



WILHELM LANDIG

IDOLS  
AGAINST

**THULLE**

# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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

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

*The author*

WILHELM LANDIG  
IDOLS AGAINST  
THULE

*A novel full of realities*

## Table of contents

FIRST BOOK .....	5
SECRET ORDER.....	6
THE BRIGHT NIGHT.....	56
NULIAJUKANAIINAQ.....	102
POINT 103.....	143
THE MESSENGERS.....	190
THE FLIGHT INTO CHAOS.....	253
SECOND BOOK.....	327
SUNSET.....	328
THE GRALSBERG.....	375
THE KNOWLEDGE.....	417
SHADOW GAME.....	440
THE JOURNEY.....	498
THE WAYS OF ALLAH.....	586
A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS.....	634
THIRD BOOK .....	676
AGNI'S FIRE BURNS.....	677
SEVEN LOTUS BLEEDS.....	729
THE SECRET EMPIRE.....	811
THE ROAD LEADS SOMEWHERE.....	874
OM MANI PADME HUM.....	930
REFUGE OF THE SPIRIT.....	966

# FIRST BOOK

## SECRET ORDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

"I wish you were right," Reimer interjected.

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

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

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

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

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

Recke grabbed his comrade's arm in sympathy.

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

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

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

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

conversation again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recke and Reimer gave him a dozy look.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

probably be lost."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The two machines at the very back? -"

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

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

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

urgently required!" the lieutenant interjected hesitantly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Probably messed up somehow," Recke said lightly.

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



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

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

"That's unbelievable!" Reimer was outraged.

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

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

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

"Unfortunately," whispered Weiß.

"Well, we fly on from our eyrie and

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

White also saluted and turned back.

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

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

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

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

"Hopefully something sensible," Recke grumbled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Break a leg," he called after them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I see - hm ..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"By your command, Major!"

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

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

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

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



he began to speak:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Rubbish!"

"You really shouldn't let yourself go, but

turn your thoughts to our 3 S K!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

field !"

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

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

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

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

"But?" the major continued.

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

"So nothing to complain about?"

"Nothing, Major!"

"Hm." A short pause.

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

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

Recke and Reimer fell silent, embarrassed.

"Treason and stupidity are absolutely separate concepts",

said the Major quietly, as if speaking to himself.

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

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

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

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

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

Recke nodded stiffly like a puppet, while Reimer

coughed and grimaced.

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

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

The major deliberately ignored the repetition.

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

"Very nice," murmured Reimer.

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

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

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

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

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

isn't it?"

"Yes, Major!"

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, that's right!"

"So ... !"

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

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

"- scary, scary," Recke mimicked again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Reserved for the start to the polar bears!"

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

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

to blame."

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

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

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

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

"Gutmann speaks more in the Frankfurt key."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His eyes were a little watery.

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

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

Recke immediately topped him up. "To your health,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



v. Wendt patted him on the shoulder in sympathy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where is Mohr staying?" asked Colonel Troll.

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

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

"Moor ..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Have the tanks topped up, gentlemen!"

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

obey the order.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reimer flew over the Aasenfjord, then over the

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Nevertheless - see you soon!"

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

"Restless, Major!"

"Which one of you has the order?"

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

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

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

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

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

The canopies closed, Reimer pushed the stick forwards, the engines sang their roaring song, the aircraft taxied and lifted off the ground,

floated, flew.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oho," said Recke. "Pessimist?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What a mess!" the people grumbled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recke honoured his wish.

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

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

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

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

But Gutmann preferred to remain silent.



## THE BRIGHT NIGHT

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

**(Edda: Helgi's return)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After drinking, Recke took the cards again

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

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

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

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

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

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

The floor picture changed. The surfaces of the dark

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

Gutmann commented: "Atmospheric disturbances."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"About half an hour," Reimer replied.

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

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

"Tilt half a cup!"

"What is it, Gutmann?"

"3 S K!"

"Are you trying to tease us?"

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

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

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

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

"Children, compare your measurements!" demanded Reimer.

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

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

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

The men's tension grew. Five minutes - three

...

"Here!"

Circling. - Checking the position - The Pole!

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

- Germans at the Pole! - Cheers again!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What if we give ourselves away?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Shall I relieve you?" asked Recke.

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

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

"But here - do you want Pervitin?"

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

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

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

"Do you have any reasons for this assumption?"

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Which one?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kasseler could not hide his surprise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

will probably not be able to avoid a landing."

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

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

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

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

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

"Funny bloke, the Gutmann!" grumbled Recke.

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

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

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

"If there really is something wrong at Gutmann, then



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reimer did not miss the opportunity to take an extended

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quickly?

what it all means! -"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

dark shreds of underlying moss lichen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

"The guy is shooting at us with guns!"

