "Admirable flying qualities," he murmured, turning back to Reimer.

He nodded briefly and added: "It's fantastic. An interesting machine!"

"Suitable for the smallest runways. Like our Fieseler Storch, only much more powerful," Gutmann confessed. "But you can easily do sandbank experiments like this with a thing like this."

The wide river quickly melted into a narrow ribbon, the bizarre contours of the forests turned into a black wavy carpet. In the first few seconds of pulling up the machine, the men could still see the nearby fire behind the wall of trees on the bank in front of the Brahmin hut, sending out a last blazing greeting like a little tongues.

The aeroplane climbed higher and higher. In the direction of flight, they were approached by the Indus River, which was divided into several arms. Following the course of the river, the aircraft changed course and flew northwards. Always following the shimmering ribbons that flowed through the dark land below them. Always islands, always a riverbed divided into several parts.

The speed of the machine increased considerably.

Individual silvery clouds were already sailing below the aeroplane like swept wisps, bright dots of houses were barely discernible. The

Punjabland fled like an assembly line.

The Mongol leader crawled out of the pulpit. In the darkness of the room, he reached out two thermos flasks, one of which he tucked under his arm while he opened the other somewhat awkwardly. The aroma of spicy coffee wafted into the cabin. He filled the lidded cup and offered it to Gutmann with an accompanying polite gesture.

Gutmann accepted with thanks. It was indeed strong, black coffee and he drank the cup empty with pleasure. Reimer and Frêne were also served.

"Apparently these strange gnomes aren't as dangerous and sinister as they seemed before," said Reimer a little more conciliatory. "Those who are hospitable are hardly up to no good."

"Wait and see," growled Frêne from the side.

Again, the men tried to catch a glimpse of the landscape below them. Frêne soon gave up, only the practised pilot's eyes of the German officers found the observation of the terrain appealing.

Soon a great tiredness crept over them. Reimer nodded off and banged twice against the glass hatch. His eyelids were like lead. Gutmann was also visibly struggling to sleep. The Frenchman had his hands clutched in the seat and was swearing incessantly and quietly. He gave Gutmann a puff and said: "I want to drink the whole Loire if these blokes haven't given us a nightcap. I've always kept myself under control



but this time I'm so tired for no reason that I'm going to go into a long hibernation in ten minutes. And sacrébleu, there's nothing I can do about it. Mil diables ..."

Gutmann could only grumble. His eyes were already closing too, just enough for him to grasp the meaning of Frêne's words. But that was all. And Reimer's head was already hanging forward.

Frêne rebelled in vain against the loss of his strength. "Chiens! ..." he whispered angrily, then followed the compulsion of his companions.

The strange aeroplane kept a steady northward course, mostly following the Indus. Flying at high altitude, it travelled ghostly along the sparkling night sky, steered by expert hands. While the pilot alternately watched the firmament and the instruments with an expressionless expression, the leader of the airline sitting next to him showed a slight, triumphant smile. And slowly, the pale shimmering chains of the earth's largest mountain range emerged from the dark horizon.

The aircraft flew towards a towering mountain range. The pilot held his course with stoic calm and only after flying over a village at the foot of the mountains did he abruptly turn the aircraft to the right. It had already looked as if the metal bird was going to crash into the rock face.

The sharp right turn caused the aircraft to lean considerably. The Mongols clung on to one of the

The machine pistol thudded to the floor from the back. The abrupt pull also woke those who had been slumbering for some time. They had meanwhile been strapped in by their carers as a precaution, so that they only came to suddenly by jerking their heads.

Gutmann and Reimer immediately turned to the hatches and looked out. They didn't find their bearings straight away, as they felt a very bad headache, which made them dozy and limp. The Carcassonner wasn't feeling any better either and a whole string of French curses betrayed his mood.

With some collection, Gutmann was horrified by the flight through a wild mountain scenery, the ridges of which were higher than the aeroplane on both sides. As an experienced pilot, he knew the risks involved in such a flight. A mountain nose was flown around, another half turn to the right and then the aircraft flew into a long valley that was completely karstic in character. As we descended, we could see a dry bed of water; on both sides the terrain was not only flat, but apparently sandy. At worst, this was terrain that could be used for an emergency landing. And yet the pilot descended here with calm confidence and touched down safely after an almost unimaginably short run-out.

The sky had a pale brightness and the hazy light gave the mountain ranges on either side sharper contours of the sky-high ridges and crests.

The whole landscape had something unreal about it, almost a primeval atmosphere, to which the dusky grey, lying between day and night, contributed significantly. Snowy peaks and glaciers shimmered bluish through the torn wafts of mist that sailed between the high walls. This image of mountainous wasteland was indelibly imprinted on the white men's minds as they climbed out into the open after the machine had finally come to a standstill.

This time, even Reimer lost his sense of humour. Gutmann's sarcasm had also fallen silent as they stood freezing next to the Frenchman, waiting for their luggage to be thrown out of the plane. Two of the Mongolians brought this out, along with several more packs. The Asians went about their work in silence, with only the occasional half-loud shout from the leader breaking the silence.

One of the Mongols took the luggage to the whites in turn and gestured for them to pick it up. While the men hesitantly complied with the request, they watched as the guide and two of the Mongols also picked up packs, not without at the same time hanging submachine guns ready to hand over their right shoulders. Two of the yellow men remained in the machine and, after a few hastily spoken sentences, slammed the door of the access hatch shut again.

The three who had stayed behind approached the waiting whites and the leader made a curt gesture for them to follow him. As you can see, his expression was

and made any question seem pointless.

As far as Gutmann could orientate himself by the fading, barely discernible stars between the torn cloud cover, the Mongols were heading in a roughly easterly direction towards an ascending transverse valley, without taking another look at the machine that had been left behind. The guide's sure step betrayed local knowledge.

There was no recognisable path of any kind. But it was the terrain itself that allowed little deviation from the direction. Slowly the valley narrowed, rocky debris hindered their progress in an unpleasant way and a constant ascent also slowed the pace of the march. At the same time, the fog thickened, forcing the men to reduce the distance they had been keeping in order to maintain contact.

The thin air caused the men discomfort. Nevertheless, the Mongols were more accustomed to it than the Europeans. The white men's dejection gave way to open displeasure when the ascent seemed to have no end and the Mongols pushed on without pause. As far as Gutmann realised with a quick glance at his wristwatch, they had been climbing for almost an hour. If it hadn't been for the morning frost that was so noticeable in the mountains, climbing with their luggage would have cost them swearing and sweat. As it was, the Whites only felt an unpleasantly cold and damp back. Even the fingers clutched around the straps of the rucksacks were stiff and freezing cold. The abrupt change from

The change from the tropical climate to the cold of the high mountains was doubly noticeable.

To make matters worse, a stronger wind came up. With a hollow whistle, it brushed over the ridges and swept the mist before it. Reimer gave Gutmann a peck: "The real pilot's laundry ..."

Gutmann just snorted. He took another step back because the ascent made it difficult to keep up. Frêne, coming from behind, moved up instead. "Mes camarades," he said half aloud, barely audible in the wind, "this is a damned neighbourhood. And I think nothing would be easier than to disappear sideways now, while the fog lasts. If the yellows were to shoot after us with their M-Pi's, it would make a bit of warlike music at most, but they'd hardly hit us."

"I'm in favour of waiting a bit," Gutmann replied. "In this area, which is certainly very deserted, our freedom is of little help to us. Even if we get our weapons out of our luggage, we've gained little. Let's wait and see!"

Frêne was about to reply vehemently when a sudden gust of wind lifted the blanket of mist and opened up the view for a distance. It was as if nature had played a trick on Carcassonne's plans. Cursing, he stumbled on.

Reimer, who was walking just behind the guide, stopped for a moment to catch his breath. "If we go on for a while longer, we'll get to heaven

into it," he shouted to the next man in line.

"Do you think so? That would be a reason to move on," Gutmann teased. "You'd find Engelein ..."

"With bare cold feet, a frozen blue backside and dripping snub noses," growled Reimer. "In such unholy weather here ..."

A stiff gust forced the Linzer to make a half-turn and took away his words. The wafts of mist began to lift and cleared the view further. The panting men stopped again and looked around them. All around was desolation as far as the eye could see.

"How much longer? - How far?" Gutmann asked the Mongolian leader, openly showing his displeasure.

"Very soon at our destination! Very soon ..." he repeated reassuringly. His right hand pointed into the stony tangle of the primeval landscape without any destination in sight.

"What could possibly be there?" said Reimer, grumbling again. "This area is far too uninviting for an excursion. I have nothing against a good change of air in a nicer area. But this here - brrr! - Well, as the old saying goes: if you're unlucky, you'll break your finger in your nose ..."

"Jawa!" urged the Mongol standing at the back.

"What does he say?" Gutmann asked to the front.

"Go, he said," grinned the guide. With a demonstrative gesture, he tightened his grip on the M-Pi and with an imperious movement of his head, indicating that he was coming, he climbed further over the narrow

Scree slope ahead.

Asian concepts of time have always been vague. If the leader had claimed some time ago that the goal would soon be reached, this did not correspond at all to European concepts.

The pale grey of dusk gave way to a peach-yellow dawn. The first rays of the sun danced over the sharp ridges as the guide turned round a protruding rocky outcrop and let out a bright call.

The men following behind saw a slope in front of them, which did not rise very steeply for about fifty metres and at the top of which a block-like building was enthroned.

Standing close together, the three white men stared in surprise at the strange structure in this stony solitude, where not even an animal call could be heard. Further in the background, a snowy chain stretched away, the central plateau in front of it jaggedly jagged as if crowned by a wall.

"Un miracle!" Frêne could not suppress this exclamation of astonishment. It wasn't that the building seemed particularly inviting or beautiful; its very existence seemed highly improbable, almost like a hallucination.

The strange building stood on a base that tapered upwards, rising from the edge of the slope and supporting a structure whose small windows stood out like dead eyes from an unadorned façade. A flat roof cut through the architecture

off. The only enlivening feature was a rather primitive veranda made of billets, which protruded from the entire width of the house and was also covered. The entrance was at the back of the building, not visible to those approaching. And there was nothing to suggest that this secluded hermitage was inhabited.

In a few minutes, the men had reached the edge of the slope despite their tired legs and followed the Mongolian guide, who led them along a barely perceptible path, not even metres wide, to the gate at the back. Here, in the background, on an even higher slope, the white men saw a high, stone-piled mark, from which a gnarled pole hung with ribbons protruded.

Before the guide could even knock, the gate screeched open. A figure stood in the darkness of the opening, bowing low and clearing the way to enter. It was clearly a Tibetan lama, who half-mumbled a greeting: "Tschag peb tsu nan ..."

The guide gave him a brief nod and beckoned the three whites to follow him. The corridor ended in a cross corridor, from which several doors led into the various rooms of the house. Turning right, the Mongol led the men to the penultimate door of the corridor, pushed it open and allowed those following to go ahead.

The room that the men now entered expectantly was not very bright. Between two window openings stood a simple, carved wooden altar on the wall with a picture painted on fabric in the centre.



centre panel, which featured an allegorical depiction of Buddhist religious elements. The details were not easily recognisable at first glance. There were cushions in a niche opposite one of the windows and a low lacquered table in front of it. Small fabric paintings adorned the otherwise bare walls.

"Cha phe nang chung!" came from the semi-darkness of the seating area. A black-clad figure sat in the corner of the seating area and raised an ascetic face to the visitors. The shaven head showed a deeply furrowed brow.

"The abbot welcomes you," the Mongolian translated, bowing to the corner himself.

"We would like to thank the abbot for his welcome," Gutmann turned to the Führer. "Unfortunately, we don't understand his language ..."

"That doesn't matter," said the Mongol. "He is a wise man and can read your hearts and minds." Turning to the black cowboy again, he spoke a few Tibetan sentences, which he replied to and then concluded with a farewell gesture.

The Mongolian bowed again and addressed Gutmann: "The abbot understood my hint that you are overtired from the somewhat difficult march and have also missed a night's rest. He wants to have a chat with my help at midday. Until then, you may rest. Follow me now!"

The guide seemed to have already familiarised himself

know.

Without hesitation, he led the three white men, still followed by one of the Mongolian escorts at the end of the train, back along the corridor a little way, then climbed a narrow, creaky wooden staircase that looked more like a ladder and led to an upper floor. Another corridor ran through the floor, with doors on both sides. With a firm grip, the Mongol opened one of them and invited them in.

"Like an enchanted castle," said Reimer to his mates. "Apart from the old man on the ground floor, no one seems to live here." Shaking his head, he was the first to enter the room.

When the men had put down their rucksacks and suitcases, they looked around. It was a medium-sized room with only one window opening, through which the clearing morning sky sent its brightening light. It was bare and unadorned except for a remarkable fabric painting on one wall. A small table, cushions and three storage areas made up the entire interior.

"Everything prepared for us," the Linzer mocked again.

Gutmann looked in thoughtfully and turned to the Mongol, who was looking at his unwilling guests without any visible emotion. "I believe it is now time to give us further clarification. Above all, where are we now?"

The Mongol pointed to a bowl on the small table. The men followed his pointing gesture

and saw a single lotus blossom, which on closer inspection turned out to be an artificial flower. The men looked back at the guide questioningly.

"You are now in the house of the first lotus blossom," he explained.

"I think the Seven Lotuses Monastery is waiting for us? Are we not yet at the destination you were supposed to take us to by force?" Gutmann's voice was cold, almost rude.

"You should rest now," the interviewee evaded. "You'll find out more at lunchtime ..."

"And if we leave this house? Who could stop us if we fight for the right to freedom so that we can act independently?" asked Frêne.

If the leader's eyes had not narrowed, his expression would have seemed almost serene. His look, however, was an unspoken warning. "You won't get far on your own, Sahibs! You are unfamiliar with the area and no white man has set foot in this part of the country. It is a barren land for miles around and few people pass through it at times. And if you should come across locals in the opposite direction of the path, they are servants of the monastery that awaits you. And you will then have difficulty getting any further."

"A threat, then?"

"Absolutely not." The Mongolian smiled authoritatively. "Just an explanation..." A hollow sound came from outside

and cut him off. It sounded like a muffled Swiss alphorn and could be heard from far away. It was not difficult to realise that this primeval sound came from the roof of the house. Three land-drawn tones broke the morning silence and were immediately answered by similar tones sounding back from far away. Like a distant echo, like the singing of the air, this resonance produced an indisputable connection with an event reported from the house of the first lotus blossom.

"We now know that you have arrived here," said the Mongolian, explaining.

"Who is the 'man'?" asked Gutmann.

"The Monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms!"

"You could almost get curious," mocked Frêne.

"There is reason to do so," the Mongol replied. "I have already told you in the Panjnadi region that you are expected by two men and a woman, and you would regret it very much if you were to confuse the clear threads of fate."

Gutmann looked at him sharply. "You speak like a llama without being one."

"I am not a llama," the Mongolian confirmed. "I am what you are. Only our realms are different." He pulled the m-pi dangling from his right shoulder in front of his chest and crossed his arms over it. "See you later. May the Sahibs rest well!" The simple wooden door closed softly behind him.

"So here we are," said Reimer resignedly. "It almost seems that the Asians have the better knowledge. They don't rebel against what seems unchangeable, but show an equanimity that is often worthy of admiration. In our strange situation ..."

"... we could probably rebel," Gutmann interjected. "The only question is whether it would be wise. The Mongols can rightly be reproached for kidnapping us, but not for treating us with hostility. The secret of the seven lotus blossoms should be revealed soon. They're not taking us away from it, they're taking us there!"

"What if there's a trap behind it?" Frêne showed a steep crease on his forehead.

"I already thought about that during our arduous hike." Gutmann stepped to the window opening and looked out into the clear day, which had just overcome the last remnants of twilight. "You get all sorts of thoughts when you're brooding. But at the same time, you lose your clear view and get lost in assumptions that sometimes contradict reason and logic. After careful consideration, I see no immediate dangers. We know with certainty that we must be armed and yet no attempt has been made to disarm us. So far they have only made sure that we do not make hasty use of them. This means that they are appealing to our reason. And that's a lot!"

"But it does seem uncanny that the entire globe lies under a net whose meshes you can hardly escape," Frêne said.

"There's not one net, but several," Gutmann corrected. "And it's not always just one person who's fishing ..."

In the meantime, Reimer had let himself slide onto a bed, groaning and sighing. "I feel sick as a dog. I'd be very surprised if I didn't get sore muscles. Such a gruelling area! All the lotus flowers can be stolen from me now. Everything! The whole world can slide down my back. Damned and sewn up! I've had enough at the moment ..."

"Sleep, little child, sleep! ..." Gutmann mocked good-naturedly.

Frêne's expression relaxed a little. "I don't think Reimer is entirely wrong at the moment. I would be telling a lie if I claimed to be fresh. I still have a nausea in me; no doubt the after-effects of the sleeping drug we were made to take with the coffee on the plane."

"That was mean!" barked Reimer.

Gutmann turned to him. "Would we have been allowed to act differently if we had been the executing bodies of such an action?"

"You're defending the gooks?"

"Not in the slightest. I'm just making observations and comparisons. By the way, I find a little drug more tender than a plunger-cut anaesthetic. That alone

proves that they are only being prudent and harbour no animosity towards us."

Frêne, who had stepped up to the window next to Gutmann, grabbed him by the shoulder. "Voilà - people!"

Gutmann also leant out a little. First he looked down the slope they had recently come up, and then beyond the hollow at the rock faces opposite. Nothing. It was only when the Carcassonner pointed sideways that he noticed a path running from the side of the same slope in a protruding curve towards the house, along which two people were approaching. One of them was sitting on a shaggy horned animal that must have been a yak, which he had only learnt about from a few travel books. The second man trotted alongside. Both wore black cowls and helmet-like caps.

"So the old man downstairs doesn't seem to be alone." Frêne left the window seat again. "I would have been surprised too ..."

"It's the gate opener at home too," Gutmann reminded us.

"And hopefully a good cook for lunch," yawned Reimer from his camp. "For crying out loud, give it a rest now!"

If the men had feared that their Tibetan lunch dish would be tea with rancid butter and yak milk cheese, they were surprisingly pleasantly disappointed. The Mongolian guide had prepared

The white guests were provided with tinned food that left nothing to be desired. Nevertheless, the contrast of the new, completely unfamiliar surroundings did not allow any real appetite for food.

The abbot remained reserved and silent during the meal. He had once again welcomed the men and the Mongol had translated his words with dignity. At the beginning of the meal it became apparent that there were several monks from the Black Cap sect in the house who had not yet shown themselves or made themselves known. In general, the monastery building was exceptionally quiet. No hurried footsteps echoed through the corridors. At most, a quiet shuffling could be heard as the monks came and went on the felt soles of their footwear. Two of them had appeared before the meal after a short strike on a small gong and, on the abbot's orders, had brought the visibly prepared dishes and served them up.

It did not bother the men in the least that the table was not set according to all the rules of European custom. The somewhat primitive preparations looked rather militarily sober and were all the more preferable to the three men as they did not emphasise the distance to the simple and foreign culture of the room too starkly.

Jampel-tsun, the abbot, was a Demchi lama. A sub-administrator of the Seven Lotus Blossoms Monastery,



as the Mongolian explained casually during the meal. As they sipped unsweetened tea together after the meal, the Demchi Lama turned to the Mongolian and asked him to translate his words to the guests: "Gyur med Idan sin klon du sykel yid bin nor bu - the stone of the wise, which spreads out like an eternal tree, is the pure source of knowledge that serves reason. May Buddha make this stone shine before your eyes and thus shed light on your thoughts, which agonise over the seemingly unfathomable."

Gutmann pondered for a while before he had his answer translated: "It is not the light alone that shows Buddha's grace, but the leading to the path that must be travelled. Only those who are sure of the path will walk it consciously."

The demchi lama nodded. "Kuchog - Lord, you spoke like a chela before the ordination. I read in your thoughts that you are aware of your path. Yet you are tormented by doubts about the section that lies ahead of you. May I advise you? - Do not ask, but go as the wind blows ..."

"Your words, O Lama, are a hint to follow the destiny to which we are currently subject through emphasis."

The abbot's thin lips stretched into an almost amused laugh. The Mongol, too, showed a trace of a smile when he had translated Gutmann's words. They both had the reproach encoded in the sentence

understood.

"There are many paths that lead to enlightenment," Jampel-tsun said again. "When Chenrezi, the Merciful One, helps, he does it with vigour ..." A mischievous expression flashed across the abbot's wrinkled face again, while the Mongol showed no further emotion.

"Great is the mercy of the Merciful One," Gutmann said earnestly, "His eyes and ears are everywhere."

"La-yö, yes - Buddha's ears are everywhere ..." The lama's eyes were fixed firmly on the white speaker's face. However, it didn't escape his gaze that Reimer was nudging the Carcassonner and adding a few words.

"Kutschog, you're showing astonishment?" Jampel-tsun turned directly to the man from Linz. "Don't the religions of the West also have one eye glowing in a triangle that can see everything?"

"You are talking about the altar eye of the Christian church," Gutmann said to the abbot. "This symbolism of a dogma is not the symbol of the world of the North, which you call the West. It is the eye of Yahweh, who subjugated the West via Rome."

The Demchi lama waved him off. "I don't equate the West - or as you say, the North - with Rome," he explained. "I was merely speaking of what is currently part of the outer general concepts of your circle of life. I hear from your words that you are not addicted to appearances and recognise: just as the sky has its

If man has his Tao, his path, he should also recognise it and live according to the cosmic order. If you remain on the greater path, the Mahayana, the Greater Vehicle, you will again find the sunship of which the ancient Sanskrit scriptures, the ancient Aryan tradition, speak. "Jampel-tsun's eyes became fixed and absent. "Even gods are the appearance and light of their own souls. Thus no sun has gone down for the man of the Asian expanses, as it has for the Christian, who has been robbed of God, but his soul itself is the light of the deity and the deity is the soul," the Mongolian translated quietly.

This time Gutmann was silent. His companions also sat pensively, processing the ever-repeating core of the age-old tradition that was expressed in all the conversations with the various people who were all on the great quest to find out where from and where to.

Jampel-tsun sipped from his bowl of tea. "This woodbird year" - "he means this year according to the Tibetan term," the Mongol explained hastily between translations, "is a year of great testing and proving. Flames blazed from the heart of the West. This fire consumed many things that people thought irreplaceable and devoured many of them. But the heat scorched those who kindled it. And these are the ones who think they are victors over those who now persecute them. Did I not say before, Buddhas

Ears would be everywhere? He eavesdropped on you on the journey that took you further and further away from where you actually wanted to go. But remember that everything is a cycle. Be content that you are safe under the roof of the house of the first lotus blossom. From there, your path is safe if you obey the voice that speaks to you!"

"The Buddha's ears were already listening in the land of midnight," Reimer said. "It was a Ta-Lama who came as Ku-tshap, as an envoy of Mahasiddha Lugtog. It was in the far north, where there was nothing but ice and fog." He diverted from the Demchi Lama's admonition to fathom the context of the stereotypical Buddha sentence. There seemed to be a special meaning to it, which went beyond the usual measure of learned formulae.

The abbot did not react. He looked down and his fingers plucked playfully at the folds of his black robe. He said just what seemed good to him and deliberately ignored what didn't suit him.

"And when will we be at the monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms?" Frêne now asked Jampel-tsun, trying to find out more than the Linzer.

"Gyok-po, soon," the Demchi lama said. "There are six houses along the way, in a semicircle around the heart of the monasteries. These are the houses from the first to the sixth lotus blossom. In the centre, on the slope of an insurmountable mountain, stands Gompa, the monastery of the seven lotus blossoms. Apart from a few

Dub-tób, saints, you will not find anyone on the way there. The morning you arrived, one of our monks blew the ragdong, our four-metre-long horn, the sound of which can be heard from afar, and the house of the second lotus flower heard our signal and passed it on. In the great Gom-pa they already know that you are here. Tomorrow, very early in the morning, you will move on. Lamas will then take the lead from the house of the second lotus flower and bring you to the centre."

"And then?" asked Frêne.

"I don't know," said the Demchi Lama frankly.

"When you are in the great Gom-pa, you can ask the Ngön-kyi, the great abbot, or the De-pön, the Mongolian colonel. There are still veils hanging in front of the Gom-pa, but everything will be clear behind it!"

"A Mongolian colonel in the great Gom-pa?" Gutmann's questioning tone could not conceal his astonishment.

This time the Mongol did not translate. He answered himself: "The abbot can't answer that for you." And with a slightly ironic undertone: "You are gifted with wisdom. Why this curiosity? ..."

"No use asking useless questions here," Gutmann explained to his companions in German. "But I think we've learnt enough. They don't want to tell us any more. Let's leave it at that for today."

Frêne and Reimer nodded in agreement. The two Asians had listened indifferently to the foreign sounds.

The tone of voice might have told them that no appointments had been made that were supposed to be a secret.

Once again, the Mongolian was an attentive host, pouring tea from a copper pot. His obliging demeanour made him almost likeable and showed a completely different side to him than the day before in India. He even endeavoured to keep the conversation flowing, although he seemed to prefer silence.

"I understood your words well before," Gutmann said to the Mongolian guide in a somewhat friendlier tone than before. "It's not curiosity, but interest in the surroundings when I ask whether this area is already directly in Tibet. I'm satisfied with general information and don't ask for localisations."

The Mongol grinned broadly and good-naturedly. "If you ask like that, Sahib, I can easily answer. Very gladly indeed! - And I can confirm that you are right: it is Tibet where we are now!"

"A strange country," Gutmann confessed.

"Even for us Mongolians," said the interviewee openly. "It is foreign to us as a country and yet familiar because of the people. This part of western Tibet, where we are now, is still considered unexplored by the white men. Here, this mountain range," he pointed out of the window with an outstretched arm, "lies to the south and is about four thousand five hundred metres high. Behind it, which is difficult to climb over, runs a valley with

a caravan route. This chain runs for at least a hundred kilometres in an east-west direction. And back here," he pointed in the direction of the door, "high glaciers, more than six thousand metres high, rise into the sky like a bar. The great Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms lies further east along this mountain range, which is a huge massif."

"And why hasn't anyone come to this area yet? Is it so difficult to access and so remote?"

The Mongol shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, Sahib. There are many difficult areas in this country, but some are known and partly inhabited. This wide area here is a very mountainous region and, apart from the trapas and lamas of the seven monasteries, is avoided even by Tibetans. Far to the west are settlements again. About two to three days' journey," he emphasised the distance, "lies the well-known Aling Kangri mountain range, over seven thousand metres high, to the north of which is the Thachap Kangri massif."

"The names don't mean anything to me," Gutmann confessed.

"So far I don't know much more about Tibet than the approximate course of the country's borders, a few things about Lhasa, the Dalai Lama and the most important monasteries known to Europeans."

This explanation seemed particularly satisfying to the Mongol. In his eyes, it largely minimised the supposed danger of flight. He did not realise that knowledge or ignorance of a country was not a particularly invigorating

or stimulating factor.



were inhibiting factors.

"What's your name?" Gutmann suddenly asked.

The Mongol looked up in surprise. "Boroldai! - But why do you ask?"

"The Mongols have always been good warriors. You, too, acted soldierly and wisely, even if you first took up arms against us. I would like to remember your name with you when we part."

Boroldai bowed low, placing his hands on his thighs. He openly showed that he was very receptive to praise and especially to this, from white men. Like all members of warlike nations, he attached great importance to a good name and the extolling of military virtues. "You do my name much honour, Sahib," he said. "As long as I am not bound by orders, I will always be your friend. Listen, we Mongols have a saying: Ksöl ksugarsang nere ksugarsanás dére. That means: Better to break his legs than to spoil his name. And you understand that well, Sahib!" He bowed again with reverence.

"You can fly, Boroldai?" Gutmann suddenly surprised the Mongolian.

"Yes, - yes of course, Sahib ..."

"I'm an aviator too," Gutmann replied. "I flew in the Great War in the West."

"I know - er, I imagine it's possible," Boroldai gushed quickly. He hadn't wanted to admit to knowing about it for the time being, and not before

watched out. He was slightly annoyed inside.

"You flew a beautiful machine," Gutmann continued lightly.

"Yes, of course, sahib. May I refill your tea?" He busily reached for the pot and devoutly poured the aromatic drink into the tiny bowls on the lacquered tabletop. "The Tibetans - in our Mongolian language they are called Tobodut," Boroldai explained,

"take great care in the preparation of tea. Especially the country's notables. The poor nomads and beggars are happy if they have tea at all ..." He sipped from his bowl and then continued to sing the praises of the drink. In between, he addressed a few polite sentences to Jampel-tsun.

It was amusing for Gutmann and his companions to see how the Mongol was frantically endeavouring to avoid continuing the conversation about flying that had initially begun. He tried to avoid giving a negative answer on the subject, having previously assured the guests of his friendship. The Demchi Lama now joined in the conversation, as he seemed to have intuitively grasped the Mongol's endeavours.

"Ask the abbot," Gutmann said to Boroldai, "whether he has already been to Lhasa and seen the Dalai Lama."

The Mongolian repeated the sentences in Tibetan. Jampel-tsun nodded in the negative. Then he made a statement, which Boroldai repeated to the guests: "He, the abbot, says that he is a Dwa-pa, a disciple of a Dub-

tób, a saint, when he was still a young man. He had enjoyed the tantric school for a long time and had only travelled through western Tibet with the dub-tób. For some unknown reason, the saint had avoided the eastern part of the country. He had learnt many nags, magical formulas, as his teacher was a great ngags-pa, a magician. After his death, he came to this monastery as a Gelüng, a mendicant monk, where the former abbot took him in. This is how he joined the order of the Ninmapa, the black cap lamas. For a time he served Gom-pa and his teachings at the Seven Lotus Blossoms, only to return here as a demchi lama after the death of the former abbot. He has now been in the house of the first lotus blossom for twenty years."

"An interesting life story," Gutmann admitted.

"Many experiences and endeavours are interwoven into the stages of this development."

The abbot must have fully grasped the meaning of these words, because he nodded eagerly.

"There was much toil involved," he continued, "and all that my youth lacked was rest for my soul and the opportunity to turn my gaze inwards earlier in order to find strength in the emptiness of pure consciousness, which is the other shore, the opposite shore to consciousness. For the true nature of human being is within the body without being within the body ..." Jampel-tsun bowed his bald head and **f i n g e r e d** his rosary. "Om mani padme hum - O you

Jewel in the lotus ..."

Whether it was because the abbot had grown tired or had fallen under the spell of his prayer formula, his figure visibly shrank and his now closed eyes showed signs of rapture.

Gutmann turned to the Mongol with a questioning gesture, which was meant to indicate walking, and was correctly understood by the Mongol. With a slight movement of his head, Boroldai agreed to this suggestion and was the first to rise. He let the men go first as he left the room and when he had closed the primitive wooden door behind him, he said: "It will be good if you retire to your room and rest. The morning's sleep certainly couldn't make up for the night."

"Oh, we slept very well for a while after drinking the black coffee," Frêne said ironically. "So the morning's rest merely chased away the remaining headache ..."

The Mongol raised both hands to his chest. "Didn't I say I was your friend," he muttered. He walked on to the staircase to the next floor. Stepping sideways, he added: "If you have any requests or need anything, step into the corridor and call for Yürki. He's in the room to the right of yours. I'll come back in the evening myself!"

"Yürki is our guard?" the Carcassonner continued to tease.

Boroldai looked at the Frenchman impassively. "He is the

Messenger of your wishes. Remember, Sahib, that this house here is a place of peace and that we have offered you peace. Do not think back too much to yesterday evening, to that hour when we took you away from the old Brahmin. Look forward expectantly to the coming days and you will thank me for doing as I was told." He made a gesture of greeting and stepped back

Reimer was the first to jump up the creaking stairs. "Boroldai's wish is very convenient for me," he said, waiting for his companions at the top of the stairs. "I find that after the sun of the last few weeks, it's getting pretty damn cold. There's nothing like a place to lie down and a warm blanket ..."

"You've been moaning like a naked chick on an ice island all day," Gutmann chided. "This bleeping with oops, oops ..."

"Yes, if you don't even have a fortifying cognac," the Linzer defended himself with a miserable expression. Suddenly he grinned. Over the shoulder of Frêne, who was standing in front of him, he called Boroldai's name downstairs. He called twice, but the person called did not answer. He had already left while the men were going up.

"Hopeless," Frêne replied. "I know you wanted to ask for a bottle for grown-up babies. But with the best will in the world, Boroldai couldn't have provided that much."

"We want to investigate that first," said Reimer

stiff-necked. Stopping in front of his own room door, he then turned right and called for Yürki. Actually, he had no real desire at the moment. But it was curiosity that drove him to try out the operating system of this strange house.