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

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

clearly the Canadian licence plates.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hello, fellow!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

limply over the edge of the entrance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The man nodded expressionlessly. Only his eyes were

suspiciously damp.

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

..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

nothing more can be done!"

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reimer arrived with petrol cans and topped up the tanks.

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

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

..."

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

"Yes - Lieutenant!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Word of honour, then!"

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

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

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

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

"Will be buried - burried!" explained Reimer.

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

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

"Does he think that we are probably man-eaters

would be," growled Recke angrily.

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

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

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

to be able to win.

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

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

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

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

"Have we got everything we need, Herbert?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tally-ho - hunt over!"

"Hunt off!" repeated the man from Kassel.

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

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

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

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

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



## NULIAJUKANAIINAQ

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

**(Eskimo song)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

humming sounds.

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

"Giant eagle!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hungry?" asked the host who had followed.

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

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

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

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

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

Both slept ...

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The chief translated.

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

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

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

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

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

"Serqorsishut?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Blood soup with seal meat!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reimer welcomed him immediately. "I have the good

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Eh - yes, yes!"

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

somewhat restless."

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

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

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

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

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

The people who came closer were strangers. One

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The restraint of the pilots is generally noticeable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I agree with your opinion. Hopefully

Gutmann before the peak excursion season begins!"

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

They could do nothing but exercise patience. Whilst the female housemates busied themselves outside, Reimer and Recke lay on their fur camps and tried to understand Aglumaloqâq's explanations. Although his vocabulary was very small, they understood his mishmash of words reasonably well as he gesticulated eagerly. He had acquired his knowledge of English through his dealings with passing whalers. Years ago - he expressed the time in suns - one of their ships had wintered north of here. It was a good time for his people. The women had brought a lot of tobacco from the ship ... He regretted that his guests had no rolls of tobacco. He had chewed a cigarette offered to him together with the paper and swallowed it afterwards.

After a while he said that his guests were different from the white men who had been here before. You always had to let these people have their way. They were like little children. If you didn't let them have their way, they became angry and dangerous. Naughty children! - That was Aglumaloqâq's conviction.

It was understandable to him, since the white

people were bastards. The Eskimo people had once chased away some disobedient and arrogant women. These then formed a small community far to the south and sired bastards with dogs. This is how the qablunait from the south came to the Eskimos and this was the only way they could understand that these people were all so conceited and unteachable. If they were provoked, they murdered ...

Aglumaloqâq thought nothing of offending his guests. He harmlessly shared his knowledge and opinions and was happy when the men of the giant eagle showed a cheerful face.

When the men told him that they had never been to Eskimos before and knew nothing else about them, he told them about the hard life they led. The good hunting grounds were dwindling, the herds of animals were becoming smaller and smaller and rarer. The whites were driving the Indians further north, Crees, Chippewyans and Yellowknives were sometimes advancing into the hunting grounds of the Eskimos and then there would be fights. The Indians often had guns and the Eskimos were powerless against them.

In the past, an infinite number of suns ago, their current living and hunting grounds would have been a paradise. Back then, there was no need to fill lamps with whale blubber. In those days, forests grew at the bottom of the sea and the storms tore the trees loose and flung the trunks all over the coast. There was an abundance of wood. People mastered magical

formulae and knew how to conjure up remote places with their huts. This meant they never had to go hungry. Aglumaloqâq sighed as he painted these pictures. Later, the earth collided with a star and much of the land was destroyed. A tremendous flood destroyed all life. Only two shamans remained of the humans, none of the animals. The two shamans lived together and one of them had a child. He was a great magician and made it into a woman, who later also had a child. So the women descended from the one shaman. And slowly the earth became populated again.

The old man's stories sounded simple, almost primitive. The two officers were therefore all the more astonished to find ancient traditions preserved here that would have been forgotten in the civilised world without books. World without books would have fallen into oblivion.

"Do you remember Gutmann's explanations about the Golden Age and fertile Greenland?" Reimer suddenly asked, looking his companion full in the face. "When we flew over the geographic pole ..."

"Certainly! - Gutmann briefly explained an Atlantist theory." With a thoughtful expression, Reimer continued: "The simple and brief lore of the Eskimo peoples is consistent with these hypotheses. All knowledge preserved from prehistoric times has a true core."