While his companions entered the room assigned to them and left Reimer standing alone in the corridor, he heard hasty footsteps approaching the neighbouring door. They were clearly audible footsteps, distinct from the shuffling or tapping of Tibetan felt boots. Then, as the door burst open, one of the Mongols who had accompanied them from the aeroplane to the monastery stood in the opening. It was Yürki.

"You wish, Sahib?" The Mongol was friendly and there was nothing to suggest that he felt like a guard. If this was true, however, the calm countenance hid any sign of sharpness or a certain arrogance that might suggest such an assignment. His words, spoken in good English, and his behaviour showed that he was part of a select staff.

Although he was still feeling the pressure of the tea he had enjoyed earlier, the Linzer could think of nothing better than to repeat the request he had previously made to his comrades.

The Mongolian grinned broadly. "Sorry, sir, very sorry! - No whisky, no cognac. I'm terribly sorry, sir! But may I bring Tschang?"

"Tschang? - What's that?"

For a moment, the Mongolian searched for the English expression. Then he said: "Millet beer!"

"Hmm," Reimer stretched. He couldn't overcome an inner mistrust. He thanked him kindly. "Later, yes ..."  
With a hasty turn, he took the few steps to the door of his own common room, which he tore open to escape the Tschang.

On this second night, the Tibetan sky had a purple glow.

When the three men had gone to rest after a simple but proper evening meal in the house of the first lotus blossom, the excitement of the turbulent events kept them from sleeping. They had had their meal brought to their room earlier, which they did not dislike. Now they stared out into the sultry red night, whose reflection lay like violet springs on the blue-black slopes of the mountains. The glacier moraines and firn peaks shone like matt rose quartz, the broad snowfields lay like amethyst-coloured veils on the rocky giants.

Not a word was spoken in the dimly lit room, into which the rays of the high expanse flooded. The men's gazes travelled across the firmament that stood in the window's cutout and their thoughts rose above the majestic chains of the roof of the world, flying further back to the land of Hind, whose strangely beautiful,

bizarre temples and pagodas, the alluringly striding almond-eyed women, then on across the seas and lands where the storytellers invented fanciful tales and where the violation of hospitality was still considered a crime worthy of a curse; ever further and ever faster the inner wishful images flew like a mirage, reflecting mental suffering, to the land of unspoken longing: the land of brothers and sisters, the homeland ...

If at first the purple of the sky lent a bright glow to the eyes of the dreamers, this suddenly disappeared like a curtain drawn away and exposed the agony in their mental mirror when the final image of the thoughts in the whole, terrible event was revealed to them. The traces of the apocalypse in Europe ...

And then again: the hours passed and with them the images, the thoughts returned and shifted the sensations of the senses from the realm of the mind's eye to the centres of the brain to rob the men of another hour of the night. It was long after midnight when physical exhaustion brought on a short but leaden sleep.

A dull and grey morning drove away the purple night and an icy wind blew over the mountains. Shivering, the three men stood in front of the monastery, next to



Boroldai and Yürki accompanied them, while the third companion stayed behind from the aeroplane. In his place, two previously unseen Trapas, novice monks, had been provided by the Demchi Lama, who were also to serve as guides and drive two yaks standing there as pack animals.

They were small, stocky animals that were loaded with packs. Long shaggy, stocky and short-legged looking, their belly manes reaching almost to the ground and with strong, curved horns, these half-wild creatures stood waiting.

"Chenrezi, the Merciful, enlighten your path!" the abbot, who had come to say goodbye in front of the gate, had Boroldai translate to the departing man. Behind him stood two lamas with their tall, black caps, unmoving like statues. Jampel-tsun folded his hands in a gesture of prayer. "Nád med tsád med tashi purisum tsog tshu - I wish you good health and immeasurable happiness - da tsha yin - farewell! ..."

A shout from the trapas set the yaks in motion. At the same moment, the muffled sound of the ragdong boomed from the roof of the monastery, like a signal, signalling both departure and departure.

The three men bowed to the Demtschi lama, who remained behind, in accordance with Asian custom, expressing both greeting and thanks with this gesture. Then they walked forwards behind the driving Trapas, followed by the two Mongols, who once again showed their

They were carrying submachine guns, but this time with the barrels hanging carelessly backwards. When they turned round after about a hundred paces, they still saw the abbot, this time standing a few paces in the open, and apart from the two lamas with him, they caught sight of a whole row of monks on the flat roof, who had hitherto kept quietly to themselves in the concealment of the house. With their black robes and high caps, they looked like a row of huge black birds. And again the ragdong rang out.

Soon they had rounded the rocky outcrop behind which the two Tibetans with the yak had emerged the day before in the direction of the monastery. This meant that the gom-pa to the first lotus blossom was hidden from view. The path was narrow and quite uneven. The grunt oxen trotted along with sure-footed hooves and the men travelled single file for a while until the path led away from the slope and into a pass. There they rejoined a loose group.

Boroldai pointed to a bright spot on the horizon. stood out clearly from the grey of a rocky landscape.

Gutmann looked questioningly at the Mongolian. "The gom-pa to the second lotus blossom, Sahib!"

"And the great Gom-pa, Boroldai?"

"You'll see tomorrow!"

On the way they came across some pyramids erected from stones, of varying heights, some with poles stuck in them at an angle, on which faded rags fluttered in the wind. They were chortens, from

The primitive cult buildings were all in very poor condition and some poles had been knocked over by the wind. The primitive cult buildings were all in a very poor state and there were a few poles lying on the ground, torn down by the wind. As long as the chortens weren't off to the side and were directly touched as they passed by, the two trapas straightened up the pennant poles, falling into a monotonous prayer lyre.

Gutmann took these Tibetan marks as an opportunity to address Boroldai again, who had remained silent the whole way: "This is truly a strange country, inhabited by strange people and certainly even stranger customs. I am very much afraid that we may make mistakes in some way, without malicious intent, that would offend or insult the Tibetans. We would be grateful to you, O Boroldai, if you would always give us the necessary advice in good time!"

"Don't worry, Sahib! - The men of the monasteries we pass on our journey, and also in the great Gom-pa itself, know very well that you are completely foreign here and ignorant of the customs of the country. Moreover, the Ngön-kyi, the Great Abbot, has given strict instructions to overlook all mistakes."

"Do they attach so much importance to our coming?"

"It's a sign of great respect for brave men!" said the Mongolian, who had given him the

Returning the compliment and answering the question at the same time.

"I hope we don't disappoint your expectations," said Gutmann, softening the reason given. "We are probably soldiers from the country in Europe that has now lost a major war. But no more. No scientists, no generals or other important people from whom you could learn anything valuable."

The Mongol smiled broadly. "Didn't we just talk yesterday about a kutshap of Mahasiddha Lugtog being somewhere in the Midnight Land? Isn't there a circle of men there who have entrusted you with a task? We know little and yet a great deal about each other!" His expression became mischievous. "When I picked you up at the Pundschab, I told you that you were expected by friends. So you actually expect more than we expect of you..."

"You talk a lot, but we know little," Gutmann varied the Mongolian's sentence, which he had just said in a similar vein. "But there is one question that is still burning on my tongue. May I ask it?"

"Speak, Sahib!"

"Is the Mahasiddha Lugtog identical with the Ngön-kyi?"

"No, sahib! The Ngön-kyi Padma Dab-yang, translated his name is Leaf of the Great Lotus, is a confidant of the Mahasiddha. I'm allowed to say that, but that's all I want to say."

"It's enough for me and I thank you for this information, Boroldai!"

"It's all right, Sahib." Walking slowly and carefully, the track was terribly stony and uneven, the Mongol stayed a little behind again until his last companion had caught up with him. Once again, the three men kept to themselves, keeping some distance from the Trapas plodding ahead.

They made very slow progress. Strong gusts of wind in this highland seemed to constantly emit a moaning or shrill whistling accompaniment. Nevertheless, the contours of the new gom-pa slowly emerged, which, despite its light colour, was very skilfully built into the landscape and was well protected. For a full quarter of an hour, the small caravan laboured forward over the scree field, when a bright sound carried lightly through the air.

"We've already been noticed," the Mongolian explained from behind. "They have blown a gyaling, an oboe-like wind instrument. When we enter the house for the second lotus blossom, we will be served fresh, hot tea. That will do us good!"

"Undoubtedly!" Reimer grumbled back audibly.

Once again, they passed a chörten, which this time was a good five metres high. And from then on, the trail was better and almost scree-free. The Trapas at the head of the procession quickened their steps, the yaks trotted out faster and the rapidly approaching destination of today's march also spurred on the walking of the Yaks.

Following.

"We've been travelling for an hour and a half or two hours," Frêne estimated the marching time so far. So far, none of the men had bothered to set a time. "I just want to know why we set off so early in the morning if we're already back at our destination at breakfast time. It would have been better as a digestive walk after a good lunch. Perhaps the sun would have made the temperature climb a few degrees higher by then." He turned to the Mongolian: "Why so early, Boroldai?"

"Early morning is always a quiet time. No aeroplanes either, Sahib!"

"Aeroplanes here? That will hardly be possible."

"Generally speaking, of course not. No aviator would risk flying here, where air holes or wind drifts harbour great dangers. But caution does no harm. There are world forces at work, scanning and checking every part of the countries. And besides - mysterious discs have already flown over these highlands twice."

"Manis?" Gutmann blurted out in astonishment.

The Mongol looked in indecisively. "I don't know how I should or may comment on this. But I haven't heard that name. Our superiors know more about it. Perhaps even our De-pinn, the colonel in the Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms ..." He came close to Gutmann. "Whatever it is, whether discs, of which I know little myself, or aeroplanes appear

and what would be impossible today? - We have proven to you that you can get people out of anywhere, and we don't want to be surprised by the same thing. And I'll make sure you get to the Great Abbot in one piece!"

"And what would be," asked Reimer in between, "If we three men were to take you and Yürki by surprise? If we were not inclined to follow the call of the Great Abbot and seek the way back alone, armed with your excellent submachine guns?"

Boroldai raised his right hand imploringly. "Do not ask what might happen to me if I do not fulfil my mission. My fate is no more important than a leaf blown by the wind. It does not count in the events of time. But ask yourself, O Sahib, whether your fate and that of your companions might not take a turn that you yourself certainly do not want. One should not play with dangerous thoughts if one does not want to deceive oneself." He made an almost desperate gesture. "Insecurity and useless brooding troubles your souls. If I were a lama, I would say: Seek samâdhi, the state of complete absorption, and therein seek Amitâbha, the boundless, incomprehensible light, the grace of the Buddha Avalokiteshvara. I would say that and much more like that. But you see, Sahibs, I myself am a Mongol and my religion is somewhat different in feeling. We equestrian peoples are not so

profound philosophers. We think a little more practically, more worldly, I would say. But nevertheless: may Buddha sink peace into your souls!"

Reimer put his hand on the Mongol's shoulder.

"Don't take my earlier question seriously, Boroldai! - You assured us of your friendship yesterday and we believe you. We're smart enough to know not to lead a friend to ruin. So we can trust you."

"That's good!" The Mongolian nodded with satisfaction. Then he reached under his jacket and pulled out a pistol.

"This one ... is mine!" exclaimed Frêne in amazement.

Boroldai handed it to him, then pulled out a second one.

"That's my gun," Gutmann said, equally surprised. "I recognise my bag immediately!"

"Good, sahib. - Here, take it!" Pulling out a third one, he turned to Reimer: "Surely this is your weapon then, isn't it?"

"That's right, Boroldai! - How the heck ... !"

"I was careful. I had your weapons removed in the aeroplane while you were fast asleep. And I was reassured because you hadn't noticed that they were missing. And reassured because you need weapons for an escape or a counterattack. So the mind link ..."

"If you give us the weapons voluntarily, then your trust is boundless, O Boroldai!" Gutmann's voice had a warm undertone.



"I'm playing for my head," said the Mongolian calmly.  
"But I can't help it. You are open and courageous. We Mongolians don't often meet people like you. And I admire you. Didn't our great Genghis Khan also conquer the world at that time, only to fail at your borders in the west? You have to treat soldiers like soldiers and dogs like dogs." He turned to Yürki, who had also stopped in amazement, and said a few sentences to him in Mongolian, explaining the situation. Then: "Jawajî - let's go on!  
..."

The Trapas were already some way ahead and the men now had to catch up. The monastery was now very close in front of them and they could already make out some figures in front of it, curiously awaiting the approaching monks. These monks were also black-capped lamas. Some were standing on the roof and a ragdong was sticking out over the flat roof like an overlong flak pipe. In contrast to the first gom-pa, things were livelier here.

The explanation may well be that this monastery was considerably larger than the previous one and had to have far more inhabitants, some of whom had to fulfil a number of secular tasks that served to maintain the necessary living conditions. However, the same tranquillity prevailed here that had already been a pleasant surprise in the house at the first lotus blossom.

Here, too, the reception was similar to that of the

the day before. The arrivals were led to the abbot of the house, with Boroldai again acting as translator. While they were still passing through the small gate, the long ragdong, which had been kept ready, rang out and announced the arrival of the white people.

In contrast to Jampel-tsun, the abbot of this house was a small, rather corpulent man who did not seem to be too fond of asceticism. Nevertheless, he acted extremely dignified and his measured movements seemed grotesque at times. Despite everything, however, he was a really clever and wise man who not only seemed to know all the disciplines of his doctrine, but had also reached a level of knowledge that was a prerequisite for his office. The great respect that the lamas and trapas of the house showed him confirmed this.

A serving monk brought tsalma for breakfast; butter tea with roasted barley flour. At first it took the three men, especially Reimer, some effort to eat this strange dish. Unspoken, the thoughts of the two Germans wandered back to the Boothia Peninsula to the Eskimos, whose menu had been far more ghastly for a European palate. The Tibetan dish, on the other hand, was still harmless and quite safe even for a refined stomach, if one was able to overcome a certain bias. And the circumstances forced us to do so.

This time it was the abbot of the house, who had already travelled on behalf of the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms from the

The next morning he spoke of your onward journey. Boroldai translated: "The Ngön-kyi of the great Gom-pa sent a messenger that one day, after your rest, you may continue your journey as guests of the Ninmapa, the Black Caps, in order to reach your destination. A gopa, a guide, is ready to lead you to the great Gom-pa." The Mongol added of his own accord: "This is an attention from the Ngön-kyi Padma Dab-yang, for he knows very well that I myself am also familiar with the way."

"We are ready," Gutmann had Boroldai reply.

"We are also grateful for the hospitality of this house and deeply regret that, as foreigners, we do not know the customs of the country so that we can demonstrate our gratitude with the customary gestures!"

The fat abbot smiled with flattery. He looked at his guests in turn, then suddenly clapped his hands. A serving trapa immediately entered. The lama gave him an order, whereupon he hurried away and returned a few minutes later with another lama who, with many bows, presented the abbot with four white veils, which he passed on to his guests with equally deep bows.

The three men looked questioningly at the Mongolian and he continued to translate the abbot's accompanying words:

"It is the custom of our country, when khadars visit, to present these white veils as visiting cards and gifts of honour.

to hand over. The abbot asked him to accept these veils and use them in the gom-pa for the seven lotus blossoms. The Ngön-kyi would be very surprised and it would give him great pleasure when the foreign guests entered his home in the Tibetan manner. He, the abbot, enjoyed imagining the Great Abbot's expression when he was presented with white khadars without being prepared for it. He had already informed the House of the Second Lotus Blossom through an earlier messenger that the strangers had been sent here by the inscrutable will of Sang-gye, that is Buddha, and that no offence should be taken at their behaviour, which could arise from their ignorance or violate local customs." Boroldai continued: "You see, Sahibs, it is everything I have said before."

While the lama and the trapa left the room again, the abbot clapped his hands on his thighs in amusement. He liked the strangers and had a sense of humour, which he was not insensitive to.

When Gutmann sheepishly apologised that he was not prepared for any gifts in return, no matter how modest, he waved them off good-naturedly and explained that his mind was not at all set on worldly things.

"I'll eat a stable broom," Reimer muttered in German, "if that's true..." when Boroldai had translated the abbot's last words.

"Did you make a wish?" the Mongolian asked the Linzer.

"I asked my companions why Yürki isn't with us as well," said Reimer.

"He's looking after our things," Boroldai explained briefly.

The men remained seated until midday. The abbot was very eager to learn about the events outside his world and Gutmann had the almost thankless task of passing on detailed accounts from the Mongol. He was very pleased when the abbot announced that it was now time for lunch and asked his guests to partake of the modest cuisine of his house.

"Are your tinned food cooked yet?" Reimer turned to the Mongolian again.

"No, sahib," he replied. "But if we were to contribute to this house, the abbot would beg half the remaining supply from the great Gom-pa's Ngön-kyi, despite strict prohibition."

"He always seems to be hungry," said the Linzer.

"Yes. Since Tibetan monks never beg, the begging bowl is only an expression of a ritual custom, he will certainly find suitable words to express his desire. Although he possesses a high degree of knowledge and is addressed as Gyud-Lama, who knows secret teachings and the magic rites, he is far removed from the path of pratihara, the elimination of food for the sense organs in order to unite with the emptiness of the mandala flow, and his zest for life means that he is also far removed from the path of pratihara, the elimination of food for the sense organs in

order to unite with the emptiness of the mandala flow.

does not practise the secret tantric rites much. Nevertheless, the great Nqön-kyi holds him in high esteem."

The abbot addressed a few Tibetan sentences to the Mongol, whereby the listeners only understood the recurring word Pratihara. Boroldai first replied to the lama and then explained to his companions: "Our host has ears like Buddha himself. He understood the Sanskrit word of the yoga disciplines from my English explanations and somehow correctly related it to himself. I have now explained to him that you are on the way to becoming chelas, or disciples, and that you therefore value little food. For this reason he, the abbot, should not be surprised if you abstain from food at his lunch table."

"That's excellent," praised Reimer. "Now nothing can happen if there's rancid butter and the like this time, which I was already dreading from Sven Hedin's descriptions when I was at school."

The Linzer's fears proved to be unfounded. The Gyud-Lama had provided an almost enjoyable meal. Two trapas served up a bowl of yak meat and rice, a feast, as the Mongolian assured us, as this region was very poor in produce and supplies were very difficult. It was accompanied by chang, which tasted sour and tangy. Although the morning's march through the high-altitude mountainous region with its already thin yet strong air had whetted the guests' appetite, they ate very little. For the sake of Boroldai's explanations alone, as Reimer had said lightly after the meal

mocked.

The second part of the day was no different from the first lotus blossom. Then came the night, this time not so much the Tibetan peculiarity of a purple sky; rather, the stars shimmering larger in the clear mountain air danced in a blue-violet expanse. And then in the morning we said goodbye again to the cowardly abbot and his monks. Once again, the two yaks were ready and loaded, along with two other companions and a gopa from the House of the Seven Lotus Blossoms. Yürki was also there, having remained completely invisible the day before. The long ragdong resounded dully as the small caravan set off.

"Kale phé a!" the abbot greeted again with a smile and the Tibetan words of farewell. "Go slowly if you want to return ..."

The scenery in the area showed little change. Lonely, wild, almost threatening. Add to that the incessant strong winds. At one point there was a narrow rocky path, barely a protruding edge on a wall that sloped almost vertically downwards, at the foot of which a gushing stream rushed. The yaks rubbed their loads along the rock face, carefully feeling their way forwards with their hooves. A deep grunt came from their nostrils.

There were patches of snow everywhere, with ice glistening a little higher up on the mountain faces. A lone vulture was circling in the sky. Slowly but steadily, the path descended towards our destination. Moss lichens and sparse, low vegetation



grew to indicate the lowering.

They passed a cave on a gentle slope and not far from it lay a skeleton in the centre of a still visible white circle. The Mongol, asked about it, turned to the Gopa and then explained: "The chela of a Naldjorpa, a magician, lived in this cave for some time in order to be able to devote himself to internalisation in tranquil peace. The gopa says that one night, by the light of the moon, he drew this magical khor circle to summon evil demons within the belt that protected him from them. On this fateful night, a bear came down from the mountains and pounced on the chela, who remained in his spell circle and kept muttering incantations, always thinking that he was looking at the manifestation of a yidag, an inhabitant of hell or a demon. In the rapture of his imagination, he had only realised his mistake when the bear began to maul him. But it could just as well be that the victim believed himself to be at the mercy of a demon that was stronger than his incantations until the last moment of his conscious sensations, or that he had made a mistake with them."

"And nobody buried the dead man?" asked Reimer.

"According to Tibetan burial custom, the vultures ate what the bear left behind until only this skeleton remained." The Mongol made a vague gesture. "Maybe another hermit will come

to this cave and builds a stone pyramid around the skeleton. Maybe, maybe not ..." Asian equanimity in the face of the unalterable was the undertone of Boroldai's words.

The sky remained cloudy as the day progressed. "Sprin ak'or!" the gopa shouted. Boroldai furrowed his brow. "The guide says that clouds are gathering. We can see that for ourselves. We must hurry more, because if a storm surprises us here, it will be very unpleasant!"

The yaks were driven more and followed willingly, as if they sensed that a storm was approaching. The two Mongols did not conceal their aversion to mountain thunderstorms and explained that the Tibetans were even more superstitiously afraid of them.

The gusts of wind became stronger. The heavy clouds drifted on rapidly, and at times there were sudden gaps, showing wisps of blue sky. The hurrying Gopa looked up again and again and his worried expression smoothed a little. He had Boroldai tell him that with a bit of luck they would reach the great Gom-pa dry after all.

There were a number of tiring stretches of road. The men were getting really tired on this march. Hours passed and the distance from the house of the second lotus flower to the destination was much longer than the day before between the first two monasteries. After the arduous crossing of a ravine, they came across a few small chortens, which were once again

indicated a busier area. A few stunted conifers appeared, indicating the lower level of the current terrain. Then, after crossing a long scree slope that sloped only slightly downwards, they reached an indentation in the valley, which already had a number of bizarrely grown conifers. Interspersed with some medium-high rhododendrons. Further back, a stepped mountain pulpit jutted out and on the penultimate ridge a large building could be seen, whose shape and colouring was largely adapted to the landscape.

The gopa pointed forwards. He said briefly, understandable to all: "Gom-pa!"

Once again, the men tried to make faster progress. In half an hour they had made it. As always, a ragdong rang out. Men came towards the caravan, again Ninmapas in dark robes, all respectfully greeting the new arrivals by walking round them and sticking out their tongues. Then, just outside the gate, stood a tall abbot with all the signs of his dignity and next to him two white men and a white woman.

Gutmann froze and Reimer ran his hand over his eyes as if he were dreaming. The white men hurried towards them.

It was Recke and Juncker ...

That was the monastery's surprise at the Seven Lotus Blossoms.

## THE SECRET EMPIRE

Kor ba mi tag mar mei lun kor ba de  
dshen mi lam k'rul.

O cycle, you breeze of a lamp that does  
not last,

O cycle, you deceptive dream of great  
happiness ...

(Tibetan insights)

If ever a spell could condemn people to immobility, then it was the spell of surprise.

When the four comrades from base 103 met again in the shadow of the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms under more than strange circumstances, the surprise was mutual. A single man, as the knower and helper of destiny, savoured this moment of the fulfilment of a partial task, the triumph of an organisation and technology. He stood motionless beside the shaken white woman and watched the scene of the greeting. It was the great Ngön-kyi himself. Padma Dab-yang, the abbot, who had his hands in a great game and whose eyes now burned with a consuming fire of supreme satisfaction. Behind him, almost hidden, stood the Mongolian Depön, the colonel of whom Boroldai had spoken.

The public reception in front of the monastery building with

The ring of curious eyes forced the Germans, after the very first release of their feelings, to tame themselves somewhat and keep a straight face, in keeping with all Asian customs. Frêne was the next person to arrive, who was also warmly welcomed by Recke and Juncker after an informal introduction. A myriad of questions hovered on the men's lips and only great self-control under the compulsion of the given moment caused them to bow to the ceremonial of arrival.

Another quick inspection, then the new arrivals set off towards the still pausing Ngön-kyi.

He nodded in a friendly manner as the men stood before him. "Welcome to this house on the roof of the world, which may be your home for the duration of your stay here!" he said in impeccable English, revealing that he must have already spent some time somewhere in the area of the Whites.

Before Gutmann was able to answer as speaker, he felt the tug of a hand and immediately afterwards a pressure between his left arms. He reached up with his hand in a seemingly insignificant movement and felt the soft crackling of the khadar that Boroldai had skilfully slipped him. Taking another step forwards, he brought out the white veil in its entirety and handed it to the abbot with a polite bow. "We thank you for your hospitality! ..."

The Gyud-Lama of the Gom-pa to the second lotus blossom had possessed an excellent imagination. The Ngön-kyi Padma Dab-yang was now hardly less surprised than his guests had been a little earlier. He solemnly accepted the visitor's sign and smiled somewhat sheepishly. After bowing his head several times, he thanked them politely, at the same time making a brief gesture to the lamas standing in front of him.

Before he had finished his slowly chosen sentences, a black-capped lama who had joined him presented the abbot with three white khadars, richly embroidered with Tibetan motifs. With an almost sacred gesture, the Ngön-kyi presented the three white men with the gift in return. "Come in!" he called to the guests at the end of the ceremony.

Passing carved gateposts, the men entered the interior of the house, the new guests passing the Mongolian officer, who now also bowed slightly. The abbot paused for a moment and introduced the Depön in European style. "This is Tayang Noyon!"

The Mongolian officer was very tall by Asian standards and had a cool-cut face. His clothing stood out from the black frocks. He wore a simple uniform of European cut with no visible insignia of rank, unless a small golden horse on the left collar testified to such. Strangely enough, he also wore the Mongolian uniform, which contrasted strangely with his uniform.

Felt boots.

While the Ngön-kyi walked on, followed by his guests and immediate entourage, Boroldai stayed behind with the Depön to report back. Both men were missing when the small procession with the pale white woman entered the room intended to receive the guests.

If Tibet had hitherto kept itself closed to the white men in the presentation of the country's own art and better way of life, after the few days of their stay in this remarkable country they were presented with a substantially different picture when they entered this room. It was not that a new character trait had opened up; but whereas in the neighbouring monasteries simplicity seemed to be the law, here an almost oppressive abundance of richly carved furnishings and meticulously crafted pictures was revealed.

Across from a slightly raised, throne-like seat stood a low, elongated table, painted matt red, surrounded by a number of cushions. In one corner of the room stood a richly decorated house altar with a sculptural depiction of Chenrezi, the Merciful. Lots of gold painting and silk ribbons hanging like flags immediately attracted the attention of those entering. In front of the Boddhisvata were offering bowls with pure water and grains, dough tormas, as prescribed by the cult, and a number of small figures and objects. Opposite the

A large mural, painted on fabric and depicting the great mandala of the peaceful deities, hung on a seemingly overloaded altar: Vairochana was seated on a mighty lion throne and in surrounding circles were Samanta-Bhadara and his Shakti, Chenrezi, Manjushri, Vajrapani and then Tsonkapa with two disciples. Vajra-Sattva sat on an elephant throne in the eastern direction, Ratna-Sambhava on the southern horse throne, Amithâbha on the peacock throne in the west of the picture and Amogha-Siddhi on his harpy seat in the north. The gatekeepers of the mandala in the corners of the picture were seated on flaming lotus thrones. Further depictions of Buddha rounded off the whole to create a phenomenal effect of great artistic skill and vivid imagination. A picture that immediately captivated every viewer.

The Ngön-kyi nodded with satisfaction when he saw the admiration of his guests. He slowly walked round the table and took a seat on his high seat, at the same time showing the guests to their seats.

Every gesture of the Grand Abbot resembled a ceremonial act, but without any stiffness. And although Padma Dab-yang's face showed strict aristocratic features and his eyes pointed to a high level of inner spiritualisation, his narrow mouth could not banish the cheerful expression that betrayed mental balance and contentment. And it was this feature that took the cold austerity out of the ceremony and symbolised the Buddha's serenity.



"Tschag peb tsu ran, we Tibetans say in greeting," explained the Ngön-kyi, repeating a benevolent greeting once again. "No man can escape his destiny and Chenrezi's grace guides the paths of seekers whose will is as pure as the white of the lotus flower. What must come together has its meaning and when you white men are reunited here, as an earlier destiny brought you together, then your thoughts may give space to the voice that will carry the rest to you. But all in good time." He interrupted and beckoned for the room to open, giving some instructions in Tibetan, which were not understood by the new arrivals.

"The abbot has given instructions to take your luggage to the guest rooms and serve a snack," Juncker explained half aloud in English so as not to offend Ngön-kyi, who was listening in.

Younger novices from the monastery, mostly Trapas, served a sumptuous meal that came very close to the usual European palate. Here, too, it became apparent that there must have been a supply of tinned food available to cater for white guests in an extremely accommodating manner. Last but not least, canned fruit juices, undoubtedly of American origin, were surprising.

The meal was attended by a number of dignitaries from the monastic community, all of whom spoke English to a greater or lesser extent and even Russian to a lesser extent. In contrast to the conversations in

the other gompas, they took their time here and exhausted themselves in informal chit-chat and pleasantries. Everything personal had to be put on the back burner, no matter how much the German officers wanted to exchange and discuss their personal experiences. The surprising presence of a German girl remained unexplained to the new arrivals for the moment.

It turned out that Ngön-kyi's interest was mainly focussed on Gutmann, whose position as leader he seemed to have found out quickly. But Padma Dab-yang deliberately refrained from going into the unspoken core and secrets of the Seven Lotus Blossoms Monastery, apart from explanations of the much-admired mural and general phrases. He made it clear that the concept of time had no meaning at the moment.

The formal reception meal lasted two full hours. During this time, the white guests had to refrain from pursuing their urge to speak. And you had to hand it to the lamas: they were excellent at keeping the conversation flowing and the guests distracted.

Nevertheless, the men could hardly suppress a sigh of relief when the Ngön-kyi picked up the table and instructed two lamas to escort the guests to the rooms provided for them. Now the same procedure was repeated that Gutmann and his companions had already followed in the gompas to the first and second rooms.

The same briefing we had experienced for the second lotus blossom, but far more personalised and courteous than before.

"Two rooms next to ours have been reserved for weeks," Recke explained to the comrades as they climbed two floors.

"For us?" Gutmann asked.

"Yes!"

"Then you've known for weeks that we were coming?" Gutmann continued in astonishment.

"We weren't entirely sure whether you would come," Recke qualified. "But in the monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms we were sure you would come. The Ngön-kyi knew about your journey since Cairo and informed us. Your trail was later briefly lost, but your arrival in India was promptly reported again. Bombay is a narrow filter and many eyes are watching there!"

"We realised that," Gutmann said ironically.

The slowly ascending lamas stayed on the second floor until their guests had left the stairs, then they went down the rather dark corridor, opening two doors. With a bow, one of the Black Cloak monks ushered Gutmann alone into one room, while the second indicated the next door for Reimer and Frêne. The rooms were almost bare, but quite clean, and surprisingly had camp beds. The luggage they had brought with them lay neatly next to the beds.

"We're next door!" explained Juncker. "Recke and I

together, one room further on is our companion Ortrun Weser!"

"Do the Sahibs have any wishes?" asked one of the lamas.

Gutmann looked questioningly at Juncker, who shook his head and answered the question in the negative. This left the lamas with no choice but to bow and retreat.

"Now we can finally find our way back to ourselves from the sheer dreamlike," said Reimer somewhat cautiously, squeezing Recke's arm. The feeling of the old and unwavering camaraderie broke through again and immediately created an atmosphere of intimate closeness despite their long separation.

"I think the next two or three hours will be ours undisturbed," Juncker added. "And I'm hardly wrong in assuming that no fatigue will be great enough to take precedence over a fundamental discussion and exchange of experiences. Wouldn't you?"

"By the lightning-slinging Zeus - there can be no question of fatigue!" protested Reimer almost overloudly. Gutmann and Frêne also made it clear that there was no way they could muster the necessary rest and patience to recover for a few hours.

"Then let's go to our room," Juncker urged. "Over the course of time, we've already set something up there, as it was possible and seemed practical to us."

He let everyone step forward and then closed the door last.

Door. "So - now we seem to be happily together!"

Recke pointed to some low stools covered with cushions and to the bedsteads on either side. Ortrun Weser moved the seating closer around the small table in the centre of the room and smoothed out the cushions with a typically feminine gesture, smiling somewhat shyly at the new guests and companions.

"It's nice here," Gutmann couldn't refrain from saying. "Downright cosy." His eyes travelled kindly over the figure of the waiting girl. "What a paradise a delicate hand is able to create for us thieving lansquenets!"