Recke nodded. "That's right. And it's strange that traditions among primitive peoples confirm that

which current science does not always dare to recognise due to its exact-constructive attitude. Of course, it is not only the conscience, but also the dutiful responsibility of scholars; two concepts that often provoke counter-opinions in people seeking opinions. Naturally, in the age of materialism, the constructive always takes precedence over the spiritual. This is probably because there are too few traditional foundations. And foundations are prerequisites for evidence. The difference, however, is that fragments as undeniably existing things - insofar as they form their physical substance - are a priori pieces of evidence around which the scaffolding of constructive thought can be erected; in contrast, even older traditions are mostly dependent on the personal viewpoint of the researcher to be evaluated as such or only as myths or fairy tales. It is therefore understandable that the sparsely preserved traditions are doubted and not always carefully scrutinised. A consequence of constructive criticism that wants to be smarter than a possible event. It is well known that one can build on opposite sides. It is only a matter of opinion. However, one thing can be said about primitive peoples: regardless of the different cultural stages, traditions have been preserved whose core is based on real events. Whatever embellishments and embellishments were added, the core was not destroyed. In a few cases, perhaps a

Distortion. And this ancient knowledge remains eternal because it is sacred. Books, on the other hand, entrusted in the materialistic sense with the preservation of a limited period of thought or knowledge, decay or may even be condemned as nonsense in the distant future. For the simple reason that the books of a materialistic epoch smother the core of the concepts with constructive commentaries. Comments of an arrogant, ethos-poor time, which is more intolerant than any epoch before."

"I'm amazed," the Linzer interjected. "I thought you hadn't thought about things before because we only hinted at them for the first time during the flight. Your views are completely in line with my thinking."

"I have rarely thought about any problems," Recke confessed frankly. "Although we are currently under the pressure of extraordinary events, I can't break my habit of thorough reflection. Netsilikmann's story has aroused my interest. Once the war is over ..."

"There's still time, my dear! When the shooting stops, the war will still continue in a different form. You don't need to be a prophet to know that. When Germany falls, the chaos will really begin. And where there is chaos, there is no peace!"

"I know that just as well as you do. Nevertheless, the 'If once' be a little lamp that shows us the way through

to illuminate the darkness that lies ahead. The light that is also called hope!"

When Aglumaloqâq had finished telling his short story about the early days of his people, he paid no more attention to his guests and began to doze off. He did not understand the white men's interchanges. He knew that they did not speak the language of the Qablunait from the south, but he did not care which tribe his guests belonged to. While they lapsed into silence and pursued their thoughts, he rose leisurely and prepared to leave his igloo. At that moment, Ubloriasukshuk emerged from the entrance tunnel.

She spoke a few words in her strange-sounding Netsilikidiom and Aglumaloqâq translated: "The white men in the new igloo have awoken. They are asking if there are any useful things left with the crashed giant eagle. They want to visit the site!"

"That's completely superfluous. You saw for yourselves that our giant eagle was burnt. You took metal parts with you if you thought they were valuable," said Recke to the Eskimos.

"Eh, eh," nodded the old man. "But they still hope to find something ..."

"I'll talk to them myself!" declared Reimer with a quick decision. He didn't wait for an answer, but crawled outside immediately. For better or worse



Recke follows him.

Together they made their way to the new snow house, in front of which those who had arrived last seemed to be eagerly negotiating with some Netsilik men. Only one of the three Avertorini people was standing next to them.

Reimer began to speak: "If you're hoping to find anything in the remains of our plane, you're mistaken ..." He paused suddenly as the men looked at him in surprise. Their brows furrowed and Howard, who was holding his rifle in his hand, slowly began to raise his weapon. Before Reimer realised the cause of this change of mood, his companion had released his pistol in a flash.

"Hands up! - And down with the gun. Down!"

As Reimer instinctively drew his weapon quickly, three pairs of hands slowly went up. Howard bared his teeth angrily and let his shotgun slide gently to the ground on one slightly bent leg. "Damned Germans! ..."

While the Eskimos were still staring uncomprehendingly, unable to comprehend what had happened, Recke quickly picked up the weapon he had lost. Without taking his eyes off the men, he explained: "We horndogs didn't fasten our combinations. Now the blokes have seen our flight blouses with the officers' mirrors on the collars. Of course, they know perfectly well that this isn't pyjamas or a Russian uniform. No

No wonder they made big eyes!" After a brief inspection of the prisoners, he asked: "Are you soldiers?"

Again, Howard, as leader, was the spokesman. Sullenly he replied: "We've already said we're sailors!"

"I know that. Just wanted to confirm it again.

We don't go to war with civilians."

"Don't understand ..."

"Very simple, misters! - You can go scot-free if you are sufficiently equipped. Including your shotgun, so you can hunt on the way!"

Howard and his men looked at the two officers in surprise.

"Don't look so stupid!" said the man from Kassel cosily. "We're not ghosts or monsters. Where nature threatens people, it's our duty to help! War doesn't change that. Do you understand?"

"Yes." The answer was hesitant and mistrustful.

Recke was about to add a few more words when he suddenly felt one of the stray dogs nudge him several times with its snout. At the same time, he noticed other dogs nudging Reimer, the Canadians and some of the Eskimos with their muzzles and then raising their heads skywards as if to attract attention to something.

"There!"