"We've realised that before," Juncker laughed. "Ortrun is our good spirit. Well, sit down already!"

"Do you want some tea before the long palaver?" asked Recke.

"Nothing there," Gutmann defended himself. "For now, let's finally clarify the situation!"

"There's not much to explain," joked Recke. "We're totally shot down. Or is that not clear enough for you yet? - Hey?"

"And trapped!" added Juncker. "If you look at it that closely ..."

"That's pretty much how we imagined things would go anyway," Gutmann admitted dryly. "We were brought here with quite a lot of pressure. And

You?"

"Well - that's the thing!" Juncker and Recke looked at each other, at odds as to which one of them should take up the matter. The girl sat still and hardly moved.

As Recke slouched over his bed, Juncker began to talk slowly and deliberately.

He began with his experiences in Prague, described the Czech uprising, touched in more detail on Ortrun's rescue, the march with the Vlasov soldiers, the capture by the Soviets and then being taken out of the Soviet quarters by Mongolians. "We were taken to a strange flying machine and loaded into it," Juncker recounted fluently. "Our equipment and weapons were left with us, but as a precaution our captors kept the ammunition. We still have them now and even our walkie-talkies were not taken away from us. That's almost the strangest thing about it so far.

Then we flew out of the witch's cauldron and, as we realised afterwards, out of the Soviets' control. The crew of the new high-performance aircraft, which had a large radius of action, consisted only of technically well-trained Mongolians, all of whom spoke a European language, mostly Russian or English. We were not given any information, but we were not exactly treated in a hostile manner, despite a certain degree of rigour and supervision. Almost

You could say that a certain courtesy was evident. We made a stopover somewhere in a steppe, then continued over the Kuen Lung Mountains into the province of Changtang. We landed there and were taken southwards through the deserts and steppes in two jeeps, which apparently came from American deliveries to Chiang Kai Shek and ended up in Mongolian hands, then at the end of the tracks in the mountainous country with a caravan under Mongolian guard after a rather arduous march to this Gumpa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms. And I must say," Juncker concluded his report, "our companion Ortrun showed herself to be extremely brave and persevering!"

"But no," the girl defended sheepishly when the men turned their eyes on her.

"She was then very ill for a while," explained Recke, adding to Juncker's account, "but she held up admirably well. Some kind of fever ..."

"And their relatives?" asked Gutmann.

The girl's eyes filled with tears, her delicate, white throat showed signs of swallowing. "I'll probably be considered missing," she said quietly. "Our house in Lippeland has been destroyed, my father was killed near Kharkov. My mother is now living somewhere with relatives. One of my brothers is missing near Rostov."

After a brief, somewhat awkward silence, Juncker asked Gutmann to tell the story of his origins,

He complied with the request and gave a detailed account of the descent into the Pyrenees and the flight across two continents to their capture in the Punjab. Gutmann omitted no detail and so the audience gained a complete picture of the events that took place and the encounters with remarkable people during their odyssey. And nothing could have been more natural for Frêne to grow into the close-knit community of Germans when his role in the events was emphasised. Recke and Juncker immediately expressed their unreserved sympathy and comradeship to the man from Carcasson, and the girl also smiled warmly at him.

"A great thing," Juncker admitted when Gutmann had finished. "A year ago, we wouldn't have believed such things even in a fairy tale." After another short pause, he continued: "Hm - but that's not all that seems and is great. We haven't talked about why we're actually here. Because without an interplay of destinies, our story would probably end with the Soviets in the Czech Republic on the one hand and the good Brahmin in the Punjab on the other."

"That brings us to the core," said Reimer eagerly.

"That's right," Juncker confirmed. "If we had previously thought that we had undertaken a technical hoarding on point 103 that had no equal anywhere else, we were wrong. But not



That's all; there are other endeavours in the world that are striving towards great goals and are among the great secrets behind the scenes of the world stage. When we arrived here after the adventurous flight and caravan journey, it didn't take long to find out the background to the kidnapping operation. And all I can say is that there are forces at work here that are trying to fulfil ancient prophecies and use every means at their disposal to gain the services of useful people."

"That's more or less what I had in mind," Gutmann said impassively. "The invitation to come here was put forward with all due vigour."

"Yes, they are looking for trainers, technicians and other personnel. In addition, the contradictions between the white nations are very skilfully played out, always pitting the interests of one part against those of the other. In our case, it is the secret of our flying discs and our new weapons, which were no longer used in the war. And because there is much that unites us in general relations, such as those known to exist with point 103, it is hoped, with reference to this, not only to coordinate our tasks with those of this area, but also to advance the underlying objectives in a beneficial way."

"Probably the prophecies hidden in the Potala in Lhasa ..." Gutmann murmured.

"That's how it is! It's about the yellow world empire that sets itself no limits."

"And therein lie external and internal dangers," Gutmann mused. "What is boundless and without limits overflows and seeps away. Such a beginning also harbours the end. The natural laws of our earth are at the same time a practical application of practical life ..."

"So far, we have had a lot of freedom here and few worries about any demands on us. There are secret forces here that are capable of far more than we Europeans might think. Not only an excellent intelligence service, but also the almost supernatural arts of the magic lamas foretold the coming of white men. We actually owe a long period of tranquillity to this prescient knowledge of the initiates here, which nonetheless tore at our nerves. And we had neither the desire nor the ability to gain the smiling calm of a Buddha. Well, be that as it may, things will change here with your arrival. How - we will find out in good time through the Ngön-kyi!"

"Who is the Ngön-kyi?" Frêne asked with undisguised excitement.

Juncker put a warning finger to his lips.

"Shh, not too loud!" Bending his head forwards, he continued quietly: "Abbot Padma Dab-yang is a confidant of Mahasiddha Lugtog, whom we have never seen despite our long stay here. We also don't know where he usually stays. On the other hand

we know that there is a close connection between the two men. And they both know a lot, a lot!" Juncker's voice took on a meaningful undertone: "Threads of a secret empire are spun here, stretching as far as India, Thailand, Afghanistan and across the Mongolian steppes and landscapes to the China Sea. And the people of this secret realm are waiting for the opening of a great mystery; for the coming of the Lord of the World, who, coming from Agartha, will show the new Great Khan the way for his peoples. In reality, they are initiates of a great plan, who have means at their disposal that are worthy of the greatest attention."

"And this plan is - ?" asked Reimer in between, unable to contain his excitement.

"A very dangerous one for the West," Juncker said harshly and succinctly. "No more and no less than the yellow empire, which, according to an old tradition, also leans against Mount Meru. And this Mount Meru lies somewhere around midnight ..."

"None of this is very surprising," Frêne remarked somewhat dryly. "The legends of the yellow empires have been haunting the brains of white people for a long time. It would be only too natural that these tales all have a kernel of truth. The old seer of Paris, Nostradamus, already predicted with certainty a new Mongol invasion of Europe!"

"These are not fairy tales that have been

fantasies," Juncker warned the Frenchman. "It is the dynamic faith of a community of the Mongolian peoples that pushes to action and is driven forward very purposefully with a great deal of patience and deliberation in order to then find its highest fulfilment with a blazing beacon."

"And the messengers of Mahasiddha Lugtog at point 103?" asked Reimer.

"They are in our favour because, in their opinion, we have a common enemy that is easier to defeat together. And they know all the hidden forces in the world very well!" Juncker made a vague gesture: "But all these things somehow intersect and in the end we stand alone. We must always keep that in mind and not be deceived!"

"Surely the messengers of Mahasiddha Lugtog were the commanding officers of a great man from the background of invisible world politics. A man who is trying to strengthen his power with the help of the technical potential of our crumbling empire," added Gutmann, to whom none of this was new. "One can only marvel that the worldwide apparatus functions so well and reliably."

"Why be surprised when you could put it to the test?" asked Juncker with raised eyebrows. "No offence, dear friend, but in this country, every superfluous word is as much as a turning away from the world of inner thoughts. Every word

must have meaning and be the language of the spirit."

"That's very nice," Gutmann remarked dryly, "but it's clear from your words that you've been here for a long time and have almost become a llama yourself."

At first, a cloud of displeasure flitted across Juncker's forehead, but his face quickly brightened and, taking Gutmann by the shoulders, he said: "Not yet, my friend, not yet. But I admit that the bypass is rubbing off here. I almost think it's about time you were brought here. Because we couldn't think of changing the circumstances here on our own."

"Change?" Reimer repeated, stretching. "Which way do you want it to go now?"

Juncker put his fingers over his mouth. "Shh, dear comrade. It's better not to talk about it now. In a few days you'll find out for yourself why you shouldn't trust your tongue too much ..." There was a short, embarrassed pause. The new arrivals realised all too quickly that their situation was hardly any better than before. Their only advantage now was that they could utilise the experience already gained by part of the group together, that their fighting strength had also increased, but they also had to put up with a lot of disadvantages. take.

Reimer interrupted the emerging mind games. In his almost carefree manner, he asked: "How far does the influence of the Soviets extend here at the moment?"

Again it was Juncker who replied: "Not openly at all. The Mahasiddha Lugtog is opposed to any infiltration in the Mongolian region, indeed they are working subversively against it in the Soviet-occupied Mongolian territories. I am not aware of any success. On the other hand, I know that they are campaigning against the Dalai Lama via the Panchen Lama. And there are lamas of lower degrees and friends of the Panchen lama who are not inaccessible to certain temptations of cradled Soviet agents. And when I mentioned earlier that there are overlaps between the underlying forces, I would just like to mention the example of the Khasars. I believe Gutmann also knows about this?"

"Go ahead," he said calmly.

"The Khasars are an Israelite tribe that seeped across the Caucasus into the Russian region some time ago. As a whole, they disappeared into the vastness of Russia, but their influence can still be felt from the darkness. They did not westernise in the process of assimilation, but inhaled the breath of Asia and called their hierarch Cha-Khan or Kha-Ghan. And this great Khan of the Khasars remained a real mythical figure. Today he appears in a name that belongs to the Soviet leadership. It is Kaganovich, whose Khasar origin is known. There are now two khans claiming to rule Asia. On the one hand, the tribal community of the Israeli Khasars, who

The Mongols, on the other hand, are opposed to this by the great khans of the Mongols, who trust their old prophecies and see the Khasars as their mortal enemies."

"So the Amur will become a soft spot in Russia," Frêne remarked.

"That's right," confirmed Juncker. "But at the moment, Moscow doesn't seem to be sufficiently clear about this."

"Maybe it does," Gutmami smiled. "Why is it reaching into Mongolian space as a precaution?"

"This could also be prompted by other considerations," Juncker said.

Gutmami said nothing in response. Recke stood up and suggested breaking off the conversation after the most important points had been communicated. There would be enough time in the next few days to discuss the matter and examine the situation in more detail.

Ortrun Weser and the new arrivals rose to their feet. After a hearty handshake, they said goodbye for the first night under the same roof. It was a memorable day for everyone.

A few days passed. On the second day of the arrival of Gutmann and his companions, the whites still had

had accepted the Ngön-kyi's invitation to lunch, they had been left to their own devices. It seemed as if they had deliberately not wanted to rush things and give the involuntary guests time to settle in, as some of the whites had already had plenty of time to do.

Once, Ngön-kyi had invited Juncker and Gutmann alone to a bowl of butter tea and had a half-worldly, half-philosophical conversation with them. It was clearly recognisable that he was also putting his questions to certain tests, but the conversation was nonetheless extremely witty and almost enjoyable. It was true that two different worlds were confronting each other in their views, but this did not preclude multiple understandings. When the three men broke off their tea chat after almost three hours, the Ngön-kyi remained seated on his cushions with a gentle smile, while the two officers returned to their rooms, highly animated but no richer for it. They were therefore unable to satisfy the curiosity of their companions who had stayed behind.

One day the De-pinn rode off, accompanied by some of his Mongols. The men were on small, shaggy horses, which seemed to be a very tough breed and were undoubtedly very suitable for the terrain. Some Mongols had stayed behind, among them Boroldai. The latter had taken a particular liking to the good-natured Reimer, which was expressed in small



He showed his appreciation for the attention he paid to him and his companions. Reimer had given him a storm lighter in return and from then on he was very receptive to all small requests.

Linzer had also asked Boroldai where De-pön had ridden to. At first the Mongol was reluctant to speak, then he whispered furtively in Linzer's ear that the great Tayang Noyon had ridden into the valley of the Black Yurt to receive a message in person. When asked where this valley was, Boroldai was unable or unwilling to give any further details.

Reimer immediately reported this to his companions. But even Juncker and Recke, who were already more familiar with the situation, had never heard anything about this valley and its significance before. They both surmised that it must have been a higher Mongolian command centre and that the name was probably symbolic.

Frêne received the news of De-pön's departure with very sober considerations. For the time being, he suggested a short walk together so that they could talk undisturbed on the way. He hinted that this would be an opportunity to leave the monastery for the Seven Lotus Blossoms on his own authority.

Juncker did not hide his scepticism for the moment, but agreed with the other companions. And so it was that they left the gom-pa after lunch, followed by the curious glances of the lamas.

Within a certain radius, they were allowed to move freely from Ngön-kyi from the outset. The valley of the monastery could probably be described as lovely by Tibetan standards, but beyond that the surrounding landscape was a barren karst expanse that turned into glaciers in the distance.

In this valley, Juncker and Recke now led their companions to a small pulpit covered with greenery, which offered a good view of the surrounding area and was not far from the gom-pa. The ground was warmed by the sun and allowed them to camp.

"So," Frêne began his observation again, "the De-pön is now gone for a few days. Actually, now would be a very favourable opportunity ..."

"To run.!" Reimer finished.

"Run away," Recke mimicked him habitually, "It's not as easy as walking home from a football pitch. I'd rather set off today than tomorrow, but there's no point in hobbling a few miles at a five-gig trot and then getting stranded somewhere in the wilderness.

The only possible direction is India. That's a very long way and besides, they'll be looking for us immediately in that direction and will certainly be able to intercept us. We would have to set off not only with our legs, but also with our brains!"

"The fact that it's not that easy is also clear from the fact that the Ngön-kyi in the neighbourhood is free to us.

running around. So nature should have provided a good guardianship," Gutmann said in a calm tone.

"I think we've survived the improbable so far and slipped through many a tight net," Reimer replied heatedly. "Why shouldn't we succeed this time too?"

"With more luck than sense," grumbled Recke.

"What difference does it make, old toad! If you only have a bit of both things, you'll be fine. Drop the brake pads and start the foot propeller, hey - so what is it?"

Juncker remained serious. "We are here in a highly sensitive magnetic field of the secret realm, if I may put it that way. There are people and forces at work here who are not easy to outwit and from whom few things remain hidden. I'll bet all the treasures we still have left that the right conclusions will be drawn from today's walk. Namely the opportunity to have a palaver without disturbance. And that's why I suggest, after the shortest possible but thorough preliminary planning, that we do nothing more of the kind in the next three or four days that could confirm the correct conclusions. I would like to say that by way of introduction. As far as an escape attempt is concerned, it would probably have to lead back to India, but by detours on which we would hardly be expected. If we were to make a sweeping arc across the north, then we should be able to escape with a

probability of succeeding in moving towards Kashmir, out of this country and the area of these powers. At least from the immediate area."

"And the provisions in this deserted room?" Gutmann immediately thought practically.

"That's probably the most difficult thing. There's not much on our menu that can be hoarded. Provisions for the march will be very sparse." Juncker swayed his head thoughtfully. "Somehow we'll have to live off the hunt. But we've run out of ammunition for our M-Pi's. We can't hunt with spells ..."

"I'll see if there's anything to steal from the Mongols," said Reimer, showing some optimism. "Maybe my friend Boroldai can be outwitted ..."

"Which is the best idea that has been put forward so far," said Juncker, smiling appreciatively. "Of course, you could try a few things in this direction without making a mess of the Mongol. Because the brothers are very strict when it comes to discipline!"

After just under half an hour, the conversation was broken off. Nobody had anything new to say and so they decided to return to the Gom-pa with seemingly unconcerned expressions. In front of the gate, Reimer tried to tell a few jokes to make the companions laugh harmlessly. But the lamas they encountered,

showed an impenetrable expression and paid no attention to the mood shown.

The next morning, Ngön-kyi asked for Gutmann and Juncker. When they appeared at Padma Dab-yang's, he invited them to sit down again and served them butter tea. After a few pleasantries, the abbot suddenly asked, while his fingers busily slid the beads of the rosary through his hand:

"Why are you thinking of leaving? Are you so compelled to go where your enemies have more power than here?"

The two officers tried to show a harmless and at the same time somewhat astonished expression. But the Ngön-kyi waved them away: "kon-tsog zun zer mi run - God cannot utter a lie; I hear what the wind whispers and it blew through the valley to me yesterday." His eyes were now like shining black pearls and dipped into the eyes of his counterpart.

The experienced Juncker took up the word: "You are right and you are wrong, O abbot! It is right and all too natural that we spoke yesterday about our later return home, among other things. Why not? Every bird seeks its old nest again after a long or short flight, every animal its den or cave, why shouldn't people seek their home again after times when they have left it? Such conversations are natural, they are by no means an escape from a given situation. If we leave here, we will only do so if it is Chenrezi's will!"

"Chenrezi! ..." The Ngön-kyi murmured, the beads of the rosary rattling audibly. "khon-tshog-gi san gópa med - God is the only and supreme ruler ..." He sat in contemplation for a few minutes, then his body tightened again, his expression showing the knowing serenity of Buddha. With the full dignity of his rank, he said: "That's enough for today. Go! May Chenrezi keep you from all paths of temptation and be a light to your mind." His smile deepened, but his eyes became steely: "Don't tempt the demons..."

"The yidam I possess, the guardian god, is stronger than the demons." Juncker raised his hand with a dignified gesture. "We have no demons to fear, oh Ngön-kyi! And besides, isn't the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms sacred enough to keep all demons away, even if you summon them?"

Padma Dab-yang scrutinised his visitors with a penetrating look before answering. He then said in a slightly sing-song tone: "There are demons everywhere if you open your heart and soul to them. Is not the body a house of being in which good and evil spirits find a place? Remember that our Gom- pa is also a good yidam in which you have found peace and security!"

"Peace and security - do they really still exist in this world?" asked Gutmann. "Isn't the whole thing a bit strange in connection with the events we all know about?"

"Turn your eyes inwards and wait until you are able to hear Chenrezi's answer! Perhaps you will find a kingdom here that you can serve like the lost one!"

"And that would be?" Gutmann asked razor-sharp.

The Ngön-kyi hesitated a little. He was visibly considering whether the time was favourable for openings. His hands clenched the rosary into a ball in the lap of his toga, his cheekbones tightened. "Do you not know that it is time that presses us when we measure it with what you call a clock? Do not press the time, for it is time that brings us closer to eternity ..." Padma Dab-yang looked briefly through the window of the room into the vastness of the landscape. The enigmatic sky of Tibet was reflected in his eyes. "Your empire, which you served, has been destroyed. You have fallen faster than anything that bears the mark of the fish and is yet to fall. You have overcome the mark of the fish inwardly only to succumb in the outer realm because your leadership would not obey the laws of a rhythmic reorganisation. Because ..."

"Because," Juncker suddenly interrupted, "the alliance of a society, a group, with the realm of your will, O Lord Lama, - O Lama of Power! -, has been broken by your secret societies!"

The Ngön-kyi looked up and stared at the speaker with a surprised expression. "What do you mean, lama from the west?"

"Just like I said," Juncker replied, all

Dropping formalities. "Haven't I made myself clear enough?"

Padma Dab-yang leant forward, his lips pressed into a thin line. "Are you more than what you pretend to be?"

"No, oh Ngön-kyi and Dorje-Lama! I am no more than you know and what I have admitted. Nevertheless, I have seen behind the curtain of events and can speak where it seems necessary. And it does not serve you or us if we keep the cards of a great game hidden all the time."

"Keep talking!" demanded the Ngön-kyi.

"I have nothing more to add."

"Then I will continue," Padma Da-yang said in a harsh voice. "It is true, as you said, that there was an alliance with men who held power in your realm. They knew the Dzyan Book, which shows the two sources of power of Eastern wisdom. The source of the material forces, the left hand, which have their seat in Shambala; in the above-ground city of violence and power, which is ruled by a great king of fear. But it is also the seat of Shambala, which a part of the Western secret brotherhoods and lodges regard as the locating point from where the promises and warnings of a Lord of the World come. This Shambala is a guiding ray of our will! Then there is the second source: Agartha, the inner lower realm, the realm of contemplation and its powers. There too is a Lord and King of the World,



who promises his rule. At the right moment, he will lead the good people against the bad and he is in constant contact with Brahytma, with God. And this is the king to be served, who will establish our kingdom and rule the others. When you said before, Lama from the West, that an alliance was broken, it was not a break, but the fault of the men in your realm who joined with the forces of Shambala, of pure violence, and worked in secret in their own way against the other men of your realm." Padma Dah-yang suddenly stood up straight, his voice as hard as metal: "And behind these forces that manifested themselves in Shambala is the Caucasian Stalin-Dugashvili! He knew about everything, he knew the men of the circle in your empire and he played his own cards to them as their own. Stalin Dugashvili had the support of the Lord of Fear and Violence against your empire!"

"And who were the forces that helped us in the war?" asked Gutmann. "Were they not Tibetan secret circles in London, who for their part promoted exclusive circles in society, infiltrated them with middlemen and set up their listening posts there? Hadn't they learnt the most secret things from the British underground meetings in this way and passed them on to the German Reich government within twenty-four hours? These could never be the same forces that promoted a Stalin?"

The Ngön-kyi nodded slightly. "You have been helped and

destroyed at the same time. You were helped by the power of the right hand, the subterranean Agartha, which favours you. It left you when a group of men placed themselves in the hands of Shambala. You relied on one force instead of serving a synthesis, instead of heeding both forces according to necessary circumstances. The source of the left hand is a good one when it is united with the right hand. Whoever serves it alone is lost. Then the forces of violence turn against their servants as an evil seed, instead of becoming an instrument of higher laws."

Juncker and Gutmann barely breathed. The Abbot's openings, a knowing, nocturnal Dordsche Lama, showed the terrible truth of the political mole work of powers that transcended borders to make the globe the plaything of their secret endeavours. The invisible triumphed over the visible, dominating and directing it.

"So our empire was actually only the arena and testing ground for higher endeavours, instead of a coordination of the interests of our empire and those in Tibet?" Gutmann asked slowly.

"Didn't we say before that you were helped and later abandoned?" The Ngön-kyi was a little annoyed.

"Much was down to yourselves and your leadership. With the fall of your empire, we ourselves have lost years of our endeavours. Today, even Stalin's forces are turning against us and shadows are rising over Tibet. Is that not reason enough to help us?"

"First you left us, now you want us to help?" Gutmann asked bitterly.

"We no longer decide things," replied the Ngön-kyi. "But know - it is an old promise that a great khan will come to the west again and that a great empire will arise. The secret empire lives here in the vastness of Asia, the throne is the roof of the world and here it will rise to life, come into visible appearance when the time of the promise is fulfilled. And it is near, my white lamas from the West. It is near!"

"And ..." Juncker urged.

"And you shall serve this kingdom and it will reward you for your help!" The Ngön-kyi loosened the rosary from its previously tense grasp and let a few beads run again. "Nub dewa tshen ... - the occidental paradise of great bliss will be reached when the light from the East and the grace of Chenrezi radiates to the Western Great Sea. O white lamas, - the forces that oppose our growing empire are the same forces that hindered your growth, that destroyed your empire. Forces that will destroy others if we do not help the Great Khan to victory!"

"Why are you only telling us this now?" asked Juncker. "Recke and I have been in Gom-pa long enough to know about this."

"Isn't it easier to bring things up all at once? Don't we have to deal with our

unite your two groups with far-reaching possibilities? And didn't I say once before not to rush the time?"

"You sought spirit and became spirit yourself," said Juncker, alluding to the rank of abbot with a Tibetan formula. "Your eye is deep and also sees through us. It will tell you that your kingdom is not and cannot become our kingdom. What will you do if we ask to be released to the base from which we came?"

"You can't go back there!"

"Why not, oh abbot?" Gutmann asked.

"Because point 103 has been cancelled and everything has been done to make hoarded material untraceable!"

"That can't be! ..." Juncker and Gutmann jumped up excitedly. "How do you know that, Padma Dab- yang?"

"Don't we always know everything?" The Ngön-kyi leant back a little and smiled. It looked like a grimace as an expression to his explanation.

"And where have our men gone?" Juncker slowly took a seat while he asked. Gutmann also sat down again.

"They are everywhere and nowhere," said the Ngön-kyi calmly. "You may or may not encounter individuals somewhere. They all have an order which you cannot know and which could not be passed on to you. But rest assured; you have clever men who have taken care of everything."

There was a pause for thoughtful silence. The officers endeavoured to conceal their shock at the news from Ngön-kyi. If the news was true - and they had no doubt that it was - then they were now without any support. If they had always faced all events with a certain superiority and a trace of optimism, the knowledge of a task, of a duty, strengthened them. Last but not least, it was also the bond with a community that had to pass a great ordeal through a hard fate and seek new paths. A community from which they were now suddenly dismissed and which seemed to have forgotten them. Although they had no way of knowing the circumstances and their secretly burgeoning reproaches could not find any reasonable ground, their inner selves were overflowing with bitterness and disappointment at a development that was trying to rob them of all faith and purpose.

The Ngön-kyi read the thoughts of the men sitting opposite him. "Tön kun doub pa - He who has accomplished all things - knows the task of man in the time of a lifetime and there is no stone without meaning on the path one has to tread. Go now and seek the light that is able to illuminate your path. Go for today, white officers of a great nation, and report back to those who came with you. Na cha yin - farewell for today!"

Slightly dazed, the men stood up. They thanked Ngön-kyi for the friendly greeting,

bowed their heads and left the abbot's room with somewhat ponderous steps to go to their rooms. They looked at each other in silence, guessing their most secret thoughts as to whether or not they should break the grave news to their companions. It was Juncker who, stopping in front of their rooms, nodded in the affirmative with a curt movement of his head. They pushed open the door, from which came Reimer's bright voice.

The entrants found their companions engaged in a superficial conversation, which immediately came to a halt. Somehow, the expressions on the faces of those who had returned seemed to betray the seriousness of a message, because after breaking off the previous conversation, Recke immediately moved from the side of the bed used as a seat to make room.

Juncker reported. He spoke calmly and under control, without being interrupted by the audience. He described the situation and did not conceal the seriousness that they would now have to face. The loss of their support and the lack of any connection to the new circumstances forced them to plan completely independently, which made them consider many possibilities.

Gutmann, the only one to interrupt the conversation after a while, was of the opinion that there might still be a remaining commando in hiding, but he himself doubted whether it would be possible to establish contact with it. He also justified his assumption by saying that a resistance and observation group

against the advance of those groups from the Zion area, which could not be too weak. However, he admitted that further considerations would be pointless and that for the time being we were completely in the dark.

The girl remained the calmest. She didn't know most things and was therefore less affected. Her restraint created a generally calming atmosphere and forced the men to look together for objective considerations first, instead of swearing and ranting like soldiers. They all agreed to refuse any service in this secret domain. They all realised that this would create new difficulties in the long run and could lead to measures **t h a t w o u l d** later hinder all possibilities of escape. So they could make no other decision than to gain time for the time being in order to prepare an escape with a chance of success. Until then, they would have to use all diplomatic means to evade the demands of this Tibetan-Mongolian power. It was also unanimously clear to them that they had to act with extreme caution, for their last experiences on the occasion of the joint excursion not only pointed to a psychoanalysis on the part of the Ngön-kyi, but also to the mysterious abilities of the Gyud Lamas, **i n c l u d i n g** the experienced Padma Dab-yang with his other ranks as Abbot and Dorje Lama. It was known to the men that the magic lamas possessed the most improbable arts.

After this basic agreement, Gutmann decided to end the talks for the day. He justified his suggestion by saying that any further discussion would only lead to getting bogged down in thoughts that would deviate from the practical findings and results and could then jeopardise them. An objection that nobody could ignore.

Tibetan life was timeless, almost dull. This was particularly true of the daily routine in the gom-pa. Days and weeks trickled by; the sun and moon, day and night, were the visible signs of a passage of time that was hardly felt, hardly noticed. For the Tibetan monks, according to the Buddha's laws, everything was a test, a step ladder to be able to leave the cycle and reach nirvana. This monastic, timeless atmosphere also rubbed off on the small Mongolian group, who submitted to the monotonous daily routine with impenetrable expressions, at least on the outside.

For the European people, the whole thing meant a strange mixture of nervous calm and restlessness at the same time after a short period of settling into the conditions imposed on them. These alternating opposites brought about a change to an increasingly emerging thoughtfulness, which outwardly showed calm, but all the more sharply stimulated thought and reflection.



In this state, the officers abducted from the Czech region and the girl were ahead of their companions who had followed. Nevertheless, there was no difference between them in the logical conclusions of a knowledge that not only found confirmation in the explanations of Ngön-kyi, but also further indications. The great secret realm of Asia, revitalised by an ancient promise and harbouring dangers for future developments, now revealed forces that had hitherto been largely ignored, and it was precisely those forces that had worked decisively against their own great game. The ongoing shifts on the backstage of world events, the changing fronts of supranational forces behind the scenes in the race for the primacy of power positions, their alternating interplay or trumping, all this required the deployment of many forces from the multifaceted game of human societies and peoples.

The white men in the Gom- pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms were also aware of this. After a sober dismantling of all illusions, they were left with the stark realisation that their own platform had no potency at the moment and that they were currently only objects of wear and tear in the service of foreign interests. And there was no need for a debate before they unanimously drew the only conclusion: Escape from the realm of the secret empire.

This decision was always there. New against it

were the prerequisites that enabled them to achieve complete independence and, on the other hand, lacked a fixed goal. Juncker and Gutmann therefore gave in to the urging of the other companions to return to their homeland regardless of internal conditions. The previous auxiliary bases that had been touched by the Gutmann group were also unable to help them find a connection to the base parts of 103. It did not seem advisable to all of them to become dependent on other organisations.

So it was that over the course of a few days and with the utmost caution, a plan of escape was formed. The Ngönkyi was still acting cautiously since his openings and it seemed as if nothing would happen until the Mongolian De-pön could return.

At the same time, Reimer made the acquaintance of a Gyud lama in Gom-pa. This magic lama lived a very secluded life and was rarely seen. He was very old and was very different in appearance from the other Black Cloak monks. When Reimer spoke to him, the lama had only looked at the officer penetratingly and walked on without a word.

Two days later, however, it was he who visited Reimer in his room and found him alone. "Tschag peb tsu nan." greeted the lama and took a seat on the cushion laid out for him by the officer. "ne Idan-la dug! ..."

"I don't understand Tibetan," said Reimer.

"Sit by my side," the lama suddenly said

in good English, repeating his Tibetan request.

The Linzer followed the guest's gesture.

The lama let a few minutes pass before he spoke again.

"You white men come from far away."

"That's right," nodded the man from Linz.

The Gyud-Lama smiled. "Nothing is hidden from the light on the highest throne. Your hearts are not with us."

Reimer nodded again. He took a closer look at the lama and realised that he himself looked different from the other monks in this gom-pa. A little hesitantly, he also asked: "You yourself are not from here either, oh Lama?"

The monk chuckled cautiously. "I am from the land of Hind and do not belong to the Mongols." He made a gesture with his hand. "The Mongols are still the steppe wolves. They and the odour of the earth are still too much one for them to find their way out of the cycle to higher consecration and thus to salvation. But I belong to a caste that cultivates ancient cultural traditions. That is why I am well-disposed towards you white Sahibs." His wrinkled mouth widened slightly and the creases in his eyes deepened. "Do you have a wish?"

Reimer thought quickly. Should he dare to hint to the old man about the plans he had made and ask for his help? - Couldn't the visit also be a trap?

"You are careful, my son," grunted the lama. When

he had read everyone's thoughts, he continued: "I am not an envoy of the Ngön-kyi. And I have no part in the strings that are being spun by this monastery with the Dalai Lama on the one hand and with the Hutukhtu in Urga on the other. I also have no part in the plans for a great worldly empire, since everything is transient in the being of non-being. The whole world is non-being, illusion and appearance. Body and mind, all appearances and images are maya, non-being, and all sensations come from avidja, ignorance. Those who do not recognise Maya will never find the eternal Atman-Brâhman." The Gyud-Lama let his eyes wander as if they were following invisible thoughts floating in space. "Your world, white sahibs, is a different world from that in the tranquillity of the Buddha. But you too seek the devýâna, the path of the gods; your light comes from the midnight mountain, from whence you come and to where you must go again. And because this is your destiny, you cannot partake of the Buddha's peace and Asia's steppe storms."