"Takuvah, takuvali - seqineq! Look, look - a sun! ...", the Eskimos shouted and pointed excitedly into the

Height. The whites also looked up, while the dogs let out a joyful whine and jumped around excitedly. High above them, under the grey expanse of the twilight polar sky, a flickering orange disc was rotating. It had emerged from behind the horizon as quick as an arrow and remained just above the small settlement. The apparition actually looked like a small sun and radiated an intense light towards the earth, which refracted like a dancing fire on the ice floes of the coast.

"Seqineq, seqineq! ..."

More and more Eskimos approached the group of onlookers, lured by the eagerly signalling dogs. Suddenly the shaman stood in the centre of the gathering. His eyes gazed with a strangely mixed expression of rapture and transfiguration at the calmly pausing disc. His fellow tribesmen formed a ring around him, which the dogs prevented them from leaving with furious growls and snarls. Reimer and Recke watched the strange behaviour of the animals and the shaman carefully. It seemed as if the dogs were subject to a higher directive, which they instinctively obeyed in order to force the humans into the circle.

The shaman's silence lasted only a few moments. Then he suddenly began to dance. A ring of dogs sat around him, like an inner circle, watching his grotesque movements with their heads tilted. A centre circle was formed by

the Eskimos with the five whites and outside again a number of dogs rounded a third ring.

"Strange," muttered Reimer and looked at Recke, who nodded in understanding.

"By God, this isn't a circus ..."

The shaman's dance became wilder and wilder. His face showed rapture and his legs stamped on the ground as if he were beating a drum.

The eyes of the bystanders kept wandering to the brightly lit window, then back to the dancing man in the centre.

The shaman's hands twitched as if he wanted to reach for the disc, which kept rotating without changing its position. His hood had long since slipped off his head and his forehead beads lay scattered in the snow. Sweat trickled down his greasy face and his chin hairs trembled. The tension was so great that no sound could be heard.

The hanging strips of caribou skin that adorned his belt flew like the ropes of a merry-go-round. The dance became faster and faster, more and more grotesque. Then - the tension became almost unbearable - he tore his fur clothing from his body with a sudden movement that was also characterised by an almost supernatural strength. Piece by piece, until in an ecstatic state, stark naked, he continued to dance his figures, which became more and more like a belly dance; already exhausted, he limited himself to movements that had a distinctly erotic flavour.

character. However, they did not appear obscene.

The disc was still in the sky and the body of the man in a trance was still twitching. The pounding footsteps became slower. Then - the bystanders could feel the cold slowly descending - the shaman suddenly threw his arms up with a final effort.

"Nuliajuk - mistress!" he shouted with an animal-like shriek. Then he collapsed as if struck by a blow. The white men and the Eskimos were horrified to see that the shaman was dead. Looking at the disc, they noticed that it had sunk lower and was now a blood-red colour. While perplexity and astonishment were still reflected in everyone's faces, a golden glow descended from the strange materialisation above them to the dead man, like a connection between him and the disc producing.

"Takuvah ..." murmured the Eskimos shyly. "Look, look ..." Immediately afterwards, the disc rose steeply upwards, changing colour to an intense yellow, and disappeared again, flying northwards behind the white jagged ridges of the land.

While the dogs stared after the disappearing apparition in a crouched position, the Eskimos fell to their knees one after the other and, following an obviously instinctive ritual, raised their palms upwards as if saying a prayer of reverence. The two officers and the Canadians were also able to say a foreign prayer.

feeling.

As the spell of this strange event slowly began to lift and the Netsilik people whispered shyly, the chief of the clan stepped into the centre of the ring and bent down to the dead man. The murmuring around him died down and the bystanders waited to see what the old man would do.

Aglumaloqâq picked up the naked body, speaking soft words that no one could understand. The dead man's flesh no longer yielded at any point of pressure and, contrary to the otherwise slow onset of rigour, already seemed to be frozen hard.

Recke brought his mouth to Reimer's ear and whispered: "The whole thing is rather strange. You'd think we were under a suggestion. This rigidity ..." He made a movement as if he also wanted to step into the centre of the ring, but Reimer held him back,

"Tusarpah - listen!" cried the old man, rising to his feet. "The Angätkoq has died a magical death and his corpse is enchanted." Turning to the white guests, he repeated his words in broken English. "The soul of the Angätkoq is elevated and followed the Great Mother - Nuliajukanahnaq!"

With an imperious wave of his hand, Aglumaloqâq shooed back the dogs gathering around the corpse. Reluctantly and snarling, they barely moved a foot. Then, easily recognisable by his tone, he gave a short order to the men of the clan.

What followed horrified the white guests to such an extent that

they turned away, shuddering. The Netsilik people crawled into the surrounding igloos and came back with knives and axe tools to dismember the stiff corpse according to the chief's instructions. Then they picked up the individual pieces and limbs to carry them out of the camp in several directions. Growling and whimpering, packs of dogs followed.