"That's right," Reimer confirmed quietly.

"And not otherwise," the Gyud-Lama affirmed. "I am well-disposed towards you, Sahib! - You and your companions. Did you not have the help of Brahmins in the land of Hind and in the north, in the Punjab?"

"You know that, llama?"

The Gyud-Lama grunted again. "There are few things in the Gom-pa that are hidden from me!"

"And - ?" Reimer looked at the old man intently.

"For the sake of the Brahmins, I will help you. They are my brothers on the other side of the Himalayas. And I know your thoughts, just as the Ngön-kyi knows them!"

"The Ngön-kyi?" Reimer couldn't hide his dismay.

"The Ngön-kyi Padma Dab-yang thinks you are safe here. Besides, the De-pön will be back in the next few days and you will probably be taken away with it."

"Then it's too late if we wait to escape!"

"Ma - no! On the contrary: you'll be closer to freedom!"

"Once we are in the power of the De-pön, we will have armed Mongols around us, against whom we are defenceless and who will watch over us like lynxes!"

A sly expression appeared on the Gyud-Lama's wrinkled face. "And yet this is your only chance! You won't get far from here without a guide. It is a rough and wild country all around, accessible only by a few paths and over a few passes. Alone, you are lost and at the mercy of others." The Adam's apple, which protruded from the old man's scrawny neck, bounced up and down, the narrow mouth twisted wide. It was an almost silent laugh that gave the lama a grotesque grimace. "Before you leave, I will send you a means that will help you escape. Am I not

a Gyud-Lama hehe? ..."

"Can you let us fly through the air, oh llama?"

"No, sahib. But I will find out which paths you will take. And then you will find a sign from where you must take action. With my means! - hehehe ..." He chuckled and grunted again.

"And the Ngön-kyi? He will see through us, read our minds!"

The Gyud-Lama raised his skinny hand. "Rest assured, white men and the white girl with you. You can speak undisturbed in your rooms. From today onwards, I will place a barrier around your small area, which the Ngön-kyi and his confidants will not be able to break through."

"How can you do that?" asked Reimer in amazement.

The Gyud-Lama became almost angry. "Did I not tell you that I am a magic lama? You should know that even the Ngön-kyi fears me. Otherwise, would I be living my own life here so independently? Wait a little longer, Sahib, and you will see!" The lama remained silent and introverted for a few minutes. Linz did not dare to disturb the old man. The lama's self-assurance confused him somewhat.

Suddenly the llama struggled to get up. Reimer jumped up to help him, which he acknowledged with a grateful smile. "Ka-le phe!" greeted the old man with an implied bow.

Reimer gave him a deep bow. The Gyud-

Lama placed his lean, bony right hand on the Linzer's head. "May you be closer to your fulfilment than to the Shambala of the Gobi. Reflect on yourselves and your centre of power, which lies somewhere in the dark north. Ka-le phe again!"

When Gutmann entered the room with Juncker a while later, they found Reimer sitting thoughtfully on the bed.

"Hey, prisoner's sickness?" Gutmann asked.

Linz shook his head. With a serious expression, he told them about the lama's visit and his promise of help. The imminent return of the Mongolian officer also gave them the certainty that the monotony of the day would bring change. So the three men immediately agreed that they had no choice but to hand themselves over to the Gyud lama's promise of help, for better or worse,

Juncker, who had already lived in the Gom-pa for some time and had studied a lot about the Tibetan mentality, saw the Gyud-Lama's visit as confirmation that opinions clashed here as everywhere else. If they could make a profit from opposing views in the monastery, this was indeed their great and only hope.

That same evening, when a council meeting was held in reliance on the Gyud lama's promise to protect them from the Ngön-kyi's spying - albeit in a seemingly improbable way - the previous decisions were changed to relying on the lama's help and advice.

to leave. Until then, they wanted to try to keep all the marching baggage in order. Reimer also wanted to take on the task of outwitting Boroldai, where they could find at least some of their pistol ammunition. But the companions were very sceptical about this.

During the night, with the ball of the moon hanging high in the sky, horses' hooves clattered over the stony path that led to Gom-pa. Frêne was quickest at the window opening, from where the path serpentine was clearly visible. He could not suppress a half-loud exclamation: "Milles tonneres, les mongoles! ..."

The riders had already arrived at the gate, the clattering of the mounts gave way to a scratching sound, a horse neighed impatiently, scenting the stable and food. In the bright night, the area in front of the gate shrouded in a magical white light, it was easy to make out the tall figure of De-pön riding at the head of the procession. After a few short shouts, the large gate opened with the ugly screeching of the hinges, the riders, about a dozen in number, dismounted and disappeared with the animals at the reins into the interior of the large monastery building.

"Now we've got the colonel and his gang on our backs faster than we expected," said Reimer to his two room mates. "The blokes seem to have been in a real hurry to arrive in the middle of the night."



Frêne returned to his resting place. "So the magic lama has very quickly fulfilled his prophecy of the return of De-pön." Frêne's tone was slightly mocking. "Now I'm really curious to see what the next few days will bring. If we are taken away from this Gom-pa now, then the old night owl with the fortune-telling is right. But it could just as well be that they have other thoughts than dealing with us."

"We'll find out tomorrow," Gutmann said dryly. "For my part, I tend to believe the lama's words."

Linz stepped to the window and looked out into the bright night. He looked at the moonlit square, on which the protruding shadows of the Gom-pa formed dark, blue-violet areas with the hard contours of the roof edges. Two shadowy figures, looking like dwarf poplars, wandered along these contours. Two monks from the Gom-pa, taking nightly walks on the roof. Or had the Ngön-kyi and the De-pön become moonstruck? Reimer smiled quietly to himself. Seriousness combined with humour.

The night's surprise had robbed the men of their sleep. Juncker and Recke also came in for half an hour to discuss the event. That night revealed secrets that were still hidden from them.

It was understandable that the men felt slightly overstimulated and tired in the morning. Breakfast was rather quiet. It almost seemed as if they felt it,

that they were in for more surprises.

On this particular day, the men went for a morning walk with the girl. A short walk through the nearby countryside should help them to get rid of the somewhat oppressive feelings of the previous night. If the Ngön-kyi wanted to see them early this time, they would find out soon enough.

They left their rooms as a closed group and descended the creaking stairs. Some of the lamas they encountered greeted them in silence without paying any attention. Gutmann and Juncker were the first to enter the wide corridor and walked towards the doorway. Their unobstructed view was disturbed by the presence of two Mongols lounging against the gate pillars with submachine guns dangling in front of their chests. As the whites approached the exit, the armed men tightened their arms and made a gesture of halting.

"Ksüi!"

"What's that bloke singing?" asked Reimer angrily from the background.

"As far as I understand from this gibberish, it means 'Stop'," Juncker explained. "This post was no doubt put up here in our honour!"

"So the air is thick now," Gutmann realised grumpily. "Then back up to the parlour. You can't blow against the wind ..."

The Mongols grinned a little and cackled unintelligibly. Their expressions were good-natured and

almost regretting having to hinder the whites in their desire.

Frêne made no secret of his anger. "I suggest, mes camarades, that we take the bull by the horns! That's a saying in Germany, isn't it? If our comrades Juncker and Gutmann went straight to the Ngön-kyi to speak for us, we'd be in just the right mood to protest emphatically against the sudden restriction of the limited freedoms we've been granted so far. Allons nous?"

"Right!" Reimer agreed with the Carcassonner.

"Go to the cowled pope and give him hell!"

After a few words, the men agreed to follow Frêne's suggestion. They could negotiate with the Ngön-kyi themselves. It was better to take him by surprise than to be summoned by him to receive instructions.

"If a hell is to be raised, then we should be the first to suffer," Recke grumbled his opinion to Reimer. "Let's not forget that we're completely in control here. No cock crows about our disappearance."

Leaving behind the Mongols who refused to leave, Juncker and Gutmann went to the Ngön-kyi. The others returned to their rooms to await the course of events.

"Ksüi!" - Again, a stop commando blocked the entrance

to the Ngön-kyi. A Mongol, this time without a visible weapon, and a lama of lower rank were posted in front of the abbot's rooms and prevented the entry of uninvited persons. It was the first time that Juncker, who had been living here months before Gutmann, had encountered such a situation. Until then, the Gom-pa had been a monastic place of peace, where an abbot probably shuffled his political cards as he did everywhere else in the Tibetan monasteries. Beyond that, however, there were no military demonstrations and even the Mongols who had been here for some time had behaved inconspicuously and respected the site of Buddhist edification with restraint.

Juncker turned to the monk: "Tell us, O Lama, we want to speak to Abbot Dab-yang!"

The black-robed monk understood and nodded. After a brief sign of understanding with the Mongolian, he shuffled off to tell the Ngön-kyi what the white man wanted.

"Is anyone with the abbot?" Juncker asked the Mongolian. He assumed with certainty that at least the Depön was with Padma Dab-yang.

"Bi medekse-güi," said the Mongolian. He made a gesture of complete ignorance.

"What did the man say?" Gutmann asked.

"He knows nothing," Juncker repeated. "I already know this stereotypical Mongolian phrase, as I have always received the same answer to many previous questions. These people are all under orders not to

to give information. Reimer's friend Boroldai seems to be a small exception."

The Mongolian sentry could not conceal a gesture of attention when he heard the name Boroldai in the incomprehensible sentences of a European language. Juncker also noticed this and bit his lip in annoyance. He said to Gutmann:

"These guys watch out like lynxes!"

Now the lama returned and bowed to the two officers. "His Holiness, the Ngön-kyi, is expecting his guests!"

He walked submissively ahead to the door of Padma Dab-yang's lounge, where another lama was already waiting and made an inviting gesture to open the way into the room.

Juncker and Gutmann entered. Their first glance fell on the abbot, who was sitting on his low seat with his legs folded under him, this time solemnly wearing his high cap and the insignia of his rank. As expected, the De-pön sat to his left and to his right a short, stocky Mongolian, also wearing a uniform coat like the De-pön and the same horse on his collar, but in silver. Sitting next to the De-pön was a clay llama who had not been seen much before. This clay lama was not very popular in the gom-pa because of his severity and the monks liked to avoid him. As a clay lama, he was regarded as a spiritual leader and master who, like a gyud lama, had magical abilities. He was one of Ngön-kyi's closest confidants.

With Asian inscrutability, those seated turned their eyes to the entrants. It almost looked as if the assembly had gathered to receive the two white officers, as two cushions had already been prepared opposite the Ngön-kyi. On the low table in the centre of the seating area were the inevitable bowls of butter tea.

A movement of the Ngön-kyi's hand invited him to sit down. The clay lama and the two Mongolian leaders greeted each other in reserved silence. The atmosphere in the room was oppressive. Fine vapours of a volatilising, fragrant resin slowly dissipated.

"Our wishes meet," Padma Dah-yang began the conversation after a few minutes of contemplation had passed. "Your stay in the Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus has given you the grace of Chenrezi to be able to send your thoughts on journeys

..." He paused for a moment, both he and the clay lama smiling at the same time. A slight twitch of the corners of his mouth suggested a hint of irony. "So our thoughts came as messengers and crossed. You would become good chelas of a master lama if you wanted to enter the Sotapama, the stream of the great quest."

Juncker and Gutmann remained silent. The Ngön-kyi was a fox and cunningly defused the suspected accusations. Using his tactics, he took control of the conversation and forced the two officers to change their attitude.

"You are probably aware that De-pön Tayang Noyon returned last night," continued the Ngön-kyi. "He has brought news that also concerns you." The abbot's eyes searched the people's emotions.

"That pleases us," Juncker parried with feigned equanimity. "We very much hope that we won't have to enjoy the hospitality of this Gom-pa indefinitely."

"Dzá, dzá!" barked the foreign Mongol officer in between. He shrugged his shoulders a little as he caught a disgruntled, almost reprimanding look from De-pön.

The Ngön-kyi himself nodded. "Buddha is the great goodness and we all live in Buddha. So our Gom-pa is also a resting place on the long path that is to lead us to Chenrezi's grace. Does it not behove us to refresh all those who live in the realm of this peace?"

"Is this what you call peace, O holiness, when the entrance and exit to Chenrezi's edifice are blocked at gunpoint?" Juncker's voice took on a harsh tone. "Is Ksüi! the word Chenrezi uses to darken people's minds in a gom-pa?"

The Asians' faces were like masks. The Ngön-kyi let his fingers glide playfully over the dordje lying on his lap, the finely crafted thunderbolt sceptre. "Many an unfathomable thing moves and

drives us. Is there not a reason that makes us recognise all events as fate, which we have to regard as a test for a later salvation? Have you forgotten that you were snatched from the hands of evil enemies and do you now perceive the hands of saviours as a threat? Did I not already say that you were chosen to serve the coming great empire and that you could help fight our common enemies?"

"How can we judge where common interests lie? Haven't we been denied access to the apocryphal scriptures in the Potala before? You are hiding things that no white person from the West is allowed to know. How can we lend a hand if a blow is directed against us?"

The abbot leant forward: "You see neither light nor shadow? Do you not know what the Urusuki, the Russians, have done to your country? How your country in the East was martyred, desecrated and trampled underfoot? You don't know yet, or you don't know enough. Do you want to wait until the dark Georgian has his claws everywhere?"

"Ah, you fear the Soviets now," Juncker said coolly. "It is now too late to take away the power that has been blindly handed to them in recent years."

"You're wrong," the Ngön-kyi defended. "Have we not proved to you that we have taken you out of the jaws of the beast? Are there not peoples from the east among the soldiers of the great land of Urusu and thus a danger to it? Are not the secret



The leaders of the Khasars around the dark Georgian Dugashvili, jealous of their own ulterior motives? Have the Urusuki not built themselves a termite state, which they gnaw at themselves? Look, the beast with many claws will soon reach for Böd-yul, for Tibet, and will try to subjugate the rest of Mongolia, which is still free. The Khasars also know about our prophecies and want to rule over Shambala with the Gobi. It almost seems as if the great king of fear and terror is already sitting in the Kremlin anyway!"

"It really almost looks like that," Gutmann muttered sarcastically. "And what should we do now?"

The Ngön-kyi took a deep breath. "The great Khan will receive you and give you instructions himself. You will set off with the Mongols tomorrow and be taken to the Valley of the Black Yurt. I can tell you no more here. Everything else is a matter for the Great Khan!"

"That's right!" nodded the De-pön.

"And do you really think you can run against the beast in the Kremlin?" asked Juncker.

Now it was the clay lama who said with a half-raptured look but a languid tone: "Some waters will gush from the spring caves of our mountains, wind their way through the narrow gorges and valleys, reach the great sea waters and mingle with them before change will come. The black Georgian will die a mysterious death and this death will be

Many people around him will be carried away. At that time, there will be a brief foreign rule over our country, and Gyana, that is China, will suffer from the red colour and send its soldiers to us, But the Gyami, the Chinese, will slowly lose ground again. The red ruler will strike a silk cushion with the flat of his hand and prick himself without finding the needles. Our magic weapons will paralyse and hinder the thinking and resolutions of the invaders, slowly forcing them to give in.

This will then make the large building with the onion domes think twice. The Kremlin will also have to be ready for the great showdown with Western power, which will set limits to the push for great domination. And while the two great powers balance each other out on the world stage, our empire will grow and become ready for the coming hour, for the hour of the Great Khan, as it is written in the promises and scriptures of the Potala!"

"Which we don't know," Juncker repeated the objection raised earlier. "Do we have a choice?"

"What do you mean?" The Ngön-kyi raised his eyebrows and winked.

"Do we have a choice between the path to the Great Khan and the path that leads to our homeland?"

The two Mongolians shifted a little impatiently in their seats. Padma Dab-yang hesitated briefly, then said:

"Yes, you have a choice: tomorrow you can take the

Mongols to the Great Khan or we will transfer you to the Russian border. Then when you come home ..."

The two officers pressed their lips together. With deliberate arrogance, sitting bolt upright, Juncker made his statement: "Don't think, oh Ngön-kyi, that you could cause us fear if you take us to the border of Soviet Urusu. We were soldiers for almost five years, don't forget that! Nevertheless, I ask you to give us leave now so that we can talk to our companions. We'll let you know in two hours!" With a somewhat angular movement, Juncker straightened up and Gutmann followed his example. "May the Buddha's blessing rest on your Gompa, O abbot, which may it always remain a place of hospitality and freedom, as Bodhisattva Amithaba commanded people for the low time of their lives according to your faith!" His smile was almost provocative. He bowed slightly and stuck out his tongue according to Tibetan custom. The Asians were left with astonished looks on their faces as the officers left the room in a taut posture.

Juncker and Gutmann reported to their small community.

"We can still be as clever as the yellows," Frêne said resolutely. "We have no choice but to bow to the summons of the Great Khan, as this secret prince or satellite is called. And

It is precisely the only possibility that our Gyud Lama spoke of."

"Where is this Gyud-Lama to be found in this gom-pa?" asked Gutmann.

"It will be difficult to find," Recke remembered. "There are quite a few monastery cells in parts of the building that we don't know about. And it's certainly not advisable to search for them!"

"I think so too," Juncker confirmed.

"So what to do?" Reimer scratched his head.

"Wait and see," said Recke. "If this magic llama really is what he seems, then he'll float in like a ghost at the right time."

The men had no choice but to leave the rest to chance and trust the faint hope that was emerging. This time it was the girl who calmly faced the coming events and bravely joined in. Recke took it upon himself to deliver the only possible resolution to be ready for the next day to Ngön-kyi.

The small group dispersed pensively and spread out into their assigned rooms. Now alone with Gutmann and Frêne, the man from Linz used the peace and quiet to collect his thoughts.

Outside, it was slowly getting dark. In the clear and pure air of the highlands, the sky seemed to hang lower and the still pale stars slowly drew a recognisable series of images of the northern astronomy.

Linz stepped out into the corridor in front of the room and clapped his hands to summon a servant Trapa. A stolid monk approached, somewhat disgruntled.

"La-yö - yes, sir? ..."

"I want the Mongolian Boroldai," said Reimer.

"No English," affirmed the trapa. "Kake rik-pa - understand nothing ..."

"Boroldai!" Reimer repeated insistently. Trapa stared stupidly.

Reimer tried to make it clear to the man with a myriad of explanatory gestures that he meant a Mongol. Again he insistently mentioned the name Boroldai. The Trapa shrugged his shoulders indeterminately and left. Reimer did not know whether he had been understood or not. But after half an hour Boroldai actually came into Reimer's room. "You sent for me!"

"Yes," said Reimer. "I have to talk to you!"

The Mongolian looked at the officer questioningly.

"I have a present for you, Boroldai! Would you like to have my beautiful compass?"

Boroldai looked at the Linzer suspiciously. "Why do you want to do that?"

"You have been kind to us. I would like to give you a memento, because tomorrow we are all travelling away with the De-pön to the Great Khan."

Boroldai ducked his head when he heard the Great Khan speak. He held out his hands in defence. "I cannot and will not accept a gift! I ask you

But once again: why would you want to part with a necessary or beautiful object that means more to you than to me? What am I supposed to do with a compass? Don't we have the sun by day and the stars by night? Our peoples have always found their way with certainty!"

The Linzer made a regretful movement. "I'm sorry, Boroldai. I would have liked to make you happy so that I could make a wish in return."

"What do you want?"

If Reimer had thought that his hesitation would arouse the Mongol's curiosity, he was mistaken. Boroldai stood quietly waiting until Reimer decided to continue. "It's hard for me to tell you, Boroldai! I already told you that we're riding tomorrow. I've been dreaming for days that a journey is imminent that could also bring me misfortune. Again and again in my dreams I see a giant wolf attacking me and trying to tear me apart. I always see myself facing this animal with empty hands and I almost believe in the fulfilment of this tormenting dream."

The Mongolian nodded very seriously. "Dreams are good warnings. You have to be careful!"

Reimer pushed around. "Your advice is simple. It doesn't help!"

"What should I do about it?"

"You can do a lot, Boroldai! - A lot! ..."

"Speak!"

"Boroldai! Secretly get me the ammunition to

my pistol!"

The Mongol froze. Almost whispering, he said: "I can't do that! Do you know what you're asking?"

"Is it that bad? I can't do anything about you. I just want to be able to protect myself. My dream..."

"I don't know ..." The Mongol hesitated, wavered.

"Don't you want the compass?"

"No!"

"Do you have another wish?"

Hesitation again. The Mongol pondered, undecided. "If you want to give me a souvenir - give me one of your beautiful coins. One with a mighty eagle on it. These coins are beautiful and the strong bird will always remind me of your brave people."

The man from Linz pulled his wallet out of his pocket and took out a five-mark coin that was already invalid. He gave it to the Mongolian, who took the coin and examined it closely. With a broad smile, he put it in a hidden pocket inside his skirt. Quickly becoming serious again, he then explained: "I don't want to promise you anything, Sahib. Let me think about whether I can do this. You'll hear from me ..."

When the door had closed behind the man, Gutmann and Frêne did not conceal their scepticism. They approved of Reimer's attempt to do the best he could for their situation, but at the same time expressed their fear that it could not be ruled out

to alert the Mongols with this wish. If Boroldai had a strong sense of duty, he must already be at the De-pön to report the situation.

There was another surprise this evening. It had become completely dark by now and the three men had decided not to light the small lamp. The full moon rose again and lent its light to the parlours facing it. A slightly elegiac mood was interrupted by a subtle throbbing that was almost like a scratching sound.

Frêne, who was closest to the door, opened it. He saw a dark figure in front of him, grunting and trying to squeeze past him. It was the old Gyud-Lama who had come to visit Reimer. The Carcassonner and Gutmann realised this immediately and kept to the background.

The monk tripped to the centre of the room and declined a seat. He made a vague gesture of greeting with his scrawny right hand. His small mouse eyes swept over the three men, then he smiled at Linz with his almost toothless mouth. In the bluish pallor of the moon, his face looked like a Perchten mask.

Reimer could hardly contain his curiosity. His face was also fully turned towards the moonlight and was an open book for the Gyud-Lama.

"Re zig sdod - wait a little ..." The magic llama awkwardly took a small bag from under his robe and weighed it upwards in his hand, thinking about it



and then suddenly handed it to Linzer. "Tuwa dug - smoke poison," he whispered with a grin.

"Take it! Hide it well. It can help you." His hand trembled slightly as he dropped the parcel into Reimer's hand.

Gutmann and the Carcassonner now approached as well. The old man turned to the door. "At night," he husked, "when everyone is asleep ... You must throw the sack into the night fire without the guard noticing. Hehe, - take good care! Find your sleeping places so that the wind drives the smoke away from you. And make sure you have wet cloths in front of your nose. And away, away from the fire." The lama paused for a moment to check that all was quiet in the corridor. Then he continued:

"If the guard is struggling with fatigue or if he falls over, you'll know what to do. You're men, aren't you? Hehehe. Then you must hurry to Gyakar - to India - but pay close attention to the road. Be careful! ..."

Another short pause. "So," he nodded, satisfied, "May the Great Light illuminate your path and pour mercy upon you! I know that you have been torn from the hands of my brothers. If I help you now, I do so for their sake. Here I am closer to the purity of the lotus, but still my soul sometimes wanders back to where the sun gives lush fertility to the land. - Ga-le, farewell! -"

He left the room again very quickly. As quickly, as mysteriously as he came, he disappeared again.

If Reimer had not felt the small parcel in his palm, if his companions had not seen it before their eyes, they would all have been tempted to fall for a deception.

"Eh bien," Frêne was the first to say. "There's probably something to this magic stuff. Keep it safe, Reimer, as the old man advised. The instructions are pretty simple and you don't need a printed novel..."

"Wind, water and careless posts by the fire ... that's a lot of things that have to come together ..." Gutmann grumbled. "Most of the time, such expectations don't materialise."

"Are you being naughty again?" Reimer showed open anger.

"No," Gutmann defended himself. "But I would like you to consider whether you should put all your chances on one card, which doesn't necessarily have to be a trump card!" He ran his hand over his forehead as if he could banish an agonising headache. "So - and let's use this last night in this Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms for a good night's sleep. Unless there are any more surprises. Good night, comrades! ..."

After midnight, Reimer also went to bed. Boroldai had not turned up.

## THE ROAD LEADS SOMEWHERE

In order to protect oneself from mistakes that body, word and mind can commit, vigilance must not be relaxed. (Tibetan saying by Tagpo Lhadje)

A cold wind ushered in the morning. Restlessness had not allowed the white people to rest for long. The trapa arrived that morning at the same time as usual to bring the tsalma breakfast. He found the men and the girl ready to go.

"We've already become real gypsies," whined Reimer as he sipped the tsalma. "It's an incessant jump up - march - march! And the parade ground is the whole globe. If we now run into fine-limbed geishas, pointy-toothed South Sea islanders and some parrot-feathered Indians, then we'll have slipped over the hump of the whole world."

"Then you can get ready for the next stage," joked Recke.

"Where else?"

"To Mars!"

"To the ..." Reimer swallowed and looked in meaningfully. Ortrun Weser acted as if she hadn't understood, the others smiled.

The men and the girl sat for another hour

together in one room after the morning snack. They had expected to be woken up very early in order to have a full day of travelling ahead of them. This arrangement was inevitably a consequence of the large, deserted Tibetan area and the great distances between the monasteries and small settlements. When a trapa did arrive and politely invited the guests to ngön-kyi, things seemed to start flowing.

"So leave the luggage here," Juncker decided. "I would also suggest that Ortrun and Reimer stay behind. We have to be very careful now!"

"That's right!" Gutmann agreed immediately. "If the Ngön-kyi asks - ?"

"We'll take our chances," decided Recke.

The four men destined to visit the abbot now went to Ngön-kyi immediately. They found Padma Dab-yang and the Mongolian Noyon alone. The Mongol officer with the silver horse on his collar and the clay lama were missing. So all decisions had already been made and the visit was merely a formal farewell. The Ngön-kyi sat there as usual in his simple black robe, without the insignia of his dignity that he had displayed the day before.

"It was your wish, O Dorje Lama and Ngön-kyi, to see us again!" said Juncker, speaking for his companions at the same time.

Instead of the thunderbolt sceptre, the abbot once again had the rosary in his hands. The carved beads

rattled softly. "Isn't it my duty to greet the guests of the holy Gom-pa with a farewell?"

"We thank you, O Ngön-kyi, for your care and hospitality. Chenrezi, Ahamstehed mykempa, the all-knowing, will credit the good deeds of the fulfiler of his laws in the book of the great judgement," Juncker replied.

Padma Dab-Yang smiled with satisfaction. "You know the thousand names of the eternal light! Chang choub semspas - as we call the Boddhisatva, will follow your paths with pleasure. Didn't he already enlighten you yesterday and show you the right path?"

"The guidance of Amithaba is inscrutable," Juncker defended. "We're supposed to be travelling today? Is that it?"

"We're going for lunch," said De-pön Tayang Noyon. "We don't want the first day of our journey to be too strenuous. Besides, wouldn't you rather leave the girl in the Gom-pa's care?"

"No," Juncker said firmly. "The girl must stay with us!"

"We have to travel far because we can't get a plane this time. The terrain in the surrounding area is also very unfavourable. It's actually impossible to find a landing site. The short approach routes also have their pitfalls. Holes in the ground, stones and whatever else there is. - Well, as you like," he concluded levelly.

"Your aeroplane has performed a masterly feat in the river sand of the Panjnad," Gutmann objected. "It

lands and takes off almost like the Fieseler storks."

The De-pön did not reply. In his place, the Ngön-kyi continued: "Yesterday evening, the Ton-lama consulted the oracle to find out the near future. A stronger power prevented him from seeing. The lama is very ill and exhausted today. I assume that fate is holding on to the veil because it has meaning. So I can't give you any advice, only good wishes!"

"Thanks again, O Padma Dab-yang! Blessings to you and the Gom-pa!"

The men turned to leave when a shout from De-pön made them pause. "I've brought something for Sahib Reimer!" He reached into the breast pocket of his uniform coat and pulled out a small silk parcel. "There - take it! It's greetings ..."

Juncker picked up the parcel. It was small, not particularly heavy and fit easily into his fist. He looked at the De-pön, but Tayang Noyon looked past him indifferently and spoke softly in Mongolian to the abbot. So the men had no choice but to leave.

On the way to the living quarters, Gutmann approached Juncker. "When we came here recently, we had a far grander reception than this farewell. Even in the smaller branch monasteries of this Gom-pa, the farewell was just as solemn as the welcome. Is this a sinking barometer of an attitude against us?"

"I don't know how to take it myself",

Juncker confessed. "Despite having lived here for a long time, I never get out of surprises. The time-honoured traditions don't always hold. Old ways and new sobriety overlap in the behaviour of the leading figures."

Reimer and the girl had been waiting for their companions. The Linzer stood in the open doorway and stared curiously at them.

"A greeting from the De-pön for you, Reimer!" Juncker stepped into the room and handed over the small silk parcel as he entered. "Was there anything during our absence?"

"Not really. Three Mongols came up the stairs shortly after you left, one looked in at the ajar door and then they left without saying a word." While Reimer was still answering, he opened the small silk parcel. With an exclamation of surprise, he showed the contents: In the centre of the small silk patch lay the coin Boroldai had received the previous evening. Next to it was a single cartridge. On the silk itself, a clumsy hand had drawn a wolf in ink.

"That's cute!" sneered Recke. "What's that?" Reimer told his comrades, who were at Boroldai's. The police asked the visitors who had not been present what the wolf picture and the objects sent were all about.

"It's a bit strange," he concluded, "that he sends the coin that had given him so much pleasure in the first place, and a, haha, a single cartridge"

"You have to really catch the dream wolf with that, otherwise he'll plague you all night long," Recke continued jokingly. "So Boroldai made a report and asked the De-pön to supply a cartridge to arm himself against the terrible Lupus in fabula and the mark, hm, - that seemed to him to be an overpayment for a single cartridge. So there are honest codgers here too."

Frêne had been listening with slightly furrowed brows.

"I don't like this story," he finally said.

"I rather have the feeling that there's a devilry behind it."

"Pah," the Linzer dismissed the objection lightly.

"Boroldai pulled himself out of the noose by compromising. He was probably afraid of subordination and made sure that I was helped against the evil wolf."

"Hm -" was all the Carcassonner said. His expression remained sceptical. "The bad wolf thing is rubbish. I don't trust a Mongolian Noyon and De-pön to have that much humour. It smells rotten ..."

An awkward silence followed. The time until midday dragged on a little. With the trapa, who brought a substantial lunch, the De-pön himself came in for the first time and asked very politely to be ready to leave in an hour. If there was a shortage of clothing, he would be happy to try to help out with customary items from the monastery's stock. He recommended buying long, Tibetan coats



which would provide excellent protection against the dreaded storms and cold winds. He added that the current equipment was inadequate.

Juncker accepted with thanks and the De-pön promised to have six coats in the appropriate sizes sent up immediately. Horses would already be saddled in the courtyard at the agreed time.

"Now the famous technology of our great age is a thing of the past," grumbled Reimer. "Once upon a time there was a mountain navy on horseback, by which they meant a unit that had to go everywhere outside its area of responsibility and training. To land on a shaggy horse's back from the cockpit of a flying gyroscope whizzing through the sky is a precipitous fall in the utilisation of all possibilities."

Frêne disagreed. "This argument, mon camarade, is not entirely accurate. Nature still dictates the limits of technical use and, what's more, you can also find the changed situation sporty and interesting."

"Interesting?" Reimer's counter-question sounded doubtful, "The whole thing is more than enough for me ..."

"Point now!" Gutmann stopped. "Get ready to leave! Luggage all right, yes?" Turning to Ortrun Weser, he said: "Dear child, you keep your hand luggage, we'll take the rest off your hands. All right?"

"All right!" the girl repeated. Her firm tone and the naturalness of her willingness to conform to military discipline,

delighted the men. Juncker and Recke, who had known them for some time now, smiled.

When they entered the Gom-pa courtyard shortly afterwards, eight Mongols were already standing by their horses. They were all wearing uniform blouses, two of them had submachine guns across their chests, the others had carbines hanging over their backs like horsemen. They had provided four packhorses. The Mongolian officers were still missing. Boroldai was not with the team and was not to be seen anywhere else. A number of the trapas and llamas were standing around in the courtyard talking to the Mongols.

A short shout from a Mongolian interrupted the noise. The De-pön and the second officer came out of the house accompanied by the Ngönkyi. This time the abbot again showed all the signs of his dignity. With the high lama cap, he looked taller and sterner, with the sceptre he demonstrated power and prestige. Behind him followed several higher lamas. The clay lama and the old Gyud lama from India were missing.