"What's the matter," Reimer quietly asked Howard, who was lingering next to him. "What does it all mean?"

The Canadian looked distraughtly behind him at the group that was just leaving and replied willingly: "I can't say anything about the apparition. At first I thought it was another one of your damned dangerous inventions. But it's not just that, it's the really strange behaviour of these people here. It's not the first time I've travelled on a whaler and I'm halfway familiar with the customs of the Eskimo people. And I know that when one of them dies, they observe strict burial ceremonies that are quite different from what we see now. They usually bury their dead in the same way as other peoples. They observe various rites before a funeral. They are not allowed to clean or comb their hair, drive sledges or feed dogs. They mourn like other people. But this here - horrible! ..."

One of the other Canadians confirmed Howard's account. "As my name is Boissart, this is more like a dog feeding than a burial. And what's more, where the dead man is a shaman. I too am

I'm not a newcomer here, but I've never experienced or heard of this reversal of their customs."

"We should retreat to the igloos for the time being and leave the Netsilikis alone," suggested Reimer.

"I have reservations," warned Recke. "If these people are acting so against their kind, then it is unwise to leave the three Canadians unprotected without a weapon." He also spoke in English so that the others could understand him.

Howard casually waved him off. "We ourselves are in no danger whatsoever. The reputation of the white man is too great ..." He turned round calmly and walked towards the igloo intended for them. His companions nodded, took another look at the Eskimos standing around and then crawled into the shelter behind Howard.

The officers holstered their pistols. Their hands were clammy from holding their weapons during the strange events. Recke lightly gripped his comrade's arm. "I can't get away from the thought: a week ago, the mess in Drontheim was our only diversion on stage duty, and now we're being tossed about by capricious fate. It must be as Gutmann claimed, that everything is fate and destiny. What may be in store for us now?"

"Sentimental?" The question was without mockery.

"Absolutely not! - If Aglumaloqâq wasn't coming towards us right now, I would still believe in a dream!"



The old man approached the guests accompanied by his clan. With a serious expression, he said: "The great mother has called our Angätkoq to her. He left no apprentice to succeed him and his son was torn apart by a bear. The tribe was honoured by the appearance of the Nulijukanahnaq, but it is bad to be without a shaman. I must consult with the elders of my people. For the time being, go back to the igloo alone. If the giant bird comes in the meantime, I will send for you immediately!"

Reimer and Recke merely nodded. When they complied with the request, they found themselves accompanied by the chief's wife and daughter, while the chief alone sought out a group of older men standing at a distance.

The thinking of the Eskimo women was not as complicated as that of their men. They had certainly been very impressed by the appearance of the glowing disc, but like all primitive people, they never forgot what was next. So it was understandable that Ubloriasukshut dared to ask again with a flirtatious sideways glance inside the igloo: "Tobacco? - Achiugaunga ..."

"Neither tobacco nor ... gaunga," Recke explained. He had a hunch that the Eskimo word was a friendly request. "We want peace and quiet!"

The girl looked uncomprehendingly at the white men. Scowling and worried about Gutmann's absence, they threw themselves onto their campsites.

## POINT 103

The sound of the hymn  
in the highest heavenly space,  
Supported on the  
the gods are all enthroned,  
If you don't know it, what good is the  
hymn?  
We who know him,  
have gathered here.

(Nrisinhapûrvatâpanîya-Upanishad)

Neither Reimer nor Recke actually knew how long they had slumbered. Shortly after falling asleep, they had tossed and turned restlessly on their beds for a long time; their expressions clearly betrayed the inner vision of vivid dream images. It was only later that long, deep breaths signalled calming and release.

When they were woken up unexpectedly, they had lost all sense of time. Ubloriasukshut had shaken them violently and was excitedly spouting a series of sentences that the officers could not understand. Only when she pointed to the exit of the igloo with her hands and then pointed upwards did they both guess that it could be an aeroplane again.

While they were still in a hurry to get dressed, they heard Aglumaloqâq from the entrance to the hut

shout: "Pavungahjah - mahunga! - Come out, white men! - A nice spell is circling over us! Quick ..."

Never before in the entire war had an alarm had such a stimulating effect as the waking of the Eskimos. What kind of surprise was in store for them? - If it were Gutmann, the Eskimos would surely report a giant eagle.

They grabbed their weapons, took a quick look at each other and hurriedly crawled outside. Fresh, cold air blew towards them and once again the inhabitants of the small settlement stood together not far away. Among them were the Canadians, who had apparently already got up before the event. They all looked skywards.

Strangely, there was no engine noise to be heard and no aeroplane to be seen. Had it flown past?

"Sule - now, - suna una - what is that? ..."

A strange shape flew towards the village from the direction where the flying mark had been erected.

Eskimos and Canadians shouted at each other. The harpooner's rough voice drowned out the shouting and screeching. "A flying puzzle! ..."

Instead of the usual roar of propellers, all that could be heard was a humming and whirring. A discus-like gyroscope stood out glittering against the overcast sky and glided at a slight angle towards the settlement.

The captains followed the movements of the missile, which showed no sign of having left the harbour, with their eyes wide open.

nationality. It was a gigantic disc that was manned and controlled by humans.

The dogs of the Eskimos behaved no differently this time than dogs anywhere else on the face of the earth. They barked and drooled angrily without following any magical law.

The craft circled the small town, then arrowed towards a nearby area of the rising coastal slope and landed smoothly without any difficulty. However, it was not the strangeness of this technical marvel, but the incomprehensibility of a personal encounter under these circumstances that surprised the two captains.

Because one of the two men who left the strange vehicle was - Gutmann.

Recke and Reimer had shouted their companion's name at the same time. The impulsive Reimer pushed aside some Eskimos standing in the way and hurried towards his expected companion, followed by a few snarling dogs.

"You've made friends really quickly!" Gutmann laughed in greeting and patted Reimer on the shoulder. "Here - may I introduce you: Captain Reimer - Major Juncker!" Pointing to the Recke who had joined him in the meantime, he concluded the brief introduction by mentioning their names again.

The captains were not yet finished marvelling. The combination worn by Gutmann's companion was fastened to his neck and displayed the rank insignia of the

German Schutzstaffel. Reimer asked again: "Major?"

"Yes, yes!" confirmed the Waffen SS officer.

Now, driven by curiosity, Aglumaloqâq and some Netsilikis, as well as the Canadians, approached. The latter showed undisguised dismay when they recognised the new arrivals as Germans. "Bless our souls," murmured Howard, shaken. "The German invasion ..."

"What kind of people are these?" Gutmann asked, pointing to the Canadians.

"Men who have lost their ship," Reimer replied. "They're heading somewhere south-west, where they know of a station. Couldn't remember the name." He turned to Howard and asked for another explanation.

"To Port Epworth in the Coronation Gulf!" Howard said briefly.

Gutmann looked firmly at the man. "Are you an old Arctic man yet?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You should know that you can find a station not too far from here. There's an outpost on King Williams Island a little south of here, about two hundred kilometres, but as far as I know it doesn't have any radio equipment. All you have to do is cross Peterson Bay. In general, the Canadian police stations are relatively easy to reach without any particular difficulties. If there is a large station much further north on North Devon Island, you will have much easier access here to the south.

You will find help more quickly than if you try to grope blindly to the left and right to the west."

The Canadian harpooner opened his eyes and looked at the German officer wide. "How do you know that, sir?"

"I know it just as well as you will know it!" Gutmann's voice had become hard and unfriendly.

"Why are you lying?"

"I beg your pardon," murmured the Canadian. "I couldn't know at first - I had reasons ..."

"I'm not interested in them," Gutmann cut him off. Then he turned back to his two comrades: "Let's get your things now and take off again straight away. Juncker will stay behind for the time being so that nobody gets too close to our machine or damages it ..."

The major nodded in agreement and slowly backed away again, endeavouring to keep the Eskimos at bay.

Walking towards the igloos, Gutmann said: "You did a good job with the flying sign. It really wasn't difficult to find you. Although the storm has blown a lot of things away in the meantime. Now we can finish this little adventure here and start a big one! ..."

"This is already enough for me," Recke interjected dryly. "It could hardly get any better!"

Gutmann smiled subtly. "Maybe so ..."

Now Reimer became violent. "I don't understand the world any more. Here come comrades with an air vehicle that

could be considered a variety of a giant toy spinning top and instead of highly necessary explanations, a palaver breaks out as if we were sitting round a regulars' table. Adventure or not, folly or otherwise, why don't you explain these wonders and mysteries to us, Gutmann?"

"Take it easy, dear Reimer! First we want to get away from here with our V7, then we'll have time for explanations. We don't want to risk being surprised a second time by another enemy aircraft."

Recke gasped: "So this is a German V-construction?"

"Yes!"

Aglumaloqâq had trotted along silently beside the three officers. When the white men crawled into the interior of his igloo, he stopped outside. He felt that he was now rid of his guests, who were making him uncomfortable. Trouble and witchcraft had come over his little world since the smoke signal of the burnt giant eagle had lured him.

His face was completely expressionless when the whites came out of his den again. As if in passing, he said:

"Are the Qablunait flying away with the big magic drum now?"

"Eh," nodded Reimer, who had already mastered the Eskimo word for 'yes'.

Gutmann also addressed the English-speaking Eskimo chief: "The three sailors stay behind. Help them on their way to the next

Police station. You know all about it yourselves. Don't you?"