At a short order from the second officer, the Mongols mounted up. The white men also climbed onto the small mounts in as good a posture as possible, but they revealed their sturdy strength. The girl sat in the same way as the men.

The trapas and llamas in the courtyard immediately formed a lane to allow the procession to ride out freely. The Ngön-kyi raised the Dordsche sign in blessing and murmured a litany to accompany it, which was

accompanied by the scuffing of hooves and the sound of the lamas.

was barely intelligible over the murmur of the assembled people. At the same time, as the cavalcade rode up, the Mongol officers with four more riders at the front and the remaining four at the rear of the procession, the muffled accompaniment of the great ragdong instrument sounded again. The horses neighed, the De-pön's mount at the front reared up, but was restrained by the rider with a strong hand.

"Da-lons!" - The Mongolian order to advance spurred the riders on to gain the open space more quickly. The lamas, with their Grand Abbot in the lead, stayed behind. One half-wing of the outer gate closed behind the last Mongol riders with a groaning creak.

With a long sound that echoed through the valley, the ragdong signalled the ride once again.

As the riders passed the first bend in the path, a tall pole was stuck at the side of the path. A human head was impaled at the top. It was the head of Boroldai ...

Juncker rode up to the De-pön without being hindered. He was serious and asked the Mongol leader emphatically about the meaning of this gruesome sign.

Tayang Noyon smiled thinly. "This is how we punish traitors according to the old laws!"

"Boroldai - a perpetrator?" Juncker was astonished.

The De-pön looked at Juncker full on. "What happens in Western countries when a soldier steals ammunition? ..." Juncker said nothing more and stopped his horse until his companions were level with him. He would have nothing

knew more to say. Asian customs were stricter, tougher. He told his companions half aloud, although none of the Mongols understood German. But they were unable to master the feelings they had for the dead man. Somehow they felt guilty about his fate.

Reimer's face had turned white as lime. He had no idea that his desire from the day before could have such consequences. Nor would it now be possible to clarify how this tragedy had come about. His loud self-reproaches were somewhat softened by his companions, who tried to make him realise that his efforts were only the result of a duty to help himself. The general assumption was that Boroldai must have tried to fulfil Reimer's wish and that he had been caught out. Under pressure, he must have divulged the entire facts of the case before the harsh judgement hit him. Only in this way was it possible for the De-pön to hand back a cartridge with a painted dream wolf and the souvenir. Psychologically, the Mongols had acted wrongly. If there had previously been some sympathy for their endeavours and the previous atmosphere had not exactly been hostile, there was now suddenly a fundamental change.

While the white-faced girl was still swallowing bravely, the men quickly agreed that they would now face their guard at any opportunity.

opportunity no longer had to show any consideration. They now had a free hand to act in any way necessary that offered them the prospect of escape.

The Mongols, who rode on calmly, took no notice of the white men's expressions. The words exchanged in German did not arouse any curiosity in them; at least they knew how to conceal it. They felt themselves masters of the situation.

The further the column travelled away from the Gompa, the more desolate the area became again. The lovely greenery of the long valley gradually became denser, the vegetation more sparse and dwarfed. After two hours of riding, the bare rock, jagged and tangled, rising up from scree slopes, almost completely dominated the surrounding scenery.

Two primitive chortens were the only man-made marks indicating a path. A narrow pass marked the natural path. There was nothing to suggest that it was much travelled. The slopes of the curved route ahead had long since hidden the monastery of the Seven Lotus Blossoms from the view of the riders. Now and again a stone rolled and bumped away under the hooves of the sturdy horses. The wind sang between the dark rock faces.

The column crossed the first crest of the pass and the animals clattered down into a huge stone hollow with a little less effort. The hollow

was not particularly deep and wisps of white-grey cloud seemed to hang high above the heads of those slowly trotting along.

At the end of the depression, a mountain ridge opened up another bend that led into a slightly lower valley. Dirty white patches of snow clung to the steep slopes like speckles. Dry lichen showed a trace of plant growth. Some distance away, stunted small trees grew, signalling the lowering of the landscape.

The De-pön kept leading the procession. He must have ridden this way several times, as he never once stopped to orientate himself. He was a proud and taciturn man who didn't show much affability. His men didn't talk either. Only now and then could a few half-spoken sentences be heard between men riding side by side. The silence among the whites also continued.

Slowly it became cloudy. The De-pön now spurred his animal on a little and led the small caravan sideways into a small ravine, which ended like a dead end after almost a hundred metres. A steep gully then ran upwards, which the horses could no longer climb. A large, roof-like protruding block of rock provided protection from above and seemed suitable as a camp site.

In fact, the De-pön had chosen this familiar spot as a place to camp for the night. The Mongols dismounted and told the whites to follow their example. Two men took care of the

The second Mongol officer came to the second Mongol officer and asked him to feed the horses while the others made preparations to camp for the night and eat a modest meal. The second Mongolian officer approached the whites and handed them some tinned food he had brought with him. Despite their recent experiences, this indicated that they were still being treated favourably.

Ortrun was allocated a particularly sheltered corner by her companions, who formed a semi-circle around her. They were all very glad to have been given the warm coats in the monastery, which now served them well in addition to the blankets. There was no wind in the area, but the very cold mountain air was getting to them.

The Mongols placed a man on guard who took his place at the mouth of the ravine. In this way, he had the horses under control at the same time. The other men of the De-pön camped in an outer semicircle around the white men so that any attempt to move away without authorisation would be noticed immediately.

"There's nothing to want now," Recke grumbled angrily as he overlooked the preparations for the night's camp that had been completed. "These tumbleweeds are well drilled and as clever as professional pirates..."

"Not everyone is as stupid as we are to fall for the scam," Reimer growled back. "The guys have caught us out pretty good and of course they're not going to play the fool afterwards."

"Wait and see!" said Recke grimly.



It was a very unpleasant night. The night chill crept through the blankets, coats and clothes and made those lying in half-slumber curl up like hedgehogs. They dozed restlessly towards the morning in a bent position. A lack of fuel prevented the Mongols from maintaining a night fire.

The next day's journey was almost unpleasant due to a thoroughly inhospitable region. The weather was bad and strong gusts of wind hindered our progress. It wasn't until the day after next that the weather cleared up a little and led us into a lower-lying landscape that was more green again. We also rode round a tiny lake in a semicircle. Not far from the shore, some Tibetan farmers and shepherds lived in very primitive dwellings. The somewhat shy people peered curiously at the passing cavalcade without making any attempt to approach. Even De-pön, who always rode at the front, paid them no attention and the other Mongols maintained their stoic attitude.

During the entire stage of the journey so far, the Europeans were left to their own devices. The Mongolians treated their guest prisoners politely in accordance with their orders and, where possible, made the camp easier and served meals. The De-pön had also asked several times for small requests, but avoided any further conversation.

"A strange chap," Juncker had said when the De-pön once again showed haste to get away from the whites after a few words had been exchanged. "You know

never quite knows what to make of this golden horse colonel. Is he just a superior in command or is he also a man of knowledge? According to the princely title of Noyon, the latter should actually be the case! But he deliberately avoids being recognised as such."

"He will just have instructions or reasons for it," was Recke's simple response. "Whatever his behaviour may be, his wishes and ours do not coincide..."

The other companions had only nodded in response. They had all become very taciturn in the last few days of their journey. The girl was constantly pale despite the sharp mountain air and the brief but strong sunlight. Nevertheless, she showed no signs of weakness, which commanded great respect from the men.

If the men had believed that they would have to continue this arduous journey in the same direction for some time, they had underestimated the will and stubbornness of one of their companions. Since De-pön's cruelty to Boroldai, the youngest of them all, Linzer, had mostly ridden darkly and introverted next to Frêne, who was a keen observer but not a mind-reader. And Reimer was constantly brooding or researching ways of escaping the Mongols' violence. A seemingly hopeless beginning.

On the third evening, the group reached a broad valley floor where a purple dwarf rhododendron grew. A somewhat sparse conifer forest, low but

The view of the forest with its sturdy trees had an energising effect on the white men. The De-pön ordered his men to set up camp here.

Whilst the horses were being shielded, two Mongols began to gather wood for a fire in the immediate vicinity. Reimer, who together with Recke also began to search the neighbourhood for dry branches, was called back by the De-pön. Tayang Noyon told the two men that this work was not suitable for them. He sent out another man in their place.

Whether this was politeness or excessive caution on the part of the de-ponent could not be recognised by those called back. The Mongolian prince's smile and authoritative hand gesture said little. However it was meant, Reimer's resentment continued to grow.

The small horses plucked off swards of grass, one Mongol stayed close to the pack, at the same time securing one of the valley exits. A second Mongol also stood guard, while the others gathered around the fire. They kept some distance from the two Mongolian officers. They camped a short distance away from the fire.

The wood brought on the instructions of the De-pön was enough to maintain a small fire for the whites as well. It burned only a few metres away from the larger fire. Without saying a word, Frêne had taken over the care of the small flame and, with a serious expression, gradually pushed the

gnarled and crackling branches to the tongues of fire.

It was getting dark quickly. The mountain ranges receded into the night shadows, the groups of conifers silhouetted against the sky with their somewhat bizarre branches. The two fires of the camp groups cast red lights around the perimeter, colouring the people and their background with their dancing flames.

While all the Mongols, with the exception of the two guards, were still sitting around the fire and talking quietly at times, the girl was the first to set up camp for the night and curl up in her warm coat and blankets. Juncker, Gutmann and Recke followed her example. Satisfied and grateful, they nodded to Frêne, who continued to feed the fire calmly, while Reimer sat pensively beside him. Both men remained silent.

One by one, the Mongols also rolled into their long coats, using the saddles and packs as head cushions. Several centuries ago, the advance troops of the Great Khan must have camped roughly like this, only somewhat more fantastically dressed up. Tough, Spartanly simple, unpretentious and unquestioningly obedient. And these men, who had now set up camp under the open sky as spartanly as ever, were in no way different from their ancestors who had conquered half the world. Their knowledge may have increased, their vision may have widened, western civilisation may have given them some of its blessings and curses

but her nature and spirit had remained.

The fires grew smaller, the sleepers around them looked like shapeless, hooded lumps. A change of guard had already taken place and the Mongol relievers were crouched with their backs against the trees. The pack of horses stood in the background.

Suddenly it seemed to Reimer as if the flame of his own little fire was growing, the glow getting brighter. Around his forehead, he felt as if an iron clamp was pressing around his head and an alien force was exerting a compulsion on his mind. He struggled to turn his head and saw Frêne gripping his forehead with a wooden, unsteady movement.

Linz tried to grab the Frenchman's arm, but he only managed a brief lift and his fingers trembled. His companion suddenly looked fixedly at the flickering flames and seemed not to have noticed his mate's attempt to reach for him.

Reimer struggled in vain to organise his thoughts. Some force compelled him to turn his head in the same direction Frêne was staring. And what his eyes saw made him doubt his sanity once and for all.

Behind the small fire stood the figure of an old lama whose features bore a strong resemblance to those of the old Gyud lama of the Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms. And it was a very strange figure. It was there and yet indescribably strange. The figure of this

Monk raised his right hand and the wrinkled face radiated reassurance with a sudden thin smile.

Linz turned his head with all the strength of will he barely had left and his eyes searched the guards. They did not move. The guard with the horses turned his back on the camp and the second seemed to be dozing under his tree. But Reimer didn't find this strange. The power holding him in a spell forced his almost mindless eyes back to the strange llama, who had not yet moved from his spot.

The monk's previously raised hand now slid forwards and gestured towards Reimer. An outstretched index finger pointed to the approximate centre of his body, but the man from Linz did not understand the meaning of this hint. Instead, the pressure on his barely functioning mind increased. He thought he heard an urgent voice, but was unable to grasp the meaning. Frêne seemed to feel the same way, but the lama's gesture was not directed at him.

Now the monk's small, hollow black eyes became more compelling, the slits in his eyes narrowed. The previously outstretched hand went under the cowl and, after a brief grope, revealed a small parcel. Once again, the grasping hand pointed to Reimer's body.

A bolt of lightning could not have struck a rotten tree with more impact than a sudden realisation

in Reimer's brain. Suddenly and abruptly he knew what this messenger meant. Of course it had to be a messenger who was carrying out his mission in the manner of the lamas. You almost had to get used to the often seemingly strange behaviour of these people. The gestures and hints meant nothing more than an invitation to dispose of the parcel in the intended form, which the old Gyud-Lama - wasn't it him anyway? - had given in the Gom-pa as a strange gift. When Reimer tried to look more closely, his certainty of finding a complete likeness between the Gyud-Lama and the monk standing behind the fire disappeared again.

Almost as if under orders, he took out the packet of Tuwa-dug, the smoke poison, from his coat pocket. He tried to fiddle around with the strapping, but a now very energetic gesture from the strange guest forced him to stand up and then throw the packet over to the Mongol fire with an abrupt movement. He had aimed well. The piece reached the somewhat collapsed fire, which was slowly running out of wood.

At first, nothing happened. The flames ate away at the casing; slowly licking at first, then a bluish-green tongue danced upwards. At the same time, a brown finger of vengeance slowly became an ever-thickening vapour, which, like a weighty cloud, was unable to rise, breaking out in different directions in a sudden breeze of air

but always seemed bound to her hearth. Like a fallen cloud, the wide clusters of vapour crawled along the ground, dissolving into several such clouds, brushing over the sleepers lying around the fire. A pungent, almost acrid odour with a heavy sweetness drifted over to the second fire.

Reimer now slowly approached the lama, but he avoided a closer encounter. The Linzer moved his lips as if he wanted to address the monk, but the latter put a finger to his lips in a warning gesture. And when Reimer took two more steps forwards, he reached into the void. The figure of the messenger turned to mist and disappeared quickly and spookily. As if swallowed up by the expanding vapours.

Frêne was now standing next to Reimer. Both men, wide awake, watched as some of the Mongols moved restlessly. One of the sleepers by the smouldering fire sighed audibly and deeply. Even the heavily hooded figure of De-pön moved restlessly. The eyes of the observers continued to wander to the guards. These, too, although from the area of the smoke, showed no further movement. Their attention was focussed outwards.

Without speaking, Reimer and Frêne had come to an understanding. While the former kept the posts under observation and occasionally glanced at the restlessly sleeping Mongols, the Carcassonian had slowly lowered himself to the ground and



crawled from one companion to the other to wake them all carefully and without making a fuss. It took them a while before they understood the awakener's somewhat awkward signalling not to make a noise and to roll a little further away. Frêne made sure that none of the barely awakened companions remained in the area of the smoke from the other fire. The heavy odour was clearly perceptible and alarming.

In the meantime, Reimer had taken out a handkerchief, then reached for his nearby canteen and soaked the cloth with the clear water from the mountain stream, which he had filled only the day before. Then he held the wet cloth in front of his mouth and nose in the tried and tested manner of smoke protection and hurried over to the Mongols, snatching a rifle lying next to him from the nearest one. With this booty in his hands, he hurried back out of the area of the now slowly thinning swathes.

The smoke poison must have been extremely powerful. Reimer's eyes were watering profusely and the odour lingered on his clothes despite the lightning visit. And nobody had moved.

When the Linzer stood again in front of the smaller fire, which was now going out, the other companions had gathered in the background further back and were watching their comrade's actions with great interest. They remained in a waiting position after the Linzer had handed the rifle to the Carcassonner and turned his head to the side.

had pointed in the direction of one of the guards. Frêne understood and, scurrying silently, he approached the sentry dozing in the tree. The man was asleep.

Frêne nudged the sentry with the barrel of his rifle. The latter jerked up and stared round with eyes widening in surprise. The Carcassonner had pushed the weapon next to him aside with his foot. He slowly raised his hands.

"Allons!" Frêne ordered and pointed to the camp. The Mongol didn't understand French, but was immediately aware of the unmistakable order. Obediently he set off.

Striding towards the two fires, Frêne and his prisoner heard the surprise cry of "A-kha-kha" from the opposite side of the camp. This was immediately followed by laughter and an angry shout from Reimer. Slowly, two figures emerged from the distant darkness and also approached.

The second sentry was walking behind the Linzer and had his rifle aimed at him. Reimer himself had his pistol hanging down in his hand. He walked on almost mechanically, while the sentry stopped halfway, when he saw his companion approaching from the other side with his hands raised, and behind him the tall Frenchman, who was now armed. Not content with this, he noticed the other white men standing upright and also pointing weapons at him.

The Mongolian stopped hesitantly. Recke called Reimer

"What's wrong with you? Was the yellow guard faster than you?"

Reimer replied in the negative. "I'm probably not that stupid again, you poison fang! But when I pointed my pistol at him, the bloke grinned cheekily in my face. White Sahib can throw the little thing in the horse manure, he said. He hasn't got any ammunition in it after all. And he laughed so hard that you could see the back of his vestigial wisdom teeth."

"Well, he lost his laugh quickly enough," Recke replied dryly. The Linzer had now arrived next to his friend and turned to look at his adversary. The Mongolian was still standing as if nailed to the spot where he had heard the white man's call. His eyes swept over the lumps of his lying companions, who were not moving, although they must have been awakened by the white man's loud talking.

Only now did the tall figure of De-pön move. He straightened up with some difficulty, leaning on both hands, and saw his prisoners in possession of weapons. A hoarse sound came from his throat.

Juncker strode towards the Mongolian officer. "Let your hand rest, colonel! If you r e a c h for a weapon, I'll have to shoot. I would regret that very much." He had previously picked up a submachine gun, which he waved threateningly.

The De-pön tried to get up, but fell back, dazed. "Noksoi!" he cursed in Mongolian.

"Dog! ..."

Suddenly Juncker also swayed a little. Gutmann, who was following the whole scene attentively with the rest of his companions, noticed the beginning of the staggering and jumped after Juncker, pulling him out of the area of the still-acting swathes. A shot was fired as he looked on.

Frêne had fired.

The Carcassonner had noticed how the De-pön used the interlude to free his pistol. The Mongol's determined expression forced him to fire a warning shot over his head. Tayang Noyon dropped the half-drawn weapon. He cursed grimly. He must have a rusty nature that made him far more resistant to the polluted air than his compatriots were.

The sound of the shot had also roused some of the stunned sleepers. The second Mongol officer, who was lying close to the De-pön, was even wide awake, but just as powerless in the face of the new situation as his higher-ranking companion. Some of the Mongols lying directly around the fire rose to their feet, but most of them fell back again with a groan. Two of the men vomited.

"It's good that we took the weapons in a coup d'état," Gutmann said to his companions. "The effect didn't last long or was only partially successful. Go back even further, I'm already feeling sick as a dog myself!"

Reimer put the wet handkerchief over his mouth and nose again and hurried to the deputy, taking the pistol from him. At the same time he disarmed the second officer. He hung his submachine gun round his neck and then collected four more firearms from the groaning and half-awake Mongols. Only now were they completely without weapons and no longer able to defend themselves. He also staggered the last few steps away from the smouldering fire.

"Put your rifle down!" Recke ordered the second guard, who was still standing there and had returned with Reimer. But he didn't understand.

Recke gathered together his meagre knowledge of Tibetan. "Tschön-tscha - weapon!" A dismissive gesture emphasised the word. The Mongol shook his head. He must have understood, because all these men also spoke the local language. Nevertheless, he feigned ignorance.

Completely unexpectedly for everyone, the girl approached the man fearlessly. "Give me the gun," she told him.

The Mongolian replied in the negative. When the girl reached for his rifle, he pressed it to his chest. At the same time, he took a step back.

From the De-pön square came an encouraging "Dzá, dzá! ..." The Mongol quickly shouted back a few sentences, then made a sudden leap back in the direction in which the girl was offering cover. The nearby trees took him under their protection before the men threatening him could even reach their position.

could switch to have a clear shooting lane. But Gutmann had waved them off. "Let him go! We'll be rid of him for the next twenty minutes and we'll have to be out of here by then anyway!"

Some of the Mongols were now cowering and staring. A third began to vomit. The smoke poison had undoubtedly not had its full effect, but it had been enough to cause devastating nausea. The Mongols were now all more or less awake, but severely dazed. Only De-pön was already on his feet, still cursing incessantly. He had realised that his orders could not be obeyed.

The guard brought in by Frêne, now also unarmed, joined Tayang Noyon to support him. The latter continued to slobber: "Tschono saing noksoido barigdana! - Do you white men know what that means? - Wolves are caught by good dogs!"

Juncker turned to him: "Every proverb is truth, Tayang Noyon! Didn't you call us dogs before? Well, then you are the trapped wolves ..."

The De-pön clenched his fists, but refrained from replying. The white officer's quick-wittedness had made him feel annoyed.

"Get ready!" Juncker's sharp commanding tone now got things moving, "We don't have time for long deliberations, we have a chance to seize. Pick up the luggage and get to the horses!"

Reimer kept the Mongols at bay with a submachine gun as a precaution, while the other companions and the girl immediately obeyed Juncker's order. With some difficulty, they selected the horses they were already used to saddling from the small herd, the pack animals were not particularly skilfully loaded with the luggage and the remaining animals were tied with a draw rope. The prudent Frêne, who already knew the rations thanks to his observations, brought another bag of tinned food, followed by angry looks from the Mongols.

When the caravan rode up, Reimer still remained in place in order to secure a small lead for those riding away and thus avoid further incidents with Mongolians hurrying behind, especially with the battle-ready De-pön. Frêne also stayed behind, already mounted, and held the Linzer's mount ready to mount on the reins.

When the clattering of the caravan's hooves could barely be heard in the distance, Frêne called his companion back. With quick movements, Reimer hurried to his animal, swung himself up awkwardly and both men trotted hurriedly after those who had already disappeared. A farewell shot rang out behind them, but it missed. It was undoubtedly the second guard, who must have been lurking nearby and had already gone into action.

A few angry exclamations were the last thing the two riders heard. They trotted off into the night to rejoin their companions. In ten

They reached it in a few minutes and then set off together at a somewhat brisk pace out of the long valley.

Little by little, the low clumps of trees receded from the path and made way for a very sparse meadow. The night lay brightly over the area and the riders could even easily make out their features. They quickly agreed to ride through the rest of the night in order to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the Mongols.

Gutmann and Juncker halted briefly from the front during the ride and awaited Reimer and Frêne, who brought up the rear. Recke, who led the free paddock on a lead, rode on unperturbed, followed by the girl.

"What was the whole thing like?" Juncker asked the rearguard riders. "Frêne woke us up and then everything else happened terribly quickly."

"If I tell you, you'll probably give me marching orders to the nearest lunatic doctor," grumbled the man from Linz. "I haven't really digested it myself yet ..."

"We've already digested a few oddities," Juncker said reassuringly. "What we already have behind us ..."

"... is plenty enough," Reimer interjected caustically. But he immediately relented and added: "No offence, comrades, but my nerves aren't thicker than ropes either. And if you have hallucinations on top of that, then it becomes



slowly becoming alarming."

"I must say, it really was a very strange thing, vraitment!" Frêne intervened.

"I witnessed what Reimer has to say, because I was sitting next to him."

"You're still beating about the bush," Juncker urged. "Of course, you used the anaesthetic powder that was initially deemed unbelievable. Well, we've now been proven wrong!"

"No, it wasn't just that," said the man from Linz. "I might not even have realised the powder chance that evening. It was simply that a llama suddenly stood in front of me and Frêne - yes, a llama! - and this guy stared at us both so strangely that we almost forgot our own thoughts. We couldn't understand him, but his gestures were clear enough. He must have said: 'Hey, you lamb's tails, what are you doing here? By the pot-bellied Buddha, why don't you do something!' - He then suddenly had a small parcel in his hand and told us to throw the thing in our possession into the Mongolian fire. I had the feeling that I had to do it whether I wanted to or not. And afterwards I approached the old lama, stretched out my hand, but reached for nothing. He just wasn't there any more!" - He paused for a moment, then shouted excitedly: "Hey - laugh at me already! - Laugh at me!"

"Calm down, Reimer!" Juncker said. "There really is

nothing to laugh about. I'm even happy to certify that you must have experienced it the way you describe it. And what happened afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Yes, that went quickly. But what's the point? You've seen and experienced everything else for yourself!"

The companions nodded. After a short pause for reflection, Juncker said: "I have experienced or learnt all sorts of strange things in my long presence in the Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms. So I am not surprised by what I have just heard. It is believable."

"Then you believe in it more than I do," Reimer said with surprise.

"Listen," Juncker explained. "I was almost tempted to assume that it was the apparition of a Trongjug. These Trongjug are an image of people whose bodies are spiritually and mentally possessed by others. According to the Phowa texts of the Tibetan secret teachings, magic lamas who practise yoga and magic can leave their own body and take possession of someone else's." The speaker moved his hand briefly when he noticed Frêne and Reimer's astonishment. "It is an extremely dangerous beginning to transfer a consciousness into a subtle, astral body. If by any event or shock the magnetic connection between two bodies is severed or broken, the lama in question may

no longer return to his own empty, material body. The result is insanity or death. According to Tibetan teachings and experience, there is also the danger that another human or non-human being will take possession of the empty body. I learnt that there are lamas who are even able to enter the body of the recently deceased and reawaken it when they take possession of it. But the described dissolution of the body itself speaks against the assumption that the appearance of the old lama could be a Trongjug."

"And if it had been such a Trongjug, what would have been the purpose of the experiment of a transfer of consciousness?" asked Frêne.

"Oh, that's easy to explain," Juncker replied.

"The old Gyud-Lama from the Gom-pa could neither come with us nor catch up with us. By transferring his consciousness into a distant body, i.e. into a body close to us, he would have created the recipient of his wishes, or used the foreign body for his purposes."

"And since it wasn't a Trongjug -?" Reimer's question betrayed great tension.

"It can therefore be assumed that we are dealing with an even more difficult manifestation of these secret arts. It would then have to be the transmigration of one's own astral body, which can be materialised at any distance at certain points in order to be transported to

fulfilment of the tasks undertaken to dematerialise again and return to the solid body."

"That's witchcraft!" Reimer exclaimed.

"In European terms - yes!"

"Hence the similarity ..."

"What do you mean?" asked Juncker.

"The warlock had the features of the Gyud-Lama!"

"Then the second assumption will probably be correct." After a moment's reflection, Juncker continued: "Here in Europe, charlatans gaze into crystal balls and tell fairy tales in an evocative tone, which they believe to be clairvoyant. A Tibetan Gyud Lama would only smile indulgently at this. This old man from the Gom-pa must surely have had a second sight to find out when he had to appear to show his good will for a promised help. I myself also experienced in the Gom-pa that the Ton-Lama, the confidant of Ngön-kyi, sent his consciousness on a journey and thus demonstrated to us the art of retrospective knowledge. I think we have a lot to thank the old Gyud-Lama for!"

The Linzer let out an audible sigh of relief. "So it wasn't a hallucination after all

..."

"Oh yes - a very real one, in fact!" It was Gutmann who laughed softly at his words. "Because it was just an appearance!"

Frêne made a serious objection: "If in this

If friends of ours have such abilities or powers, then we also have to fear our enemies!"

"That's for sure," Juncker admitted. "I can't say how supernatural forces can be used against us, but I believe I can assume that such dangers will diminish with increasing distance from the radiation points. We can also hope that counter-forces from our benevolent helper, at least from the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms, will disrupt or block such plans."

"That would mean that the Gyud Lama was more powerful than the Ton Lama and a confidant of Ngönkyi?" Frêne said.

"Why not? The Ton Lama may have been the more skilful in the monastery intrigues and thus secured the position next to the Grand Abbot. But the Gyud Lama may still be the greater master of Tibetan practices. And it would certainly be a pleasure for him to be able to outplay his rival with his skills."

"Perhaps the Gyud-Lama only intervened on our behalf to play a trick on the Ton-Lama out of competitive jealousy or a desire to play a game," said Frêne.

"Whether out of sympathy for us, or whether we were just a welcome object for secret arts - it was for our benefit," Gutmann replied.

Reimer's horse stumbled. "Heda, you mare!" He tore at

and grumbled on: "I wish we could also take our thoughts for a walk. Then we could at least get one of those phenomenal flying discs that our dear Juncker used to get us out of the Eskimo spell ..."

"Yes, if -" Juncker said, stretching. "If we had such a machine here now, we would be free of all worries. Then all the rulers of the secret empires of this continent could scratch our backs"

"You could give us more than that," Reimer continued in a soldierly manner.

The riders had now reached the end of the valley and could see a large area in front of them. Bathed in the mild light of the moon, dark streaks of shadow travelled across it, coming from the banks of clouds passing in front of the silver sphere. The caravan stopped.

The whole group deliberated. They all realised that this was the first point that would make any pursuit more difficult. Three main directions lay open before them in good night visibility.

After quick deliberation, the men agreed on Recke's suggestion to keep the least conjectured northern direction, as this contradicted all logical reasoning due to the vastness of the area. On both sides of this direction, mountain slopes pushed in again, covering and promising protection. These two sides would therefore be looked for first.

The horses travelled almost silently across the grassy

Steppe onwards. The train had spread out a little so as not to leave too wide a trail.

As it slowly became pale and the silvery glow gave way to a dull grey, the train had crossed the plain and reached the broad foothills of a new mountain range. As the horses, who had been deprived of their night's rest, were already hanging their heads and the riders were also feeling the strain of sitting in the saddle for so long, they stopped. A wide belt of medium-high undergrowth was enough to hide those camped in its thicket from the view of passing people.

"The first night of freedom since the end of the war," murmured Recke as he curled up in his long Tibetan coat. "And yet: the Mongolian interlude was more bearable than if we had remained in the hands of the Soviets ..."

"It was far more bearable, but also very strange," confirmed the neighbouring Juncker, who had volunteered to take the first watch. "We even have to be grateful to the Mongols and, despite the constraints of the circumstances, we left almost ungratefully. When I think of our problem child Ortrun, what fate she was spared, the llama in the Bohemian Forest, the yellow officers ..."

Recke leaned on his elbows. "Well, the llama back then - that was another oddity. Just like a few hours ago! - Hm." He let himself fall backwards and closed his eyes. Quieting down, he said: "So many things are strange. The whole life ... The whirlpool

has a deep undertow and once it has caught hold of you, you have plenty to do to avoid being swept away. Duty and destination is the name of the little ship that narrowly avoids the whirlpool or lets you die a manly death. Here - the already dimly shimmering stars above us, above this Asian expanse, these are the many little dots of unattainable hopes, the end points of unquenchable longings, beckoning and, despite their apparent standstill, drifting away in infinite space. One should ..."

"You should sleep," Juncker warned quietly. "It's dangerous to dream with your eyes open. Just as the stars move, a path leads us somewhere ..."

"You're right." Recke rolled sideways and buried his head in the crook of his arm. "You can't say good night now - it's getting grey ..."

Restlessness and cold had soon encouraged the sleepers again after a few hours of rest. After a brief consultation, the men decided to keep mainly to the west in order to reach either the Indus Valley or Kashmir in a sweeping arc. Once out of the immediate danger zone, the rest would follow. The superfluous horses were to be exchanged for food en route and any contact with the locals was to be avoided over the next few days.

The horses were made ready, the men and the girl mounted and the caravan followed at a short distance behind Juncker's and Gutmann's lead.



The path runs along the edge of the undergrowth in a north-westerly direction.

After a while, when a small monastery became visible on the hillside behind the undergrowth, the riders dismounted and pulled the horses behind them by the reins so as not to be seen from above. Despite the inhospitable and deserted nature of this part of the country, caution had to be exercised. Pilgrims or nomads could also appear anywhere.

The weather was good that day. The terrain was not overly difficult and so the small group managed a satisfactory stretch of the trail that day.

The next day they rode round another small lake, the water level of which was only slightly moving. Two nomadic families were grazing here with a few yaks on the sparse pasture. There was also a wandering llama among them. The group of riders and their packhorses passed quite close by, but without touching them. As long as the llama soon set off in the opposite direction, the Mongols would know the direction the refugees were travelling in a few days' time. Juncker therefore led the train south-westwards, only to turn north-westwards again later.

Over the next few days, the wild character of the landscape changed little, but there were more signs of human settlements. Every now and then small monasteries appeared, in between stood chortens as signposts and devotional stations, some-

times, colourful ragged pennants fluttered lazily on gnarled poles in the breeze of the valleys. A troop of nomads and a few wandering llamas were the only people the riders encountered.

They had just been travelling for a week when, towards evening, they heard a slowly swelling hum from the air. The riders jumped off in a flash and drove the horses into a nearby group of bushes. Looking out, they noticed an aeroplane flying past to the south, keeping fairly low and even circling at one point. The strange karbau horns on the cockpit could be seen in the diagonal turn. It was therefore a Mongolian aircraft that had already been deployed on a search flight.