The old man blinked his eyes. "Takujamablugo - want to see what can be done to help. But I'd much rather you took these men with you. People from Waltöter ships are usually rough and dangerous."

"That's not possible, good Aglumaloqâq," Reimer interjected.

"We don't have that much room in the thing you call a magic drum."

"Then let the Qablunait move on from the big smoke kayak with the three Avertormiut," the old man said stubbornly. "They'll get some meat and fish. Ublume - today!"

"It shall be done as the chief wishes," Gutmann decided briefly. "The Canadians will leave with their companions and take some food with them. Their return to so-called civilisation is only a matter of a very short time. There's nothing else we can do ourselves."

Aglumaloqâq showed his satisfaction at the acceptance of his proposal. Grinning gratefully, he accepted some tools and small utensils from Reimer, which the airmen considered expendable. For him, these gifts were a great present, as his small people did not have much.

Returning to the flying disc, in front of which the entire Netsilik population was staring, Recke called Howard, who was standing to the side with his companions, and gave him back the rifle he had taken earlier, which he had kept in Aglumaloqâq's hut. "Here - don't do anything



Stupid things, man!"

The harpooner hesitantly accepted the weapon. Only when he held it firmly in his hand again and recognised the sincerity of the foreign airmen did he offer his hand to Recke. "The Germans are strange birds," he said more to himself than to his counterpart. "Thanks! ..."

Standing in front of the disc, Reimer and Recke realised that this strange apparatus had a considerable circumference. Around the spherical body, which was fitted with a glass cover, was a convex ring disc consisting of a number of blades mounted between the base of the sphere and an outer centring ring. They were unable to make any further observations at the moment, as the Waffen-SS officer urged them to get in.

Gutmann handed the packs inside and told his companions to get in through the hatch at the bottom of the gondola. "Into the thing that the old liver uncle here thinks is a magic drum. Zackzack, comrades!"

Reimer nimbly jumped through the entrance into the gondola, supported by Juncker. The broad-shouldered warrior followed a little more slowly and finally Gutmann squeezed in after him, closing the entrance behind him. Through the windows of the sphere they could see the silent, expectant front of the three Canadians and the Netsilik people, all of whom were waiting with their children for the spectacle of departure. Juncker sat down in the

The three other officers took their seats behind him, facing in one direction.

"Ready!" Gutmann shouted.

A few quick grips by the Waffen SS officer. A loud roar, flames flashed from the edge of the windscreen, the circular wing blades began to rotate at breakneck speed and with a gentle jerk the apparatus detached itself from the ground to climb steeply upwards. While Juncker's eyes wandered unperturbed between the arctic expanse and the driver's cab with its controls, the other three occupants saw how the Eskimos, growing smaller and smaller, had scattered in horror or had thrown themselves fearfully to the ground. Three figures standing close together appeared to be the Canadians, who must also have been uneasy about the launch of the strange disc.

Silence reigned among the men for a short time. Reimer and Recke were in a mood that made them stare around them in silence, as they felt they were in a dreamlike, unreal state due to the all too great surprise of Gutmann's return under such strange circumstances. It was only after some time that Recke asked the first question: "Tell us now, Gutmann, what kind of bowl this is that we're flying in!"

Gutmann barely moved as he answered. Only his eyes roamed inquiringly over the faces of his

Companions. "We are in a flying gyroscope, which is known as V7 in a small circle of insiders. We have two such devices here at a post in the Arctic region. When I arrived with the captured Canadian and his aircraft at the base known by the call sign ZYX, comrade Juncker immediately volunteered to take off with the aircraft he had flown in after I described the situation. Although we arrived a little late, this was due to the weather reports and certain other preparations. But we were convinced that we would find you safe and sound!"

"Very nice," said Recke. "Finding it again would have worked. So there's just a little more to satisfy our curiosity. Wouldn't it?"

"How far away?" Gutmann asked hypocritically.

"Why don't you put us on a spiky fakir bed?" interjected Reimer. "Why don't you explain to us in turn where the journey is going for now and then - what this gyroscope stuff is all about and what else is interesting. Put yourself in my shoes: you're sitting in a glass sphere, a horizontal disc surface flickers rapidly in circles before your eyes and a fiery aura sprays out from the edge. I think you would ask more questions than an old woman!"

"It would very likely be as you say," Gutmann admitted. "Of course, it shouldn't and can't remain a secret for you. I wanted to explain the whole story to you in peace a little later. But after all - about

We can talk about the technical aspects of this flying machine until we land. It's quite understandable that this thing must captivate you."

"It's high time you realised that!" growled Recke.

Gutmann waved his hand placatingly. "Well - our This thing here, the V7, was created in a peculiar way. Starting from the fact that up to now take-off and landing for an aeroplane was always connected with the question of space and that speed also had to be taken into account, a resourceful designer, going beyond the helicopter project, found the solution of having adjustable flying blades circle around a curved cabin. Incidentally, this was a peculiar duplication of ideas, whereby our devices are already in use, while another designer is currently still busy somewhere near Prague with the production of the same project."