"But they were alerted relatively quickly," said Frêne.

"A feat," Juncker replied. "The Mongols, or at least some of them, sensibly returned to the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms and sent a radio message to the nearest command centre."

"From the Gom-pa?" Reimer asked, somewhat puzzled.

"Of course! The Ngön-kyi has a receiving and transmitting station?"

"Hm - then I'm not surprised if they often seem better informed here today than some Europeans through their newspapers ..."

After a few minutes, the aircraft had disappeared. Nevertheless, the men decided to return to the

The plan was to remain in place, as the possibility was open that the machine would return along the same route, this time a little further north, and discover the riders. The rest was to be made up for by setting off early at dawn.

During the evening meal, the men continued their discussions and decided not only to set off very early, but also to camp at natural shelters during the day in the late morning hours and only move on again as dusk began to fall. Depending on the terrain and the night weather, a night ride was to be maintained. This precautionary measure was to apply for the next three or four days, regardless of the fact that it slowed down the pace of progress considerably.

The next day it turned out that this measure was correct. This time a Mongolian aircraft appeared in the sky at midday, flying quite close and again very low in its search. However, it did not return over the same route that day.

"It's strange," said Reimer after setting off in the twilight of the evening, "that they are now using flying machines to search for us, but that they didn't send one to pick us up."

"It will have causes that we can't fathom," Juncker replied. "Incidentally, we don't even know whether they haven't already found one on the way."

had prepared a pick-up station. It could just as well have been the case that some Mongols came to such a pick-up point instead of the Gom-pa and raised the alarm from there."

"Isn't it superfluous to make such considerations now?" Recke interjected. "Our only concern should be that the air hornets don't find us and that we get out of this witch's land in one piece!"

"Who wouldn't have this worry," Reimer admitted openly.

"There you go!" Recke snapped two fingers at head height, as if saluting an imaginary. Cap peak.

After another three days, no more aeroplanes had appeared. Against all calculations, the riders and their animals had travelled a considerable distance further. But none of them, not even the girl, was able to suppress a look of suffering when they dismounted or mounted their horses.

With some caution, the small caravan now moved on quite briskly during the day. Small encounters brought nothing new. In a small village that was slowly ridden through, a local headman planted himself in the way and politely asked for papers. However, communication was very poor and deliberately misunderstood, so the riders left the somewhat bewildered Tibetan behind.

"A-tsi! - Tschiling-ki ..." they heard as they rode away the

man and a number of the villagers who had joined him clamour behind him. "Ho - Europeans! ..."

"I wouldn't be surprised if the wider area soon realised that white men had ridden through here," Gutmann said somewhat angrily. "A diversions - even if it had taken half a day - would almost have been better!"

"Only to come across another village or nomads," Juncker dismissed Gutmann's objection. "Now it should be more about speed than anything else!"

"What does speed mean? Fast or slow, as long as we are on Tibetan territory, the Mongols will have us by the scruff of the neck either way if they take us out in the airspace they control. Our misfortune need not be extraordinary if one of the encounters with the locals contributes to our discovery." Gutmann's voice was calm but serious.

Another day later, the riders came across the primitive dwelling of a Dubtób, a saint, on the slope of a small valley. Not far from his seemingly dilapidated hut, a large stone pyramid had been piled up and a gnarled pole carried some faded and worn cloth pennants. Another one of the many villages that characterise the country ...

The noise of the riders attracted the occupant of the house to the doorway. It was a man of medium height, very poorly dressed, but, as you c o u l d see as you approached, with very clever eyes and a very good sense of humour.

internalised features. Nothing about him betrayed even a trace of surprise, everything was calm and equanimity.

Juncker signalled to those following him to stop, then dismounted and walked a few paces towards the old man, greeting him in the customary manner.

"Ons-pa legso!" was the Dubtób's native greeting. He crossed his arms in front of his chest and waited until the stranger stopped.

"Dél-wa dschi yod? - What do you want?"

Juncker tried his meagre knowledge of the language and explained to the saint that they were travelling in a hurry. He asked about the nearest watering place and the nature of the surrounding area. He also asked for clarification of the newly revealed, huge mountain ranges.

"K'yod su yin - who are you - you are strangers? ..." His eyes enquired.

"You're right," Juncker said without mockery. "And we hardly speak the language of this country. I can't express myself clearly and in detail. But again: where is the nearest water and where do the paths lead everywhere here?"

The Dubtób pointed to a nearby cut in the ground about a hundred metres from the hut.

"Thungyaki tschu - drinking water?" He waited until Juncker had translated and suddenly an astonished expression appeared on his face. "You don't speak English?"

"How do you know that?" was Juncker's counter-question.

"I speak English," came out of the saint's mouth

back. He spoke in a somewhat nasal, sing-song tone and repeated the previous question about nationality in the same language.

"Germans - Germans!"

Dubtób's eyes grew wide. His brows lifted and his face almost resembled that of an astonished child in its change of expression. Even his thin-lipped mouth was half-open. Slowly he repeated: "Germans?"

"Yes, Germans," Juncker patiently confirmed once again.

"I have nothing to offer you," said the Dubtób meekly. "I am poor. But if you're hungry, some sour yak milk and cheese ..."

"You're very hospitable," Juncker smiled. "Is that because we're Germans?"

"Chenrezi - Buddha Amithaba is love and the great light of brotherhood among men! It is his commandments to live hospitably and with kindness with all that lives and breathes his breath into the world of this apparent being. And it is doubly easy for me to be able to obey his commandments for people who belong to a great and brave nation. I have heard that the Germans have been fighting with the Japanese against the whole world for some years now. Even if the world does not live by Chenrezi's laws, I cannot but respect a people like the Germans. Buddha Avalokitesvara, the Lord of all the world and the One who looks down everywhere, must be very pleased that you are here after the great persecution in the world of the

dark spirit on the path of a great quest!"

"The enlightenment of peace speaks from you," Juncker said politely, grateful for the friendly welcome. "If you don't mind, we'll rest at the watering hole and get some more of this precious water."

"It's not my country," the saint defended. "Even the nearby spring is a tiny part of the great whole that we call our world. Everything we see here around us as nature is a tiny thing, a very small part of the great illusory world into which we are born again and again until we ourselves have gained the maturity and internalisation to enter the eternal light ourselves. So do as you wish!"

While Gutmann joined Juncker, the others led the horses to the nearby hollow, where a small spring gushed through a narrow bed and flowed crystal clear over the small boulders. Recke and Reimer unsaddled the animals, let them graze freely after the drinking trough and joined Ortrun and Frêne, who had prepared a suitable resting place under the sheltering canopy of some low trees.

In the meantime, the saint had given the two men who had stayed behind two seating stones in front of his house and took a seat on one of them himself.

"You asked earlier where the paths lead from here," he continued. "Look at these two high chains that border the horizons at a great distance! - They are



the chains of the Karakor Range and the Kwen Lung Mountains, which open the way to the north-west within their pincers. If you keep to the south-west, you can reach Kashmir. But it is a tedious way because you have to cross passes. And you came from the east, didn't you?" His eyes gleamed in mute question.

"You also saw that correctly," Juncker admitted again.

"And we don't want to go back, because not everywhere can one find as much hospitality as with you, O Dubtób!"

The saint nodded profoundly and was silent for a while. Nothing revealed what was going on behind his forehead. Then he said abruptly: "You did not come to this land willingly and it is driving you to leave it quickly. I know what forces intersect on the roof of the world and" the Dubtób showed a knowing smile as he spoke, "it must be that you have escaped from the clutches of such a power in a strange way. But rest assured, I myself do not serve any power that pursues earthly goals and calls for such in Chenrezi's name. Is it not the case all over the world that people want to turn the deities into human beings instead of striving for the divine as human beings? It is the same in our country as elsewhere in the world, where people want to rule in the name of God or the gods and abuse the name of the Eternal. And it is the disease of Western world religion that it is not able to approach its God with its apparent realisations, but with increasing words

more and more distant from it. As the sage Kuntu Sangpo said: "Since the beginning of time, all beings have erred because they did not know the place of origin, dominated by the darkness of unconscious being, t h e cause of error, ignorance! See, Sahibs, this ignorance and the great errors are also the blinds that close the eyes of the forces in this part of the world of sensual desire - Kamaloka - and keep them away from Mâhayâna, the greater path, whose symbol among the Aryan Indians is the sun-ship! And so I live here apart, awaiting a next life after a previous one, which is to bring me back to the purity of the lotus and to Nirvâna. I only serve seclusion and you can stay here without worry and in peace as long as restlessness does not drive you further!"

"It is as you say," Juncker nodded. "Errors lead to the desires of a false conception of existence and from these desires grows the will to power, which is not helped by God but by demons. It is not a Dêvayana, not a path of the gods, but a pull of the demonic that pulls downwards, that harbours the falling within itself. For nowhere is it the power to do good, but the power of sensual domination. And we don't want to be servants of such forces either, but to be able to learn our lessons from the mistakes of our environment and live according to what we learn."

"The West has few chêlas, few disciples who are able to come closer to the eternal light. But you

you are wise and of good will, I would almost like to be your guru, your master and teach you the wisdom of the Eternal ..."

"You are very kind," muttered Juncker. "But listen, O Dubtób, the illusory world of your conception is also great and this is not our world. But everywhere the thoughts of good will be able to meet and here too our souls will be able to reveal themselves like books of pure knowledge. We hear your words and they sound like pure bells from somewhere!"

The saint had his hands on his knees and was looking at his fingertips.

"We are all subject to the wheel of karma. It brought us to the being in which we live and the road ahead leads somewhere. And you have an arduous path ahead of you, despite Chenrezi's grace leading you this far ..."

"It's like you say," Gutmann confessed with a smile. "Our path is truly difficult and it leads somewhere. In fact, we don't yet know where it will end ..."

Juncker also looked strangely melancholy now. "Somewhere ..."

Oltan Tsewang, the guru and saint, had expertly examined the mounts and recommended that the guests rest for one or two days. As he had also offered them a place to stay in his small dwelling in the event of bad weather, otherwise it would have been too late.

to camp near the spring, where they seemed to be well protected from view, the whites had agreed after some initial hesitation.

In the course of a further, longer conversation, it emerged that Dubtób was a well-travelled man by local standards. He knew Mongolia and had also visited the residence of the Hutukhtu in Ulan Bator, the city of the Red Riders, where the rival Red Church against Lhasa had its headquarters and which was vegetating under Soviet suzerainty. He had been to the monasteries of Kumbum, where the baten with the strange leaves bearing Buddha slogans grew, and to Shigatse. He had taken part in processions in Lhasa and had also travelled through the empty areas of Turan. He therefore knew the entire inner-Asian expanse. He had acquired his knowledge of English in Kashmir.

In agreement with Gutmann, Juncker had described the escape from Mongolian captivity to Dubtób, after the latter had already dropped hints of such suspicions. Oltan Tsewang now expressed the opinion that the pursuers had probably ceased their hitherto unsuccessful search in the country and were shifting all their vigilance to the border crossings.

An almost cheerful expression crossed Dubtób's face when the two guests told him about the Gyud-Lama's strange support. "You white people have few explanations for these things",

he grunted with the corners of his mouth pulled up. "In general opinions, you only speak of inexplicable magic, but in more thorough endeavours you only rarely come to the explanations of telekinesis, a psychically induced paranormal distant movement, a splitting of the personality into a double ego and psychic automatisms. The explanations for telepathy, tele-dynamics and similar concepts are also not unfamiliar to you, but only a few are able to master them as our Gyud- and Ton-Lamas can. Without the appropriate levels of yoga, these forces cannot be grasped and controlled."

Juncker and Gutmann looked at each other in astonishment. The former said: "How, O Dubtób, do you know the terms of Western science? Until now, we have only heard talk of tautram spells and yoga powers, which were too general and meaningless unless they were accompanied by the allure of the strange and mysterious..."

Oltan Tsewang chuckled. "Didn't I already tell you that I've travelled far and wide? In the Tang La Mountains in central Tibet, I met a strange lama who was very old and explained Western terms to me. His face was all wrinkles, so I could not immediately recognise that he came from the West and had been enlightened by Chenrezi while travelling through our country. So he remained as the chéla of a famous guru, only to later become one himself. He walked

on the path to the light and no longer knew where he had come from." The Dubtób chuckled again. "At least that's what he claimed ..."

"You yourself are a guru and a saint," said Juncker. "So you are also the master of these powers?"

"I don't need it," Oltan Tsewang evaded. "All too many who master white magic - as you call it - then fall prey to the power of black magic. Demons take possession of their souls and karma forces them into an inescapable darkness. These dangers are the fruits of monastic intrigues and power struggles. Only those who serve the pure teaching in solitude and seclusion from the world and in the contemplation of the Tsampa - the hermit - in the five colours of Karma, Maya, Manas, Dharma and Dhyana Loka - that is the law of destiny, the world of appearances, the inner world, Once you have recognised the five wings of the world building in the five colours of the law of destiny, the world of appearance, the inner world, the principle of consciousness and the world of reality as the world of meditation, you will be able to create the magical bond between the visible, otherworldly sphere and the invisible, inner and supramundane spheres and turn your earthly body into the most perfect possible instrument of yoga and pure knowledge. In this way, one is removed from the demonic and petty aspects of the present illusory world."

"And yet this world of nature that you call an illusory world is a living world into which we were born by fate in order to fulfil our existence, be it in the

Good or bad," Juncker said cautiously.

"Everything is a test, whether here or elsewhere," returned Oltan Tsewang.

"I think that the explanations of such views do not always have to be the same," Juncker continued.

"Those who see life as a test for the hereafter deny the meaning of existence in this world. Is it not the duty to serve that could be karma? ..."

"What duties do you mean, Sahib?"

"The duty of a decent life and the duty in a community to which one belongs by nature and according to its laws!"

The Dubtób remained silent. After a while he said: "There may be truths, but they are not on the way to Chenrezi Amithaba. The great light from the east ..."

"... is the light above the roof of the world," Juncker continued, interrupting Dubtób. "But the light over our country comes from the north, from the midnight mountain of ancient myths ..."

Oltan Tsewang raised both hands. "You said Midnight Mountain, O Sahib! We too know a light from Mount Meru, which lies somewhere in the north, in a mystical darkness, far from Shambala beyond the Gobi. No one has seen Meru, but its warning weighs on us, yet we are no longer able to hear its voice properly. If, white Sahibs, your Midnight Mountain is also our Meru and you are closer to it, then you are not as far away from the primordial knowledge as people everywhere else. Many grope

in the fog for the primal ground, the root. Hardly anyone is able to penetrate back to the goal; the mists of long periods of time seem almost impenetrable, especially for those who are burdened with the ballast of false knowledge that grows like weeds. For you must know, Sahibs, whoever finds his way to the Midnight Mountain or comes from there, the gate to the future is no longer closed to him."

"We know that, Oltan Tsewang! We come from the north, where the mythical mountain of the Midnight Land is. You may or may not believe it." Juncker raised his hands in a final gesture.

Dubtób's gaze darkened and became almost piercing. He scrutinised the two men sitting opposite him and then sank into a brief reflection. After a while, he said softly:

"It's good, Sahibs. I believe you. Chenrezi, the all-seeing mercy, must also be with you, otherwise you would hardly be sitting here before me in this land. His all-seeing eyes seem to protect you and lead you to freedom."

"You yourself are all-seeing and all-knowing," Juncker said politely.

Oltan Tsewang defended himself. "It is the Maya in me that gives my eye the images by which I judge."

"Why is it that you have no chélas around you, wise guru?"

The saint smiled thinly. "I lose a lot of time with the disciple initiations for the minor mysteries. I said



not that I want to be alone and be a tsamspa, a hermit?"

"Do you know Mahasiddha Lugtog?" Gutmann asked in between.

The Dubtób pulled up. "How do you know that name, Sahib?"

"He sent a message to a gathering in the realm of midnight. We were also there at the time!"

Shy astonishment was painted on the saint's features. "Then you must be one of those men whose secrets the winds whisper softly. You are the beginning of a new power that is both hoped for and feared. If I may advise you, avoid the Mahasiddha, the Great Sage. He is wise and will show you friendship, but it is dangerous. Go your way when you and your animals are strengthened and do not ask for the great Chohan. You could end up like the Ngönkyi of the Gom-pa of the Seven Lotus Blossoms you told me about."

"Is the Mahasiddha Lugtog a Chohan, a member of the secret, leading brotherhood of Shambala?"

"They say so," Oltan Tsewang evaded.

"You've been to Shigatse, haven't you?" asked Juncker. "Isn't that the seat of the Maha Chohan, the Supreme Being, above whom only the Living Buddha stands?"

"Sahib, you know a lot," the hermit stammered in surprise. "You know the secrets of the Lord

of the world ..."

"Of course," Juncker trumped, showing self-assurance.

"We know that the Maha Chohan is subordinate to seven other Chohan who have previously passed through the various degrees of consecration. This council forms the Inner Government of the world and is the ruler of the Great Mysteries. The many divine incarnations in the various monasteries of this country are subordinate to this council. The Asian brotherhoods and the Lamaist monasteries are the profane instruments!"

The Dubtöb's eyes were wide and serious. "It is not always good to know as much as you do, Sahibs! I have already advised you to rest as long as you like, but then leave this land immediately. It is an inner voice that speaks from my mouth!"

"We thank you for your warning, O Dubtób! We ourselves wish we were far away from here and in the realm of our own power, which we do not even know where it will be found."

"Didn't you say you were from the realm of midnight?"

"Yes, that's what we said! But you will know that our homeland on the occidental continent is occupied by foreign powers and that our worldly empire lies prostrate. And the seat of our spiritual realm, symbolised by a new runic sign, is now everywhere and nowhere. The command centre to which we belong has also relocated and we don't know where. We can do nothing but try to reach Europe for the time being."

"Chenrezi will help you further," muttered Oltan Tsewang. "If I may advise you, take a diversion to be on the safe side and make your way up to Jarkent and from there, not far from the Russian border, over the Karakoram ranges and sharply southwards down to Kashmir. It is a long journey, but you will not be looked for on this route. The Great Khan, who will now be waiting for you in the valley of the Black Yurt, has his eyes everywhere, except on this remote route."

"The advice is good," Juncker agreed, overlooking the geographical picture of the country in his mind. "But it means we'll have to travel a few weeks longer. We still want to think it over ..."

The hermit said nothing in reply. After a little while, he got up, went into his hut and returned with a jug of sour yak milk. "May the humble drink of a poor man find favour in your eyes, O Sahibs of the Midnight Land..."

"Bka-drin-cé - thank you very much," Juncker said politely in Tibetan. He accepted the not very clean jug and sipped the drink with his eyes closed. For better or worse, Gutmann had to follow suit.

"I think we'll keep travelling," Juncker suddenly said. "It's past midday now, we still have half a day to go. Time is pressing! - Da tscha yin - farewell, Dubtób, we thank you!"

"Da cha yin!" Oltan Tsewang said simply and bowed. "Da cha yin! ..."

## OM MANI PADME HUM ...

He who strives for the possession of earthly goods instead of developing his spirit is like an eagle whose wings are paralysed.

(Tagpo Lhadje)

Bearded, hollow-eyed and torn, the five men and the girl had been travelling for days in the direction indicated to them by the Dubtób. The pace of the journey was quite slow.

In a remote gom-pa, whose monks were conspicuous for their extraordinary silence, they took a rest day at the polite invitation of the abbot, as the remote building offered quite a bit of security. However, they had to make do with a simple camp in an annex of the gom-pa, as the monks did not allow women to enter the sacred area of the monastery. The lamas here were stricter and more ascetic than the people from the Gom-pa to the Seven Lotus Blossoms, and they clearly belonged to a different sect.

The murmur of the praying monks and the creaking of the prayer wheels could be heard throughout the day.

"Om mani padme hum - O jewel in the lotus! ..."

Gutmann made a strange discovery in this monastery. During the brief and only formal farewell ceremony with the abbot of this remote gom-pa

Gutmann saw a round, copper disc on a low table top with a temple tower rising up in the centre.

He stepped closer to the abbot: "Allow me a question, you light Amithabas in this holy house!" Gutmann pointed to the strange disc. "What is that, O Tangpo, O abbot?"

Tangpo's expression became almost hostile. "Why do you want to know, stranger?"

"It reminds me of a thing we call Mani, which has an archetypal shape that resembles this piece!"

It was not clear whether Tangpo, the ordinary abbot, had understood the explanation. His expression betrayed neither knowledge nor ignorance. After a moment's thought, he said almost reluctantly: "It's a symbol of a Buddha city, we call it Chot-Mandal ..."

Gutmann looked meaningfully at Juncker, who had accompanied him to the farewell. He explained half aloud: "A very peculiar name. Undoubtedly a synonym of the Mani form. Especially here in this monastery ..."

The abbot had tried suspiciously to catch the whispered words, but he did not understand the foreign language. With an almost impolite gesture, he demanded attention. "Are you scholars, that you know more about this disc?"

"We saw discs flying," Gutmann deflected. "They glowed in different colours or had a flaming tail!"

"Kye - He! - Nis-chu' terykh - flying chariots!" The tangpo did not hide his excitement. "You are guests of my gom-pa," he continued after a brief moment of surprise, "but I have a right to ask: Are you spies of a foreign power looking for these discs? If so, know that I know nothing. I don't know anything!" The tone proved him wrong.

"We're not spies," Juncker assured him calmly, continuing in Gutmann's place. "But surely you've seen discs in the sky just as we have. You don't have to be a spy if you see and recognise things that remind you of spies!"

"Kye! -" the Tangpo shouted again. "Nis-chu' terykh mk'a la - The flying chariots in the sky, kye, they are the sign of some new turning point! And it could be that our secret scriptures in the Potala are right, reporting that a time will come to end the trials. When it is fulfilled, the King of Shambala will appear and deliver those who are faithful and lead them out of the sufferings of this world into his realm of bliss, which is more beautiful than Amithaba's paradise. Those who resist, however, will be destroyed and must first suffer torments in order to then, purified by them, enter into bliss. This is the last battle on this earth, the last conflict of the three worlds. Then Tsongkhapa's teaching will dominate the universe and all blessings and gifts will then be common to all people ..."  
The cheeks of the fervent Tangpo

showed a hectic colouring. "Listen, you strangers, listen and spread the word!"

"He's quoting the Lamaist world programme," Juncker said quickly to Gutmann, who barely understood part of it. He continued louder to Tangpo: "We have heard what you told us, O Tangpo. But didn't you say before that you know nothing and now you are interpreting the signs in the sky!"

The Tangpo made an evil face and a threatening hand gesture at the same time, reaching for the small thunderbolt symbol and holding this demon-defending cult object with the thumb and the two middle fingers of his right hand, while at the same time straightening his index finger and little finger. "Evil spirits are guiding your thinking! How can you reprimand a Tangpo? I see you want to say goodbye and leave. I won't stop you, go strange men, go?"

After a formal gesture of greeting, Juncker and Gutmann left the belligerent abbot. A little later, the small group rode on as one into the partly steppe-covered landscape.

The groups of nomadic inhabitants, who were happy to sell plenty of milk, cheese and brick tea in exchange for Indian coins, were far less dangerous. Millet and some flour could also be purchased.

On the other hand, it was always advisable to ride around larger settlements, unless they had to pass through a valley.

were blocked. The local governors everywhere were keen on passports, the possession of which was made compulsory for foreign travellers with passes. The Tibetan provincial governors insisted on the fulfilment of the strict instructions.

The further north-west the riders travelled, the sparser the monasteries became, and the fairly frequent hermit settlements, called ritödpas by the Tibetans, increasingly gave way to the land of the freer nomads. Occasionally, not exactly confidence-inspiring horsemen appeared, armed with old, bad shotguns, who immediately swerved away when they saw modern rapid-fire weapons in the hands of the foreigners.

The riders also picked up an ancient, fragile llama on the way, which they lifted onto one of the pack animals and took with them part of the way before dropping him off not far from his destination, which was in the same direction. The old man was usually completely enraptured and prayed or meditated even while riding, although he had to hold on with all his might despite the slow pace.

When they lifted him from the animal before his destination, he continued his reflections aloud, unaffected and enraptured: "... just as we need a mirror to look at our face, so the sky shows us the reflection of our spirit when we look at it properly ..." Enraptured and with staring eyes, he looked into the cloudy expanse of the firmament. And as he shuffled away, he murmured: "Om mani padme hum - om mani ...!"



The ethnic elements became more and more mixed. Turanians, Dungans, Mongols, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and other ethnic groups were increasingly appearing in place of purely Tibetan natives. The somewhat busier area gave rise to fears among the horsemen that word would spread about the passing of a group of strangers and that the Mongols would soon receive news of their whereabouts through their organised outposts.

As they could gather from various statements made by travelling pilgrims, they were in an area through which the northernmost border of India and then Sinkiang ran. And it was precisely in Sinkiang that the very active interests of both China and the Soviets intersected. Last but not least, there were national-autonomous movements that aimed at special interests.

Mistrust and caution were evident everywhere. Stalin's victory in the West, which was virtually played into his hands with the help of Anglo-American politicians, gave rise to fears that world communism would also extend its imperialist grip on power in this part of the world after a few cautious statements by herdsmen or individual wandering lamas. At that time, the Chinese situation had not yet been fully clarified. It was known that the eyes and ears of the agents were lurking everywhere and that the network of driving forces lay close to this geopolitical crossroads.

Since the direction they had taken was towards the Soviet border, the riders decided, contrary to their previous intention, to put all their eggs in one basket and not to advance further across the Khotan-Darya, but to seek the next best route to the south.

Recke suggested asking for a guide during the encounters. Apart from money, they had horses and weapons, which they could not keep anyway, and it would be easy to find a guide for good equipment. The companions immediately agreed.

In a small nest, Juncker took it upon himself to ask for a man who would be willing to take the group over the Karakoram Mountains.

"Bcu gopa - I am a leader!" One of the men standing around stepped out of the half-ring and placed both hands in front of his chest. "Droki yimpa - where do you want to go?" he asked Juncker, who had addressed the men.

Juncker pointed southwards over the towering mountain ranges.

"Gyakar - India!"

"Kong katshö yimpa - what is the price?"

"Kheta yang nonda - a horse and a gun!"

"La-si - yes," the man nodded with satisfaction. "Ona - it's good!" He made a gesture that he wanted to come right away.

He wedged his way through the bystanders, who stared open-mouthed, only to return a few minutes later.

Somewhat timidly, the man pointed to one of the two

free horses. "Can I ride this animal?"

Instead of answering, Juncker told him to mount. The man first walked carefully around the animal, inspected its hooves and saddle seat and then mounted. His expression was one of satisfaction. "Sho - forward!" he said and waved goodbye to his fellow villagers with a proud gesture. He sat down with Juncker at the head of the pack.

Before the group could start moving, however, a tall man stepped out of the semi-circle of locals, clenched his fists and shouted a few quick words among those gathered. Then, with an outstretched hand, he pointed to Juncker as the spokesman for the riders: "Sopa!"

"What's he saying?" asked Reimer, who was closest to the man.

"Sopa means spy," Juncker instructed him.

The mistrust of the locals now turned into visible hostility. It could be seen that the people of the country reacted immediately in their own way when the tensions that had long overlaid the area came to light in any form.

The gopa had steered his horse back. "Lempa - idiot!" he howled angrily. "Your agitation stems from envy because I was taken as a leader by the sahibs. Why didn't you speak up when the great Sahib at the top put the question to all of us? Hey, you men! Isn't that so?"

The people l o o k e d a little indecisive. "Khyi -

Dog!" the agitator shouted at the gopa. Another short torrent of words followed to sway the bystanders.

Juncker, who was able to follow the argument halfway with Recke, had now had enough. He slowly took the submachine gun hanging in front of his chest, steered his horse towards the rabble-rouser with the pressure of his thigh and pointed the barrel of the gun threateningly at him. "If you say another word, you'll get a rosary of lead in your big belly and the men around you can then make a Thöntam, a skull drum, out of your head with the mosquito brain! ..."

The threatened man pursed his lips and remained silent. However, a look of deep hatred followed the riders, who Juncker was the last to follow, not without having shouted another warning to the man first.

After the first hour of riding on, the riders already knew that the Gopa had a knowledge of the English language in addition to various dialects of the region, which, despite an extremely modest vocabulary and grammatical inadequacies, was sufficient for a generally makeshift communication. Not as secretive as many of his compatriots, he eloquently informed them that a new wave of wandering agents of foreign powers had recently emerged, especially anti-religious emissaries from the East, who preached the same principles as the strangely inquiring foreigners or who had been brought in by those in the East.

The intentions of these people, as far as could be recognised, revealed Moscow's instructions. Despite the opposition to the Lamaist power of the Dalai Lama Gyewa Rimpotshe Getson Ngwang Lobsang, Trapas and a number of lamas were prepared to listen to whispers from the onion-tower city devil and it was whispered that the Panchen Lama would not dislike such machinations for reasons of rivalry with the Dalai Lama. The government in Lhasa was not in a very fortunate position, as China and the Soviets were now playing together and no help could be expected from the other great powers far away. For the time being, these Western powers had smashed the great power at the heart of the West and opened all doors to the all-destroying power of the Kremlin demons.

"You've already travelled a bit," Juncker replied. "You have a gift of judgement and take an interest in the fate of your country."

The Gopa smiled flattered, but soon put on a serious face again. "When the storm howls over the Thakla Makan desert or the Gobi, it destroys everything that offers itself as prey. Such is the fate of nations when the great, secret powers wrestle. They are sacrificed in the struggle for power!"

"You speak correctly!" Juncker nodded appreciatively.

The gompa now became confidential. "Sahib, if I get you to Gyakar safely, will you give me a gift in addition to the promised reward?"

"You are like a yidag, like a poor, starving

The essence of your demon faith," Juncker laughed. "We barely know each other and haven't even finished our first rest and you're already begging for a parting gift ..."

The scolded man ducked his head a little. "I said that for a reason, Sahib! The wind brought a message that a strong arm of the Mongols is looking for white men who want to leave the country. But since it's not people from the Ulan-Nam, the Red Party, who are looking for you, I haven't heard anything or have forgotten about it. Is that worth a small gift, Sahib?"

"If they were Ulan Nam people, would you have acted as an opponent?"

The gopa raised his hands in defence. "I don't want to know anything about the Ulan-Nam, Sahib! But I fear them and would not have volunteered as a leader if I did. It is dangerous to act against the interests of powers. Some here have left the road of earthly existence prematurely and, while their souls were still fleeing their bodies, had to listen to the texts of the Bardo Thödol, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, in their deafened ears."

"And the other strong arm? Perhaps that of the Great Khan of the Black Yurt?" Juncker looked intently at the gopa.

"They say he is everywhere and nowhere. He is said to lead a harsh regime and there are whispers everywhere that he wants to re-establish the laws of Genghis Khan. But he is not feared. My ears heard nothing

and so I don't have to worry!" He clicked his tongue lightly and spurred his mount on. "If we hurry, we can still reach a rest house today!"

What the gopa called a rest house later turned out to be a crumbling masonry structure. At best, it was a primitive shelter from any inclement weather.

The paths were often narrow and not without danger in places. White water formed unpleasant obstacles, the simple and old footbridges and suspension bridges were anything but confidence-inspiring. The scenery became downright wild and inhospitable and the slopes and peaks of the towering Karakoram Mountains offered the sight of frozen giants of the primeval world.

Thanks to the Gopa's guidance, the group of riders now made progress without much question. However, much of the way had to be covered on foot and the animals had to be led by the reins. After days they reached the Karakorum Pass with some difficulty.

This mountain crossing was more than five and a half thousand metres high. An icy cold wind whistled between the ridges and often took their breath away with its fierce gusts. The men and the girl trudged groaning over the scree path, while the animals' flanks trembled. And sometimes it seemed as if the wind was singing the worn lyre of Om mani padme hum through the majestic gate sheath between the world of religious contemplation and tantric rites on the one side and the old Trimurti freedom on the other, still far to the south.

After overcoming the decisive pass, the path did not drop much. Slowly the great massif of the almost seven thousand metre high Depsang rose up again, to the left of the path loomed a block whose summit, the Mamostong Kangri, looked like a slumbering ice egg. When the group reached the Sasir Pass after days of fatigue, their modest food supplies were almost exhausted.

Everyone was happy when the Gopa explained that they were only thirty kilometres away from the larger settlement of Panamik.

Before they reached this place, they still had to cross the small Pukpoche River, which flowed into the nearby, wildly rushing Nubra.

From Panamik onwards, the arduousness of the path decreased somewhat. The village of Tiggur, a little above the confluence of the Nubra and the larger Shayok River, was a day's journey away. This was the end of the greatest hardships, as there was food again and, above all, accommodation for overnight stays. It was now only about fifty kilometres as the crow flies from Tiggur to the town of Leh.

As the Gopa explained, one could advance from Leh into the nearby Indus valley and from there reach Srinagar. However, it was almost certain that there were agents from various directions in Leh who would immediately register and report the arrival and passage of the foreigners. He recommended a somewhat



This was a major diversion, but one that offered greater security for the next stage of the journey.

It was the gopa himself who offered to take the white sahibs and the girl through the Shayok valley and then a little further up the course of the Indus to the road leading to Srinagar.

With three overnight stays in the villages of Biagdango, Thang and Abadon in the Shayok valley, they had covered half the distance, which initially led to the fork of the Shayok and the Indus. They travelled through Gurtse, Doghani and Kuru until, after four days, they reached Kiris, from where the route continued in a south-easterly direction up the Indus. This stretch of the journey became somewhat more arduous. Now the great chain of the Ladakh Mountains loomed to the north-east, separating the Indus from the Shayok. To the south-west lay the high massif of the Deosal Block.

They continued on towards Leh for a while until, after about eighty kilometres, they reached the road that led away from the Indus and directly to Srinagar. At this point, the gopa took his leave after receiving the promised horse, a submachine gun, a pistol and money.

He took his leave with outbursts of sincere gratitude and the customary blessings, constantly bowing. The gopa was visibly pleased with the generous reward for the tour by the standards of the country. "Tashi shig, Sahibs! - Farewell, may you be happy! May the gods you believe in lead you safely to your destination!

bring! - Kale phé - Farewell! ..."

Now it became apparent that the girl in particular was almost at the end of her strength - a rest day had to be taken before they could continue the last stage, which was the same distance through the Indus valley from Kiwis to the Srinagar road.

By the time they reached the capital of Kashmir on this road, overcoming the foothills of the Himalayas, the whole group was exhausted to the point of collapse. They were not particularly conspicuous at first, as they had hidden their weapons in good time and their clothing, which had been badly worn by their exertions, made them appear to be pilgrims at first glance. Nevertheless, they underestimated the large net that lay across the globe.

Although they had only opted for very modest accommodation on the outskirts of the city and showed no interest in anything other than a proper meal and a long-lost night's sleep, the men in particular were hardly surprised when two English military policemen appeared the very next morning. "Your passports please!"

Wire fences all around. There were watchtowers at intervals, on which floodlights were mounted to illuminate the no man's land in front of the internment camp at night to prevent any escape attempts. The barbed wire fence itself was then reflected in the dim

the glare of the beams of light like matt hoar frost. By day, the mood in the camp, which consisted of just a few barracks, was gloomy. An adventurous journey had come to an end here for the time being.

Even the best Swiss passports couldn't save a messy situation. The girl, Juncker and Recke had no papers with them other than their pay books as German officers and intelligence assistants respectively. Frene's French passport hardly counted, as he was immediately considered suspicious when he was apprehended. Gutmann's and Reimer's passports probably withstood the first check, but it soon emerged that both passport holders had been on a list of persons to be checked for some time. And last but not least, despite all the secrecy, it did not remain hidden that whites had disappeared somewhere in the Panjnad estuary. All these and other minor circumstances made it not too difficult for the British authorities to establish the true nationality of the people taken into custody fairly quickly.

There were not many inmates in the internment camp. A number of women were also accommodated in an isolated barrack, where Ortrun Weser was now staying. In the men's block, apart from a few sailors, there were mostly German businessmen and travellers who were surprised by the war in India and were immediately caught and interned by the British Field Secret Service, the FSS. In the meantime, the British had captured the majority of the internees.

had already been moved to the Middle East, where there were collection camps for deportees. Most of the cases that remained behind were those that seemed particularly suspicious to the FSS or were thought to have been in the service of the German Abwehr or SD.

There was no pathetic slogan above the gate leading into the camp. No sign saying "Abandon all hope" or any other inscription greeted the latest arrivals. The only prosaic greeting from the gate sergeant was simply: "Damned fools! ..."

It was all rather primitive and the logical continuation of the concentration camps invented by the British during the Boer War at the turn of the century. But even an apathy of fatigue could not help but find the camp depressing and inadequate.

The men were briefly interrogated as soon as they were admitted, and the next day the British FSS officers interrogated them individually and persistently. The cheap attempt to pass themselves off as having escaped from Soviet captivity collapsed after a few skilful counter-questions from the British. The British captain who conducted the interrogation was a sharp-thinking and old colonial officer who repeatedly pointed out in the course of his objections that he had been able to test his skills long enough on the damned bloody Hindoes. Nevertheless, he otherwise behaved quite properly, unlike two sergeants who had come from

made no secret of their cynical attitude.

Captain Benson soon found out that he had German aviation officers in front of him, apart from Frêne, who had fallen into British hands late in a rather confused manner. The officers truthfully gave their names and the last units stationed in Europe, but refused to give any further details, citing the international provisions of the Geneva Convention, especially about the astonishing fact for the captain that they had turned up in Kashmir almost falling from the clouds. The interrogation of Frêne, who claimed to be a Frenchman who had been caught up in the riots, was not much different, which the Briton had to resign himself to with annoyance.

However, if the Germans had considered the British captain to be comparatively amicable after the initial questioning, which was conducted in a calm tone, they were immediately disappointed. After a short, almost sleepy-looking pause, the British man advanced like a hawk and asked about the origin of the Swiss passports for Gutmann and Reimer, both of whom he questioned together. As if that wasn't enough, a suspicious encounter with Swiss nationals in the Persian Gulf had been recorded and was now to be clarified. This became the most awkward point for the two officers, the attempt to claim responsibility, that they had bought these passports on the black market somewhere, was not credible. The captain became brusque and bluntly accused them of being members or agents of the German intelligence service.

The prisoner was not a member of the police, the defence or the foreign department VI of the security service. He went so far in his energetic endeavours to clarify the true identity of the prisoners that he even doubted the truthful information about their names and units.

Only after repeated interrogations did the captain resign. As far as the Germans could tell from the British, his report did not appear to be conclusive and apparently left a number of suspicions unresolved, which adorned the interrogation files with notes in red pencil that were by no means conducive to suggesting the namesakes as easy cases for early repatriation.

Apart from the confiscated weapons, the prisoners were left with their luggage. Money and papers were also taken and deposited in the camp administration. During the transport to the internment camp, however, Gutmann had managed to remove the small radios from the luggage and let them roll onto the road through a slit in the side wall of the military lorry so that they fell from the lorry, which was driving close to the edge of a riverbed, into the deep water. Two military policemen sitting at the back of the lorry had not noticed anything in their dozy mood.

After a few days, a small, scrawny colonel came to inspect the small group of internees who had lined up for roll call. In his hand he carried

a short cane and next to him trotted a spiky-haired terrier.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked the broad-faced warrior at the front in a curt tone.

"This isn't an officers' camp, Colonel!" he said with noticeable irony. "Something like a camp for Australian Negroes ..."

"Damned German - shut up! - Shut up," came back rudely. "What we offer here is plenty enough. We already have our Indian experience, hehehe ..." He grumbled unpleasantly, somewhat tinnily.

"We can't put you up with a maharajah, we're still sitting there ourselves ..."

"But not for long, I guess," said the Juncker behind it, outraged by the Brit's cynicism.

"He - who is that damned swine!" now roared the colonel, his face crimson.

"That wasn't a pig, Colonel, that was a person speaking. And that person is me!" Juncker casually raised his right arm.

The Brit gasped.

"Don't get upset, Colonel! You asked us if there was anything. We gave you our opinion. Why don't you take a look at these conditions?"

"I didn't ask you, I asked your front man," the colonel shouted between them. "What do you want anyway? Think of your concentration camps ..."

"The one you invented first!" Juncker interjected. "Or do you want to take us for Boers because we lost the war? We also read other newspapers and heard other opinions before we got behind the wire and now know that the Allied propaganda is often a great hoax and fraud ..."

"Shut up - shut up! ..." the Brit shouted again, waving the stick wildly in the air.

"And we know that the bombing victims of Munich were shovelled together, loaded onto lorries, transported to Dachau and photographed there as allegedly gassed victims and this atrocity film, with the murdered victims of the Allied bombs, was shown as forced screenings in the prison camps of the German soldiers ..."

"Sergeant - Sergeant! ... Hell and devils! - Grab the damn German and put him in the bunker! - quick, quick - quick, damn it! ..."

Both sergeants were beside the colonel in a flash. While the colonial officer was still hurling angry insults, the two sergeants led Juncker away to the bunker intended for reprimands.

The colonel was trembling with rage. Spread-eagled, he planted himself in front of the front of those standing in line, put his arms on his hips defiantly and asked threateningly:

"Anyone else of the same opinion?"

"Yes, yes!" said Reimer loudly. Murmurs of agreement



accompanied him.

The colonel's mouth was open. His arrogance had taken a knock. "That's like mutiny ..." His jaw ground, the hair on the side of his cap bristled. He vacillated between irritation and surprise. Then he realised that he was no longer in complete control of the situation; everywhere in front of him he found barely concealed laughter, blank, knowing eyes. So he suddenly turned round without further ado and stomped off, growling. Angry and embarrassed, Captain Benson followed him.

For the time being, nobody paid any attention to the internees. The sergeants had led Juncker away and then apparently disappeared. The officers were gone, and so it was a Scottish sergeant who finally had the prisoners marched off. Mac Culloch, who was always available for small favours and had his own benevolent opinion of the Germans.

That evening, the men sat closer together than usual in the barracks and socialised with those who had already been imprisoned for some time. It had become clear that the reticence towards latecomers was justified because of the danger of informers. The British FSS loved the system of buying gullible or character-weak elements and using them as listening posts. It was a system that the British sometimes used successfully, even though the Judas wage was often only a handful of cigarettes. In this camp, too, a prisoner

of an unidentifiable nationality, who was quickly marked by putting down a Pall Mall brand cigarette butt.

After the evening roll call, the sergeant on duty briefly announced that Juncker had been sentenced to a month in the bunker for insubordination. That was the maximum sentence, but it was the average sentence.

The small camp community was outraged by the behaviour of the British colonel. That evening, the often leisurely tinkering of individuals came to a halt, be it the carving of small figures with broken glass or fragments of razor blades, small tin works from the abundant tin cans, playing with self-made, primitive chess pieces or with playing cards made from the same backs of collected cigarette packets. After a lengthy discussion, the community decided to lodge a protest with the British captain the next day through their spokesman and to try to get Juncker released.

So the next day the German camp spokesman, accompanied by Gutmann, stood before the British camp commander and politely asked for Juncker's sentence to be suspended on the grounds that the colonel's rude behaviour had virtually invited an objection.

Here it became apparent that the British captain, despite his harsh interrogations, also had human understanding.

possessed. He approved the form of the objection, but stated flatly that he could not afford simply to overrule an order from the inspecting colonel or even to circumvent such an order by making it easier. However, if, as rumoured, the colonel were to go on leave to Europe in the near future, he wanted to see if he could end the sentence early. The defence had to be satisfied with this.

"Bloody hell!" grumbled Recke as the two men came back from the camp commander. "First a long monkey ride and then such a lousy bunker at the end. It was better in the Gom-pa at the Seven Lotus Blossoms!"

"And the Mongols were certainly more friendly to us than those short-sighted Britons, whose royal house pays homage to the myth of being the bearers of David's crown and who constantly sin against the Germanic family," added Reimer. "We'll see who really lost the war in a few years' time ..."

"What Azîz already recognised in Bombay," Gutmann concluded.

Two weeks passed without anything happening. As the camp was already far south of Kashmir, the heat during the day made us sleepy. Even the camp gossip, characteristically known as latrines in the language of the country, could not become plentiful. The British also gradually lost interest in the game they practised

to circulate such gossip in order to somehow keep the prisoners busy with artificially fabricated slogans. This mainly concerned release times that never materialised. In contrast, the world news service worked quite well thanks to the willingness of the Indian auxiliary staff to smuggle newspapers. In other respects, too, the Indians were happy to bring news of their own accord. Above all, the tensions that were beginning to emerge between East and West became visible.

The grotesqueness of this new political situation led to one of the British sergeants approaching Reimer after the morning roll call and lightly poking him: "Hey, bloody German, it could be funny fun if we suddenly go against the Rußkis together! - Hey, what do you think? ..."

"Get off my back, you servant of David," said the Linzer angrily. "You've been spouting mud about German militarism all this time and haven't even recognised us as soldiers. Now all of a sudden we're supposed to march again, fly or whatever. Go away, old Johnny, leave us in the weeds! ..."

The sergeant looked venomously at Linz. "All right, as you think. But when it really comes down to it, you bloody huns will march!"

"Höhöhö, or what's biting us," sneered Reimer. "You can't force guns into our hands!"

"Oh yes," grinned the sergeant. "We need you

just eight days without food, then you'll come on your own! ..." Then he walked away with a swaying step.

Reimer presented this argument in the evening barrack discussion. But nobody got excited. The men saw in the strange pairing of unbalanced views with unjustified arrogance complexes only a consequential development of a propaganda technique on the other side, which sooner or later would also produce undesirable results that were not calculated by the atrocity and news manufacturers. The new case of the British sergeant was thus only seen as a small mosaic in the picture of a great incitement, whose errors clouded all perspectives on a reality.

While this conversation was still going on, the Scotsman Mac Culloch entered the barracks. This was a surprise, as the British had not entered the barracks after the evening roll call for a long time and left the internees in peace. The Scotsman was clearly not on duty, but had a short pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth, from which he smoked like a tugboat.

After a friendly greeting, he headed towards Gutmann, whom he knew to be a friend of Juncker.

"Hey, Gutmann, come along!"

"What is it?" Gutmann took a few steps towards the Scotsman.

"Your comrade Juncker - he's ill! He's had a fever all day today ..."

"What is it?" Recke had joined Reimer, Frêne also sauntered up. "Juncker is ill?"

Mac Culloch nodded. "Severe fever. Hasn't eaten anything all day. Only drank some tea. Captain Benson said this evening that if he's not better tomorrow, we'll have to send for the camp doctor. Does he have any illness you know of?"

Gutmann replied in the negative. "He has no suffering!"

Mac Culloch furrowed his brow. He looked at the men standing in front of him in turn, then reached into his pocket and handed the next man a full packet of cigarettes. While he tentatively reached for it, the Scotsman tapped his cap with two fingers of his right hand, then turned and walked slowly out of the barracks.

"We hardly know any more now than we did before," said Recke after the Scotsman had left. "I hope it's nothing serious?"

"Mac won't have come for nothing either," said Reimer with a clearly worried undertone.

"Actually, Juncker should be in the hospital barracks," Gutmann explained. "The British doctor should actually take care of that!"

"If he's a cold-blooded buffalo doctor, the most he'll do is bob his chopstick and then have a whisky instead of the patient," said Recke. "With the British, you never know how they're going to turn out..."

"Vraiment," nodded Frêne. "The times of fairness are

long gone!"

The other barrack dwellers shared the same opinion. They had all had time and leisure to study and familiarise themselves sufficiently with the British camp regiment. When the men went to their simple sleeping quarters at the prescribed time, the neighbours told the stragglers about their various camp experiences for a while afterwards. Not much good came out of it.

After the morning roll call the next day, Gutmann and Recke waited patiently for an opportunity to find out more about Juncker. Only after two hours did an Indian passing by report that the German Afsar, the officer, was still in the bunker. He knew nothing about the British doctor.

"Shouldn't we speak to the captain?" asked Recke.

"We should think about that," Gutmann advised thoughtfully. "Above all, we must remember not to inconvenience the Scotsman Mac Culloch. If the captain learns that the man was with us that evening and told us about Juncker, it could be unpleasant for him. Let's wait for Mac Culloch himself for the time being. I'm sure he'll come by himself if he knows anything or has time for us."

Recke accepted Gutmann's objections. Nevertheless, the men's patience was put to the test, as the Scotsman only arrived late in the afternoon.

Gutmann had to approach him directly so that the Scotsman could tell him that the camp doctor had allegedly been with the detainee after all, but that he had left him in the bunker.

"Then he's probably feeling better already," Recke tried to reassure himself.

The Scotsman looked at him, but said nothing in reply and hurried away again.

Junker died two days later.

The men in the camp learnt about this after the evening roll call. This time there was a riot in the camp.

At first, the younger men made themselves heard by shouting loudly in protest. When the sergeant on duty stepped out of the guard barrack by the main camp gate and followed his order to rest with a swear word, a stone the size of a fist suddenly flew at his feet.

The sergeant immediately shouted out the guard and had the rifles brought to bear.

The initially modest revolt now showed the beginnings of a more dangerous rebellion when one of the internees shouted out the slogan "Tommy, sail home from India!" with deliberate calculation.

The Indians, who were also gathering, heard this call and immediately shouted their approval. "Germanistan ki jai!" one even shouted back in sympathy.

Now the sergeant, losing his nerve, fired a warning shot from his army pistol into the air.



The response from the camp was a roar and laughter. Reimer, who wanted to jump forward in anger, was pulled back by Gutmann. "Stop it! - It's no use!" Gutmann raised his hand and demanded silence. "We're going back to the barracks! Can't you see that the sergeant is about to snap? Shouting won't help us. Back - let's go back! ..."

Slowly, hesitantly, the men followed him. It visibly cost them an effort to suppress their long-standing anger. Nevertheless, reason prevailed.

While they followed Gutmann, the entire camp was alerted. The tower posts pointed their guns inside the camp and reinforcements for the guard came running from the outer barracks. A few minutes later, Captain Benson also appeared on the scene.

Two of the internees had stopped in the camp area and were watching the events outside the wire fence. When Benson saw them standing there, he shouted in through the fence: "What's the matter, he - what's going on?"

The people called looked at each other indecisively, then simply turned round and took a few steps back towards the barracks.

"Damned fools!" cursed the captain. He waved the sergeant and two soldiers over, then walked past the gate barracks and entered the camp. Angrily, he crossed the square with long, sweeping strides until he saw the two men walking slowly back.

had reached. "What's that supposed to mean, guys? Don't you want to talk?"

"That's what we're trying to think about," said one of them thoughtfully. "Namely, whether there's any point in talking about things that simply aren't heard ..."

"Hey? ..." Benson squeezed his bamboo stick so that the knuckles came out white. At that moment Gutmann and the camp announcer came out. They walked towards the captain and then stood waiting in front of him.

"What's going on here?" asked Benson again.

"You ask that, Captain?" Gutmann's voice was calm, but there was an undertone that made the Brit take a step back.

The men exchanged glances for a brief moment. Then Benson stomped up. "Why don't you speak?"

"How was it with our mate Juncker, Captain?"

Benson bit his lips. "Well - sorry - sorry - suddenly ill and - you know how it is in the tropics sometimes - an unfortunate occurrence. Regrettable - indeed! ..."

"What do you mean by regrettable?" Gutmann asked harshly.

"What did the doctor do? That's the most important thing!"

"The doctor? - Well, - surely he did what he could do ..."

"What is it?" Gutmann urged.

"Ask the doc yourself!" shouted Benson, who was getting on Gutmann's nerves. He obviously didn't know how to give a suitable answer himself.

"Perhaps you can tell us, Captain, whether Juncker died in the bunker or in the military hospital?"

"I'll make a report to my superior authority," Benson evaded. Turning sharp, he added: "But under no circumstances will I tolerate any unruliness or camp commotion! - I'll hold you both responsible for keeping the camp quiet!"

"I personally refuse to accept any responsibility," Gutmann said coldly. "You haven't taken any responsibility for us either!"

"Under such circumstances, I also decline all responsibility and resign my office as camp spokesman!" Gutmann's companion joined in with a statement.

"I'll have you locked up!" Benson turned red.

"The whole camp has nothing against being locked up. But everything you do and order will be your responsibility!"

The British officer banged his bamboo stick against his thigh, then turned round abruptly and walked out of the camp. After a few steps, he called back with his head turned to the side: "If there's any unrest, I'll have them fired!"

All camp work was immediately suspended. Benson responded to the silent protest of the internees by withdrawing all favours. As the so-called labour portions were cancelled, the rations became noticeably smaller. Just at this point, one of the British

sergeants posted a small propaganda pamphlet in the barracks to annoy the internees. In this pamphlet, a French woman described her experiences in the so-called Ravensbrück concentration camp in north-west Germany, citing the accommodation and food rations. Amusingly, it turned out that the Allies allocated their prisoners a food ration that was only half to a third of what the inmates of Ravensbrück received. The men interned in the small Indian camp were only too familiar with the starvation rations issued in the camps in defeated Germany and the so-called victorious states, thanks to **t h e** news from the Indian camp staff.

When the sergeant returned the next day and biting pointed to the printed matter, he was met with cheerful grins from all sides. A Berliner with a typical humorous snout said broadly: "These are all scary fairy tales for small children!

..."

"Focking!" the sergeant mumbled in Whitechapel jargon as he pulled away.

The British camp commander was uncomfortable with the internees' attitude of protest. For better or worse, he was forced to submit a report to his superior office. However, if some of the prisoners had secretly hoped that the Juncker case would be investigated, they were disappointed, as had often been the case with certain assumptions in which the British had been misjudged. The

The camp regiment continued to be run with rigour, and the minor harassment by the sergeants was not stopped. The superior authorities completely covered up the camp leadership, even the camp doctor remained.

The German helmsman Jansen suggested a hunger strike to intensify the protest, and the majority of the camp inmates immediately agreed. Here, however, Gutmann intervened together with the camp spokesman, who was still unofficially in charge. After careful consideration, both men persuaded the other prisoners to postpone this plan. The camp spokesman in particular found it easy to convince his comrades that such an action would only weaken them, but would in no way shake the stubbornness of the British.

After a further week, Benson suddenly relented, allowing the spokesman and Gutmann to come into his barracks room and giving them the option of having the camp community carve a cross for Juncker, who was buried on the edge of the nearby village. He provided the wood and tools. A small delegation was then allowed to erect it on the spot.

"That doesn't help our comrade Juncker much," Gutmann replied sarcastically. "At least we still have to thank him for this gesture of belated goodwill!"

Captain Benson mumbled something unintelligible. Then he dismissed the summoned people.

On the second following day, the camp commander

dant that ten men from the camp were allowed to go to the nearby grave to erect a crucifix. He even agreed to the request that Ortrun Weser and a second camp inmate should come along.

When Juncker's old companions, the two women and a few other camp mates marched out of the wire camp shortly afterwards, accompanied by a sergeant and six Tommies, they had barely a quarter of an hour to walk before they came across the burial site on the edge of the small Indian village, where a small administrative centre had also been set up.

Bitter feelings accompanied the prisoners on their silent march. While they were standing on the spot, Captain Benson followed in a jeep. As he jumped out of the vehicle, Gutmann and Recke were ramming into the grave marker. The front of the row of prisoners standing in front of the grave blocked his view. He waited in the background until the small camp delegation had sung the song of the good comrade after Gutmann and Recke had stepped back.

A number of locals had gathered nearby. After the Germans had finished their song, Captain Benson joined them and paid a brief military tribute at the grave. But then his eyes widened. Instead of the expected cross, he found a sign he had never seen before. On Juncker's grave was a man's rune.

Now the Indians came closer. The native auxiliaries of the British had already been informed by whispering

propaganda ensured that the grave was covered with a new layer of flowers in accordance with European custom. The British did not hinder the sympathy of the locals, although they must have felt the associated protest against their rule.

Among the donations of flowers, there was suddenly a small bowl with seven lotus blossoms floating in the centre of the grave. A small ribbon showed the familiar signs of the eternal invocation "Om mani padme hum" in brush lettering. But it was impossible to determine which of the visitors had so skilfully and unrecognisably placed this lotus bowl on the grave. The trail of the fugitives had been found and kept under observation. The greeting of the lotus blossoms was like a gesture of a final farewell from a loosened embrace, the separation of two worlds and goals.

"Om mani padme hum" was the last, but futile invocation of the roof of the world. The rapidly fading flowers floated calmly and peacefully in the bowl in the shadow of the runic symbol towering above them. Two symbols against each other, a silent question to the future. The dead man took this question with him, still unresolved.

White or yellow - Midnight Mountain or Ri-rap-hlumpo?

## REFUGE OF THE SPIRIT

This is the path that is marked out to the north, on which the gods and the fathers and the rishi's go to the highest of the highest, to the highest goal.

(Atharvacira-Upanisha)

One day the time had come. The British camp commander announced that the internees would now be repatriated to Europe. As the British had been feeding rumours of release at short intervals since the end of the war, but these always turned out to be untrue, this time too an imminent return home was dismissed as a rumour despite the official announcement.

This mistrust diminished somewhat when an FSS commission checked the internees again and then had declarations signed that none of the signatories had belonged to the German Abwehr or the SD, the intelligence organisation of the SS. Gutmann, Recke and Reimer were interrogated in particular detail. Frêne, as a Frenchman, was ignored. The three Germans stuck to the statements they had already made and refused to make any further statements. Despite signing the forms, they were marked with notes of suspicion in order to avoid further investigations in Europe.



to hire.

After the interrogations by the acting commission were completed, military lorries drove into the camp a few days later. The transport was immediately prepared, an escort detachment took over the prisoners and hours later the convoy rolled out of the wire fence camp onto the dusty road. The journey continued to Karachi.

There was a short stay at the destination until the British steamer arrived and took over the transport. During embarkation, the prisoners saw large piles of dismantled machine parts lying around freely and unprotected on the quay in the harbour. It was booty from Germany that no one in Balochistan knew what to do with and which later fell prey to rust.

When the steamer sailed, thick smoke billowed out of the chimney. In the hot, shimmering air, it formed itself into a long, trembling plume, which then dissolved in the expanse behind. Birds screeched their farewells around the ship's booms, the town and the lighthouse became visibly smaller, the hinterland merged into a grey, hazy and irregular line.

The south-west vestibule to the roof of the world disappeared ...

The ship's rules were now not overly strict. At certain times, the

The internees could move freely on a deck section. The rations had also improved. After the long period of resignation beforehand, the impatience of the returnees now showed no bounds.

Frêne was the most restless of the men. He had firmly refused to return to France at the present time and insisted on being released in Germany for the time being. It was now common knowledge that more than a hundred thousand Frenchmen, friends of the Germans, had been mercilessly murdered by the Communist maquis during the epuration. The same happened to thousands of Flemings and tens of thousands were sentenced to death by special courts, some in absentia. A cold-blooded mass murder had been at work. Robespierre's shadow haunted the tormented countries.

"What will happen to us?" asked Recke gloomily, as the four men rested alone in the shade of a persennig and let a cooling sea breeze caress their faces.

Gutmann, who had been sitting there brooding and silent, looked up. Thoughtfully, he said: "We will always live in a duty! Our people are down, but they are not dead. The survivors of the great battles are left with the inalienable responsibility of ensuring the lives of women and children and working to rebuild the country. The remaining substance of the people must be preserved and survive at all costs. Otherwise the zero hour on the day of

Wehrmacht capitulation on the fateful day of the nation's downfall. If we succumb and resign ourselves, Rathenau's prophecy will be surpassed and Morgenthau's wish for destruction will be fulfilled." His posture tightened as he continued: "Where there is life, life will be passed on. Every nation that retains its will to live will be given a new moment of glory by a balancing history after times of adversity. Remember that!"

"And what about the lost point 103?" asked Reimer.

Gutmann looked at his companions. "None of us now knows where any potential is hoarded, no one knows where the men are. But everything is there and lives hidden in the stream of time. When the book of time opens a new page, a bright chime will also bring together everything that is scattered in the purified space. Only a few knowledgeable people will be the great directors to fulfil a historical imperative."

Recke leaned back tiredly. "So each of us will be on our own for the time being."

"We first have to see how our house is ordered back home," Gutmann replied calmly. "Perhaps we can then somehow continue to form a small community. We'll probably be able to see things more clearly in a few weeks' time!"

After a brief silence, Recke continued: "I will try to keep Ortrun under my protection."

keep. I don't know why the English keep us separated during transport. They also have their official manners. We'll probably be released together after all ..."

"Get married!" Reimer interjected curtly.

"That's what I want," said Recke seriously. "We're actually clear about it. It's just that circumstances have delayed a formal discussion so far." A mischievous look suddenly flashed across his face. "And what about the girl from Tangier? ..."

Reimer showed a slight embarrassment. "Who knows how things are now. I'll have a look around Munich." He added gloomily: "I can't imagine her - standing on the ruins of a bombed-out city - crying her eyes out for a missing airman. Oh, nonsense," he broke off abruptly.

A slightly rough sea caused the steamer to lurch slightly. Snail-like - so it seemed to the travellers - it headed for Aden. After a short stay in the British protectorate harbour, which had been converted into a permanent base, the ship sailed into the Red Sea, leaving the old pirate's nest surrounded by a wild, black, bizarre rocky landscape behind it.

Quite late in the evening it was restless on the steamer. The following morning, the internees were told by the crew members that a brightly lit disc was circling in the sky.

Crew members and the people of the escort command now spoke of extraterrestrial saucers.

as the British called these saucer-like flying structures - and puzzled over their appearance.

Offside, in a close circle, Frêne said: "I very much believe that we are actually dealing with a third appearance at the moment, which shows a new variant outside of German technology and alongside the Mani. The British also spoke of the fact that a separate office had been set up in the Pentagon in Washington to deal with the "Flying Saucers" and to withhold the accumulating files from the public."

"Anything is possible," Gutmann admitted frankly. "We just have to be careful not to leave the ground of factual considerations. These new phenomena will continue to challenge many speculations for a long time to come. Perhaps the almost improbable will happen, that two of the three variants will meet. Who knows? Under no circumstances can an Allied power have already produced a flying gyroscope using any captured German plans. Whatever the Ivan may have captured in Prague or Breslau, there has hardly been enough time for a speedy reconstruction."

"Lots of questions and no answers ..." said Recke musingly.

As they drew ever closer to home, the *m e n* began to seriously consider the practical possibilities of their future civilian life and the coming struggle for existence. For the time being, it had been no different to all people who had been isolated in captivity for a long time.

and spun thoughts among themselves, which repeatedly jumped from boredom into the realm of fantasy. No age protected them from folly and foolishness.

The approaching new phase of her life forced her to take things seriously. The expected dismissal confronted her with harsh realities.

Then, contrary to expectations, everything went quickly. After passing Suez and a short Mediterranean voyage, the ship turned off to Italy, to the surprise of the internees, where they were disembarked one night and driven to the province of Carinthia in the newly created Second Republic of Austria in military lorries of the Eighth British Army. When the convoy was handed over to the command, rigorous harassment began again. The transport landed in British POW Camp 373 in Wolfsberg.

This camp was the last nerve centre of a persistent arbitrariness. The camp ruler was a banker named Kennedy who had emigrated from Vienna. As captain of the FSS, the New Englander made no secret of his hatred of Germany. Thousands of prisoners suffered under his arbitrary behaviour and the punishment bunkers were constantly occupied. During interrogations and examinations, men of all ages - there were many civilian prisoners - were transferred to Poland or Yugoslavia under many accusations, mostly for alleged war crimes. In a women's block, the British held girls as young as seventeen and old women

between the ages of sixty and seventy.

Months of waiting followed month after month. Hunger raged in the camp. Tea with plenty of bromine, four biscuits and soup with worm peas was the daily ration. One by one, some of the men were sent to mental hospitals, and a dysentery outbreak caused by eating grass could only just be averted.

One day, a Red Cross commission inspected the camp. Shortly beforehand, Captain Kennedy had the bunkers with the blue-black victims cleared and created a quick scene of apparent orderliness. With the best certificates for the camp, the Red Cross men disappeared after a fleeting prudence.

Just at a time when nobody expected it, redundancies began. After a few transports, Gutmann, Recke and Frêne arrived. At the same time, Ortrun Weser was also released along with some women. This release group was taken to Bavaria. A further interrogation by the FSS captain produced no further results than the existing files. Kennedy from New England had made no secret of his deep mistrust of Gutmann and Recke, Frêne was simply categorised as a "displaced person" for the sake of simplicity and thus removed from any further interest. Reimer remained behind as an Austrian.

Once again, the small community was separated.

Further weeks of gruelling waiting passed, before further releases took place. This time Reimer was also involved. When the tall FSS sergeant with

When he handed the Linzer his discharge certificate with his cold, ice-coloured eyes and had him sign a receipt, the discharge was already a month overdue. Captain Kennedy had left the note in his desk drawer for a month out of sheer malice. Some of the belongings taken from him were missing. But the Linzer wisely kept quiet.

In Klagenfurt he received a four-language identity card, as prescribed by the Allies. With the required number of stamps, as demanded by the Soviets, he was then able to travel via Vienna to Linz without being stopped at the demarcation lines.

Everything was different. Freedom was a strange world. Even the people didn't seem to have a face, only hard stamps or masks. Everywhere mistrust, strangeness and rejection.

The Linz home station was scarred by war damage. The heavily bombed city showed its many scars and a cheerless picture. When he arrived at his parents' house, he found it in ruins.

He later found his mother in emergency accommodation.

When Reimer had overcome a mental low, he pulled himself together and wrote to Gutmann. A postal delay caused by the occupation censorship played a major part in the fact that a long time passed before a reply arrived from Runkel.

Gutmann's answer was cordial but brief.



He informed the Linzer that they were already worried about him. The delayed dismissal would probably have been one of the many abuses and arbitrary behaviour of the New Englander. The letter also stated that Frêne was also safe and sound in Runkel. Recke had found no more relatives and had married Ortrun Weser in the meantime. They had moved to Marsberg, where they had created a small middle-class existence for themselves. Recke, meanwhile, was struggling with the times and dreaming of his days on the hilltop with the last stone ruins of Widukind's old Eresburg castle. Gutmann concluded the letter with the suggestion to arrange a meeting in Munich in the near future, where Reimer could then also take care of Nella Post.

They exchanged letters again, then Reimer travelled to the Bavarian capital two days before a meeting that had now been arranged, despite his modest means. P.O. Box letters he had written to Nella from Linz had been returned as uncollectable. So the only option was to try to contact the city's registration office.

Contrary to expectations, he was given an address in Schwabing relatively quickly. With the information slip from the registration office in his hand, he immediately went to the address given.

"Nena Post?" asked an old woman who had opened the front door a crack when Reimer rang the bell. "Nelly - don't you know yet? ..."

"I'm from out of town," Reimer replied briefly.

"I have the address only now from the

registration office

get."

"Come in!" The flat owner let the Linzer step into a semi-dark anteroom. She scrutinised the visitor curiously.

"Were you related to Nelly?"

"Were?" asked Reimer. "I helped her return home at the end of the war. She's here now, isn't she?"

"She was here," the woman replied emphatically.

"She was buried the day before yesterday!"

"No - that's not possible!" The Linzer almost shouted.

"How did that happen? " His eyelids fluttered slightly.

"She's poisoned herself," the woman replied dryly.

"She was actually a nice girl at first. When she came to live with me as a lodger, she had previously lost her mother, who was living with relatives in the country. Nelly did quite well for a long time. Then she started drinking after her roommate kept getting on her nerves. They shared a room with me. The other one, who is a real hustler, always brings her black Negro soldier friends here. I can't do anything about it, you know, the occupiers ..."

"Go on," urged the Linzer. "What else happened with Nelly?"

"Well, recently the Negro sergeant from Claire's - her real name is Klara - brought a real black gorilla with a bottle of whisky in every pocket. Well - and after a while he attacked Nelly. She has

shouted so loud you could hear it all over the street. But who can mess with occupying soldiers?"

"So?" Reimer's face had gone white.

"And?" the woman repeated, "for a few days she howled like a dog when her tail was cut off and argued with the black sergeant. Then she got over-excited and took poison. It was actually Claire and her hustler friends who were to blame."

Suddenly a door flew open and a flood of light brightened the anteroom. "Hey - old woman! - What did you just say? - I've got hustler friends?" A dark-haired, dishevelled girl with garishly painted lips followed her words with a flood of vulgar words.

The old woman looked at the raving woman impassively, then shrugged her shoulders without answering and disappeared into the kitchen.

"What's the matter?" A half-dressed Negro soldier had appeared behind the girl. He belched loudly and glared angrily at Reimer.

The Linzer clenched his hands into fists in his pockets. The Black American pushed the girl aside.

"Where are you from? - What are you doing here, hey?"

"Shut up!" growled the Linzer harshly. He added sarcastically: "I've slipped over half the world's hump and now I've landed on an arse!"

The black GI's lower jaw dropped and his white teeth bared. Reimer turned round without another word and left the flat. The people

He no longer understood the insults shouted after him.

He walked slowly through the streets without a destination. The world had now become so ugly that it crushed every feeling. An inner emptiness had taken possession of him. A leaden grey sky cast a pale glow over everything that had become foreign, over deceptively glistening Talmi and over gloom and misery. Germany lay in the gutter ...

The evening was slowly approaching. Reimer was still wandering through the bombed-out city. Miserable figures, people in tattered Landser uniforms shyly huddled around looking for work. The lingo of Munich had become Americanised. A conspicuous number of girls, barely grown up, strolled through the streets, brightly painted and swaying their hips. The pubs were mainly overcrowded with Gis, who lounged around at the bars, scribbling and dragging colourful-faced girls along like lapdogs.

Smaller casinos were labelled "off limits" and were forbidden to American soldiers. Army jeep patrols had the powers of the former German army patrols and ensured that prohibitions were observed. However, they only managed to prevent attacks or assaults in a few cases. The population was numb, partly under the spell of an agitation. Everything that came before Linz's eyes had nothing in common with the heroically fighting people of recent years. Everything at the bottom was turned upwards. The

Newspapers on the stands were full of bold headlines of atrocity propaganda and vilification. In between, other news items fabricated by the occupying power.

Linz stopped in front of a small bookshop. Few new things and mostly worthless old ones. Out of sheer boredom, he went in and rummaged among the unsightly reprints and antiquarian books. Thoughtlessly, he reached into a dusty pile. Suddenly he had an edition of the Edda in his hand. "How much is this supposed to cost?"

The bookseller looked at the book and then shook his head. "Give me what you want for it. Nobody buys that anymore anyway ..."

"Is that how it is now?" Reimer's voice sounded stretched.

"Yes, that's right," the old man confirmed laconically. "Er - everything in its time. Today, people buy and sell certain other things. Pictures, certain photographs ... The Americans pay well. Well - "

Reimer gave the man a banknote, tucked the book under his arm and left.

Gutmann's suggested meeting place was the flat of a young front-line officer of the "Hohenstaufen" division, near Romanstraße.

Reimer found the address with ease. When he rang the bell, he found himself standing in front of an open door facing a man who was the usual type of swashbuckling elite soldier. When the man from Linz said his name

and asked for Gutmann, he immediately cleared the entrance and also gave his name: "v. Lothar. - Your friends are all here already!"

Linz took a deep breath as he was led through a short anteroom. A room door stood ajar. Murmurs of voices drifted out. Following a hint from v. Lothar, he tentatively pushed the door open. Before him stood the companions of a turbulent time.

The men's eyes gleamed. The woman's features looked almost transfigured. Gutmann was the first to make the observation after the brief, almost stormy greeting: "So that's what you look like, boy, when you're wearing civilian clothes back home! You've become a bit thin. Was it still bad in the last few months?"

"It was mean," whispered Reimer. "Mean, like everything else that came after the release."

"And where is Nella?" asked Ortrun guilelessly, unable to contain her curiosity.

The Linzer's features became angular, his mouth narrowed like a line. Immediately there was an awkward silence.

"I think I understand. Not every woman can wait ..."

Reimer waved him off. "It's worse!"

Slowly he gave an account of his visit to Schwabing and concluded with the bitter words: "Time burnt up the months of my unspoken hopes and then it cheated me out of days! Damn - I was already sitting in Linz and missed the last train 'Chance'. Not only the environment, but also

the



Fate is mean!"

The men's faces were as hard as ever. Glistening drops ran down Ortrun's cheeks.

The faint sound of a striking clock came from somewhere. They broke the spell of an almost painful silence.

"Soon the most stupid will realise that the war is far from over," growled Recke harshly.

"Instead of weapons, insidiousness claims its daily victims. There is a system behind it that affects each and every one of us and wants to drive us towards an end and a resolution in a cold war."

"I knew that back home after just a few days," said Reimer calmly. "The old song still applies: life is a game of dice, we roll the dice every day ..." Becoming a little quieter, he added: "It really is like in war - the bone-handed scythe still tears a gap on the left or right."

"Now a new, phrase-mongering system is using every possible means to ostracise us, condemn us and blame us Germans for all the sins of this world. The fact that they then incidentally ensure that a harsh fate is given extra help is part of the hypocrites' lack of compassion!" Recke continued: "It used to be said in America that only a dead Indian was a good Indian. Now it is said in the world: only a dead German is a good German! ... "

v. Lothar, who had remained silent until then, now gently interjected: "How right you are to recognise this,

I can prove it to you! - A few days after the collapse, the well-known international law expert Prof Dr Friedrich Grimm received a visit from an educated man who introduced himself as a university professor from the other side and began a high-level conversation. During the conversation, he suddenly pulled leaflets out of his pocket that dealt with German atrocities. When asked what he thought of this, Grimm replied icily that as a lawyer he would condemn any injustice, but that he knew how to distinguish between injustice in facts and atrocity propaganda. He referred to the publications after the First World War, such as the writings of the Northcliff office, the French minister Klotz with his tales of chopped-off children's hands, the magazine Crapouillot and finally Posenby's classic book *Die Lüge im Kriege*. It reveals that even in the previous war there were magazines in which artificial piles of corpses were put together by photomontage with dolls. These pictures were then distributed and later the texts were passed on by the propaganda centre as required. Professor Grimm then compared his remarks by referring to this leaflet. He went on to point out that in this war, too, the entire world press was supplied daily with reports on German atrocities from a central office. And after each occupation of a country, this propaganda rolled out according to a certain cycle. At first there were hundreds of

The number of dead, especially in the concentration camps, then thousands, weeks later tens of thousands and soon after that hundreds of thousands. Then - Grimm reported - a million would be due, but there could not be such an inflation of numbers. And reaching for the new leaflet again, the professor said to his visitor: "Here's the million!"

The spokesman reached for a glass of water, then continued: "Grimm's visitor was at first disgusted, then he confessed that he was not actually a professional colleague, but a man from the centre that Grimm had previously attacked. And he bluntly and literally admitted that he had been carrying out atrocity propaganda here for months. The Allies had thus finally won the war. When Grimm replied that he had suspected this and that he could now assume that this was the end of this method, the visitor replied verbatim according to Grimm's notes: "No, now we're just getting started! We will continue this atrocity propaganda, we will increase it until no one will accept a good word from the Germans, until all the sympathy they have had in other countries will be destroyed and until the Germans themselves will be so confused that they will no longer know what they are doing. - And that is the cold war for our destruction," concluded Mr Lothar.

"Until the Germans themselves get confused," Gutmann repeated musingly. "And that has only just begun. It's the onslaught of the idols

against Thule!"

"On point 103 we once spoke of the last heroes. Are we now facing the fate of the last Goths on the slopes of Vesuvius?" It was Reimer who spoke these words. His face now looked aged and tired.

"No!" - Gutmann's eyes showed a consuming fire. "We must allow ourselves to be overrun by the overwhelming forces of the Shriners and the Japhetites. We've been hit so hard that we can't think of any defence for the time being. We must bring the remaining substance of our people through the devouring fire of Sinai, which wants to blaze up to Midnight Mountain. We have the world against us because it is already in the hands of the Shriners. After the conquest of Jerusalem, these forces want to build the Third Temple for their universal empire. This is the dark plan of the great Anonymous with their black magic Ark of the Covenant, which has already been largely fulfilled. In 1925, a certain Oskar Goldberg wrote in a book entitled *The Reality of the Hebrews* that the tent contained the motor that generated the metaphysical tension. This is the publicly sanctioned place where the powers can be produced. The tent was thus the warlike centre of the Levite armies and was to be regarded as the place where everything that is technically understood as a means of war was produced. This means that metaphysics is capable of war. In other words, not just a warlike deployment with the usual technical deployments, but with metaphysical, transcendental power-

means. The Mani rests because now are the days of the idols. It will shine again as a sign of the Grail when a new consciousness manifests a new power in space within a historical climate. Then the many persecuted ones from all parts of the earth, from the darkness, will emerge again from the great mother house, purified from the reflections of their experience-rich retrospection, with a brighter and better knowledge of all things of being and committed to the inner law."

"I agree with you," continued Recke. "We must do everything we can to survive in this chaos and let the destruction roller pass. If Lucifer, the now universally demonised great light bearer, throws the torch from the Midnight Mountain again, there must be survivors who will carry his light everywhere, as it was done in ancient times!"

"Those are fine words," said Mr Lothar dryly. "I completely agree with these views, but the new present will hardly understand us. The new vocabulary has become narrow and stale and thinking will soon be perceived as ballast. Deep knowledge is also being fought against in order to achieve a docile, non-judgemental world unity type of humanity more quickly ..."

"... and Germany is the parade ground," Reimer interrupted bitterly. "We've been kicked all the way to hell, our souls are being whipped out of our bodies and the defeated and defenceless people of our nation are being turned into the first robots under the white and blue flag of

the

United Nations."

"Knowledge comes with time," Gutmann gently objected. "Even now, shortly after the Nuremberg Victory Tribunal, the British journalist Douglas Reed found out that the sentences in Nuremberg were pronounced on 30 September and 1 October: between the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hoshannah, and the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. The executions were carried out in the morning hours of 16 October, on the day of Hoshanna Rabbah. This macabre procedure thus took on the unambiguous character of a tribal ritual in accordance with the laws of the Old Testament. The American occupation zone as the territory of the trial also had symbolic significance. If today the people in our countries and in the white world are not yet partakers of our knowledge and no longer understand the form of our language, later they will learn to understand it again."

"Provided we survive in the cold war with cold resistance," added Reimer with a little sarcasm in his voice.

Gutmann looked at Linz and the others in turn. "That's up to us! Haven't we already made a precautionary start on point 103? Didn't we hoard potencies and set tasks for the people? We don't know where the people of this point are at the moment, but they are there somewhere. Somewhere..." He gazed pensively out of the room into a grey sky.

"I'm the youngest among you," interjected Mr Lothar.

"I have an inkling of Gutmann's knowledge, but the youngest generation at the front had not had time to grasp the profound between the school desk and the front. We are well aware of the power of the forces that overlay the profane level. But the entirety of the last war years still has some catching up to do in terms of deeper knowledge. Incidentally, the front-line youth are faced with the same questions, only they see things more simply and up close. We have understood why we had to fight and have realised that we are now to become the victims of an all-perverting propaganda. When you, as elders, see the great decisions of tomorrow in the final battle between idols and Thule, then we, as survivors and the last remaining intact substance, move closer together. In my soldierly imagination, Dürer's knight, death and devil motif remains a meaningful companion!"

"We understand each other," Gutmann said simply.

The next few hours were spent in relaxed company. Only Reimer became monosyllabic again in the personal atmosphere and then silent. His recent experience was beginning to have an effect. Frêne was also completely introverted.

Before setting off late at night, the men agreed to accept an invitation from the young "Hohenstaufen" officer to a small get-together of comrades in nearby Salzburg, which was to take place in three days' time. Until then, the Recke couple and Frêne were to stay with Mr Lothar. Gutmann had the wish to return to



Salzburg ahead, Reimer wanted to get to Linz and then back to the Austrian border town,

Men's freedom of choice created an illusion of apparent independence ...

Three days were like a whirlwind of time. But they turned out to be fateful days.

Gutmann was the first to arrive in Salzburg. Despite the remaining war damage, the city showed itself to be a mature gem and its charming beauty even under a grey sky. The American occupation dominated the streetscape with a somewhat hectic restlessness.

After a brief tour of the town, and after some deliberation, he decided to go to the nearby Untersberg. Coloured GI's - as American soldiers were known in army jargon - roaming the streets with girls made him reluctant to stay there any longer. Every time he met them, he had to think of Reimer's fate.

When he left the city's soft landscape, the sky had become even gloomier. Gusts of wind were now chasing through the landscape. Every now and then an American army jeep whizzed past on the road, there were no pedestrians to be seen. At the foot of the nearby mountain, he met a farmer and asked for a way up.

The countryman raised his hand in warning. With a few words, he pointed out to Gutmann that although the Untersberg was a relatively easy mountain, it had the same pitfalls as the

High mountains. Furthermore, it is not advisable to climb mountains without equipment. Even mule tracks and ascent routes require sturdy footwear and a minimum level of protection. According to the current weather conditions, a cold snap is to be expected in the higher areas, unless a storm brings even more serious dangers.

Gutmann thanked him somewhat hesitantly.

Regardless of the warnings, he climbed into the incipient mountain forest. The mountain block loomed over him, hiding its high peaks under drifting plumes of cloud. The whole thing seemed forbidding and like a silent threat.

As the forest thinned out, the path became increasingly inhospitable. A panoramic view showed a landscape smothered by grey weather, the nearby town now seemed to be crouched around the Hohensalzberg. Strong gusts of wind attacked the lonely hiker, as if the mountain spirit was blowing its wrath at human carelessness from stony nostrils.

Gutmann climbed higher and higher. He had never been a mountaineer and therefore felt the arduousness of the path far more than experienced tourists. Nevertheless, an inner restlessness increased, constricting his thoughts and driving him onwards. Wisps of mist, which were now rising from the heights into the depths, and an unreal light from the nearby surroundings, told him nothing. Almost mechanically, he climbed past crevices and rockfalls. The giant was now beginning to show itself in its stony nakedness.

The singing of the wind had died down. Lead-grey and black-grey clouds now hung like heavy sacks in the sky, threatening to smother everything around them. From inside the mountain came a muffled organ, as if the mountain was warning for the last time.

Gutmann heard nothing. Courage and stubbornness held him in their grip. And then the storm came.

An ice-cold fist threatened to whirl him round and crush him, tearing him out of his clouded thinking and forcing him back to harsh reality. The mountain was now screaming like a beast, shrieking trolls tore at his flapping clothes and a distant rumble signalled a rockfall. Freezing rain stung his bare face and the falling temperature made his hands clammy.

Now Gutmann was looking for a sheltered spot. He left the path and looked out for a crack or a cave. He no longer had any sense of time or orientation. The mountain drew him in as if it offered protection and destruction at the same time. The roar of nature became the enemy of man.

Suddenly, the mountain seemed to take pity on us. A small hollow, half concealed by a barren and stunted shrubbery, offered itself as protection. The storm itself tore aside the branches of the groaning shrubbery, as if inviting those it pursued to enter the stone interior. With the last of his strength, Gutmann staggered into the darkness.

It took a while for his eyes to adjust to the

The twilight had grown accustomed to him. Behind him lay a narrow, dark chasm. This meant that the cave was deeper than initially assumed. As the wind caught in the vestibule, raged around and blew in an icy chill, Gutmann retreated even further. When he hit his head on the ceiling, he crouched down. Turning back further, he found that the corridor was narrow, but without end. He realised with regret that he didn't even have any matches with him and no modest source of light to help him. A short distance further down the mountain, the force of the wind diminished. In its place came the strange odour of mountain breath.

"Like a gate of Agartha!" it flashed through him. Now he also realised the mythical significance of the Untersberg, inside which Emperor Charlemagne slumbered until the ravens flying around the mountain took off and let him emerge from the mountain after another hundred years of sleep. That was to be when the empire called him.

He crouched down, shivering, and leant backwards against the stone-cold cave wall. In the dark interior, the storm no longer had any power. The shrill fury of the forces of nature only sounded like hissing and howling. However, the merciless icy cold had remained and sent shivers of frost through his shivering body.

A half-awake dawn remained for a while. In the border area of dull consciousness

Thoughts and dreams. After a while, a cosy warmth crept through my body in place of the gradually diminishing cold. It tempted me to sleep.

Gutmann's eyes fell closed ...

Colourful dream images took the slumbering man away from reality. Only the powerful mountain smoke penetrated his subconscious and crept into his inner vision, helping to shape it.

The dark cave hole took on a new shape. Rock crystal and rose quartz suddenly sparkled everywhere, corridors burst open, whispering and giggling trolls lured out of fathomless crevices. Large bats fluttered ahead, pointing the way into the deep interior.

Staggering, the dreamer visionarily followed an increasing, unreal light. Small mythical creatures crept across the path, dark, ghostly birds squawked mealy-mouthed and cast moving shadows on the walls. He followed the chirping compulsion further and further. The dazzling reflections of the gripping vision made him lose all sense of time.

Stumbling over a threshold, his gaze led him into an enormous cathedral hall. All around was an almost unbearable sparkle and glitter. In the background, a huge rocky stage, flanked by mighty stalagmites, radiated a brilliant glow. Behind it, large stalactites supported the soaring ceiling.

Something else captured the inner eye: A natural stone table grew out of the stage. Behind it sat

a sleeping man with his head resting on his folded arms.

Now the animals were noisy and the calls of the invisible grew louder. The sleeping man raised his head abruptly. Deep-set eyes flashed from an ancient countenance that reflected dignity and nobility. Long hair, a flowing beard and bushy brows shone silver.

The wanderer, who had stopped, stared at the ancient man in fascination. Minutes passed. Then he stammered:

"Sir..." The man behind the stone table was still silent.

"Sir," Gutmann repeated. "Lord of the Untersberg!" Still silence.

"You are - the king of the Franks! - the K a i s e r !"

The silent one seemed to grow, then nodded slowly.

"Charlemagne!" The caller's agitated eyes fixed on his majestic counterpart. His tongue was heavy, an anxiety almost paralysed him.

Now the emperor spoke. His voice was deep and rumbled through the room. "Who are you, stranger?"

Without waiting for an answer, he continued: "Have you come to tell me that there are no more ravens flying around the mountain?" After a brief hesitation, Gutmann replied: "The ravens? - They're still flying, Emperor!"

A painful look of resignation flashed across Karl's face. His hands, resting on the table, trembled slightly. "You're still flying? ..."

"Why shouldn't they fly?" Gutmann darkly recalled the old legend.

"When they're no longer around the mountain, I'll come back from the Untersberg. Then the kingdom needs me!" The eyes flashed again from the proudly raised head.

"The empire? - There is no empire," Gutmann shouted. Then a terrible laugh came from his throat, which rumbled against the glittering walls. "Your empire, Emperor, has long since crumbled, as has a second one. And now the third has also crumbled!"

"What are you saying?" Karl's eyes darkened.

Gutmann's voice now sounded like sobs. "The Apocalypse rides against Germania and the idols ram the gates of Thule!" Another maniacal laugh.

The emperor grew, his eyes burning. "I should go out!"

"You can't, Franke! - The ravens keep flying and will never leave!"

"How do you know that?" Karl's voice was heavy.

Gutmann hesitated, then said clumsily: "They are Widukind's ravens, Emperor, - they caw from brood to brood about the slaughter at Verden on the Aller! - It is a race of ravens that came from this forest and puts a ring around the mountain forever."

The emperor's furrowed features hardened, his beard trembled. "Have you come to reason with me, stranger?"

"You asked me, Karl, I answered!" Gutmann's voice rose: "You crippled an eagle and raised a fish and a lamb. With the

Sharpen your sword!"

"I was the first emperor of Greater Germany!" The old man's eyes looked over Gutmann into the height of the cathedral hall. "I created the first empire and paid the price!"

"Yes, you paid the price," Gutmann now muttered dully. "You paid with the blood of the Saxons!"

Now the face of the Franconian turned pale. "I wielded the sword of heaven and made it the sword of the West!"

"Where has the sword of heaven gone?" A defiant undertone underlined the question. "It's already lost three realms!"

"I won and held the kingdom," Karl said harshly. "Who gambled away my inheritance?"

"Your seed, Charles! - You did not use your Frankish power for the north, but helped establish an ultramontane rule. For the great spider with the sign on its back of ultramontes - beyond the Alps!"

Karl's eyes flashed and a deep rumble came from his broad chest: "You have a bold tongue! Are the rebels still not extinct in Germany? Why do you deny that my seed created a great empire?"

"It was a Roman empire," Gutmann disagreed bravely. "Henry I only created the first German empire after you, Frank! But the spider ate it because you **m a d e** it too strong. And to this day



rebels fought for freedom again and again, but the foreign power was stronger."

The emperor's forehead veins swelled and his face darkened in colour. "Do you want to blaspheme God's power?"

"No, Franke! I mean an all too worldly power that pretends to rule in the name of God. And now there is an even stronger power that you do not yet know! ..."

Karl's features showed movement, followed by an angry gesture. "Rebels always have rebelliousness in their blood. You are a rebel too! - You always defy power. Not the realm of Henry, whom you named, but my realm held. God's kingdom! - What do you mean by freedom? Soon there will be no more rebels!"

"Don't wish that, Emperor! When the last rebel dies, Germany is dead too!"

Karl sighed. There was silence in the room. After a while, he said:

"There will always be pros and cons - and everyone wants great things! I succeeded and the Saxon duke lost. Do they still call me the Saxon Butcher?"

"Yes, Franke! And it is history itself that never forgives. Scratched marks in the time tables remain!"

The emperor made an agitated movement. "It's been so long. People have forgotten and some things have faded. One day the ravens will fly away and then I will return as prince of Germania and Gaul. Then history will have a new page!"

"Perhaps the great Hohenstaufen, Redbeard, will come

out of Kyffhäuser before you. He is also waiting!"  
Karl's brow furrowed. "We'll see who the

Empire calls."

"There will probably be no empire for a long time now. History is not Germany's time now. Three shattered empires are recorded in it. You would no longer recognise Germania. And your crown now rests in a lustreless shrine. Even the fish stink - they turn red! ..."

"That - I don't understand," muttered Karl.

"There is much that is no longer understandable. If you want to return from your stony realm to the earthly one, then you must ride with the rebels! Side by side with Widukind, with Hutten, Florian Geyer, Kurt Eggers and many others whom German history gave birth to when the time was ripe. And when a fourth empire casts its shadow into the mists of the future, all the great Germans will have to help the new rebels!"

Karl looked at Gutmann penetratingly. "When it comes to the empire..."

"Everything is at stake then, Franke! When the eagles fly - maybe your banishing ravens will fly too. Then you'll be free. Free, Karl, free! ..."

Now Gutmann felt himself floating. The figure of the tall Franconian melted before his eyes, everything around him began to spin. Shadows danced before his eyes, which suddenly looked into an increasing darkness. A cosy warmth made him unspeakably tired. Colourful wheels of an inner vision, which took him completely away from the previous scene, became smaller and smaller.

then went out completely. Only an unreal, spherical music rushed through his ears with full tones. It then died down as well. The warmth overwhelmed him and extinguished all sensations.

A long sleep came ...

Shortly afterwards, the sky outside cleared up again.

"Gutmann is missing!"

The small group of people at the meeting in Salzburg had been deeply shocked by the announcement that the Salzburg host, a former member of the "Wiking" division, had made to his guests.

After a fruitless search, enquiries with the mountain rescue service revealed that all options were still open. The Untersberg probably had all the degrees of difficulty of the high mountains, combined with the pitfalls of unpredictable surprises, but many mountaineers inexperienced in unknown areas had survived weather falls. A fall with a later discovery of the victim is certainly possible, but so is a descent on another side of the mountain. It sometimes happened that tourists left without cancelling their trip.

"So Gutmann's fate is currently undetermined," whispered Reimer gloomily. "I don't really want to believe that he died on this legendary mountain. He is probably a living descendant of the bonhommes, the Cagots, who followed the path of the ever-searching troubadours.

But he is too combative to commit himself to the last of the Cathar Goths: the endura - suicide

... And an accident? Gutmann was always very careful!"

Frêne raised his head. "I don't want to believe in misfortune either." His slumped posture lifted slightly. "Charlemagne rests in the Untersberg! - Perhaps Gutmann has been enriched by an inner experience? Our comrade-in-arms was always an extremely sensitive person. His well-known waywardness suggests that he stayed away from our meeting for some unknown reason. Perhaps ..." Frêne hesitated briefly, "perhaps a call from point 103?"

Recke looked at the Carcassonner full on. "Gutmann's characterisation is aptly drawn. With his often strange and internalised manner, every possibility is open. The only thing I don't believe in is a call of 103. At least not at this point in time."

"Perhaps Gutmann withdrew for a while because, like many others, he couldn't cope with the environment," interjected Mr Lothar.

"People like him can no longer stand their homeland, and men like that can't stand what is still called home."

Reimer nodded in agreement, "These words make me think of Belisse! Back in Sabarthé, he said prophetically that I would probably return home and see the homeland, but the homeland would not see me. Now I understand the meaning of his premonition!"

"I overheard," confirmed Recke. "And the Rabbi of Toledo spoke just as knowledgeably about the wandering soul of the north, which he called the new Ahasuerus. Now we're all wandering around the room because a banishing cloth has been placed over the apron of the Midnight Mountain." He shrugged his shoulders a little wearily. "We're on our own now and we don't even have a mundane connection to Küpper. Where are these men now?"

"That shouldn't be your concern," said Mr Lothar calmly. "In the age of modern means of communication that are effective everywhere, intelligible calls over the airwaves are no longer a problem. And waiting is the epitome of soldierly wisdom!"

"So we wait," sighed Reimer devotedly. "Life outside of time will demand a lot from us!"

"Pah," said a Viennese called Hase, who had been a first lieutenant in the "Das Reich" division.

"Since I became a soldier, I'm used to always being overworked." Soft blue eyes twinkled with slight amusement from his otherwise hard face. "I'll be happy if I have a holiday from the mud holes now and don't have to endure a fire spell for twenty-four hours." Becoming serious again, he continued: "We all know here in this small circle that the last dramatic events in the course of the world have torn the living space of white humanity into further feuding parts. While we wait, new front lines are emerging. Not only the East - the whole coloured world is being torn apart by forces behind the scenes.

controlled, stand up against the whites!"

"This shift in the fronts confirms the ancient Greek phrase: pantha rei - everything flows," added Recke. "At point 103, we still had the coloured world next to us. I doubt whether it will stay that way. Even the special position of the Germans among the coloured people will disappear. Greater Thule will then have to become a shield and protection for all those who are still blinded by the white living space. Then comes our test and our hour!"

"We French will also be there again," Frêne said emphatically. "Many of us have already grasped the deeper meaning of what is happening. Didn't my friends help to doggedly defend Berlin in a war situation that had become hopeless?"

While the men nodded to Frêne, V. Lothar asked the Frenchman: "What's going to happen to you now?"

Recke raised his hand: "Frêne will come to me for the time being.

I still have room for a mate!" The Carcassonner tried to fend him off.

"No excuses, Major!" said Recke, cutting off every objection.

"That's the right thing to do," emphasised Hase. "Move close together and then right through. Another old troop motto. We survivors have to stand together to hold our ground!"

"We will," agreed v. Lothar. "Let us remain a stronghold of the spirit in the survival of these times. We owe that to the dead for three empires."

"Great Thule must become the new spiritual concept for all white people of the northern region, a spiritual empire across all state formations, in the Old and New World. In this mother water also lies the fourth empire of the Germans!" Hare leant forward, bright lights dancing in his eyes. "I know a centuries-old scripture that speaks of a mountain at midnight white and of the white midnight sun. Tigers and dragons will beset the heroes in the north. Even the Pope's triple diadem will turn to dust. In another passage of the 1617 manuscript, it is announced that Europe will give birth to a mighty child, a lord of the Fourth Empire! - And in the 'Themis Aurea' there is talk of a Germania that lies far beyond the geographical borders of the country that has been called the same from then until today. The demonic nature of the collective was recognised in the ancient foresight and described as Gog and Magog. The great anonymous people in the world today have indeed mobilised nihilism against us, they have deployed black and grey magical forces on the metaphysical level through their Beite Midrashim, the tent and the Ark of the Covenant have been activated and in the foreseeable future the coloured peoples will be incited against us and oppress us.

We are on the brink of a decisive movement in history. The war that has now been lost was only the introduction, not the end. Friedrich Schiller coined the words: "The day may belong to the bad, but eternity belongs to the true and the good. Let us be ready!"



There was a deep silence in the room. Rays of sunlight danced through the windows. The Salzburg sky was a deep, rich blue and the sun itself hung in the firmament like a blazing golden disc.

"Blue and gold - the ancient Atlantic colours," said Hare after a while in a slightly husky voice. He continued dreamily: "They are the colours of the sons of the sun that my friend Edmund Kiß spoke to me about when I was with him in the prison camp at St. Avold. They kept us worse than animals there. The prisoners died like flies and we felt the power that wanted to break us. When we survivors were released, Kiß was terminally ill. And that was the end of his work. He passed away too soon, like Kurt Eggers and many others. But he left us the knowledge in his book *Singing Swans of Thule*:

The earth once belonged to the Northmen,  
now they are shattered and shattered and  
wander on the icy edge of Thule,  
like the whooper swans of their homeland.  
But the lance of the soul still aims for peaks and heights.  
In their deepest need, they are determined to once again  
imprint the round pressure of their souls on the earth.

**BERSERKER**

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**BOOKS**

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