"The reason that the problem of the runway required a solution is quite understandable, as it was long overdue," Reimer interrupted Gutmann's dry lecture. "But why the cancelled circular solution of all things?"

"The term gyroscope is correct!" Gutmann continued unperturbed, without responding to the objection for the moment. "After various tests, it was realised that this construction promised to achieve an extraordinary speed even at the experimental stage. In fact, this

flying machine has reached speeds previously thought possible."

"How fast?" asked Reimer excitedly.

"With medium-power engines, it is theoretically possible - that is, without taking the human factor into account - to reach four thousand kilometres per hour, with a climb speed of one hundred metres per second. The principle of movement is very simple: after climbing - you must have noticed it to some extent anyway - the rotor runs a little slower so that the apparatus hovers in the air, then the jets are started for forward flight. Of course, this maximum speed could only be achieved if, in addition to the turbine engines, ramjets were also operated, although these are only capable of operating at speeds of eight hundred kilometres per hour or more. The extraordinary manoeuvrability seems obvious thanks to the ingenious gyro design. Of course, the apparatus can also stand still in open space. The motor prevents it from going down when the horizontal drive is set."

"So it's a jet aircraft," remarked Recke.

"That's right! - I said it before." Gutmann continued: "In terms of construction, I would just like to briefly explain that the fuel tanks are stored under the cabin floor. On the outside around the centre is the bearing for the rotor blade ring, below which are the engines that start the rotor. On the outside is the centring ring that surrounds the rotating blades. Almost ingeniously simple!"

"Phenomenal!" Reimer could not contain himself.

"And what is the range of this V7?"

"Currently away from a base - about two thousand kilometres," Gutmann replied. "That's still the only sore point. Nevertheless, the military possibilities are quite extraordinary. I believe that the V7 will continue to occupy the minds of our world for a long time to come!"

"And where is our destination now?"

Gutmann turned to the questioning knight. "You'll be surprised. Near the eightieth parallel!"

"Pötzblitz!" Recke could not contain himself.

"How long are we flying for now?" Reimer asked.

"To the finish?"

"Yes!"

"About half an hour," said Gutmann. "Because we fly at a reasonable speed."

Reimer and Recke looked over the rotating disc at the landscape. As experienced pilots, they were able to estimate the speed of the flight from the passing of the landscape. After all, it was considerable. Masses of water and ice flashed past as far as the eye could see. To the side, a dark land mass, also covered with white snow fields, moved backwards as if pulled by an invisible hand, in the opposite direction to the direction of flight.

"You'll be interested to know," Gutmann suddenly remembered, "that our type of aircraft, a design from Breslau, has a diameter of thirty-one-point-four metres."

metres. This is known to correspond to the number pi. Since fractional numbers cannot be used in certain cases with machine sets, the number of nozzles on the circumference was set at thirty-two."

"That almost looks like a mathematical gimmick," said Recke with a slight sneer. His critical nature found a target for his remarks.

Gutmann remained serious. "Everything in nature has harmonious laws. The same applies to technology. Incidentally - there are certain role models ..."

"One more technical question," asked Reimer. "How does the rotor process the air?"

"You can easily see this after landing. There are slits at the top for the air to pass through, while the outflow fields are at the bottom. Also very simple!"

"Every miracle becomes simple when it can be justified or explained." Recke suddenly leant forward. "You were just talking about certain examples, Gutmann! Let's bet that there are such without you realising what real miracles there are!"

"Ah! -" Gutmann was mightily astonished. "Have you actually seen another disc that seemed to be of supernatural origin?"

"That's exactly what I mean!" confirmed Recke, now surprised for his part. Reimer also nodded excitedly.

"A Manisola ..." Gutmann muttered. His words were barely intelligible over the roar of the flying machine. Instead of getting up to explain, he put the

Counter question: "What was your impression of this apparition?"

Recke's eyes widened, as did Reimer's. "Have you become omniscient, Gutmann?"

"Answer me first," he urged. "Tell me quickly what you and probably the Eskimos have experienced!"

"It was in the Eskimo village," Recke admitted. In a few words, he described the whole strange process from the appearance to the departure of the glowing disc. Reimer only interrupted him from time to time to explain some details in more detail.

Gutmann nodded often. From time to time he made it clear that he knew the apparition well enough. He was most impressed by the strange behaviour of the dogs and the death of the shaman. After describing the incomprehensible burial of the medicine man and the sudden departure under the disc's discolouration, he said: "You will get to know the whole thing in detail shortly. Right now is not the time to talk about it in detail. It is quite understandable that you alone cannot cope with this most peculiar problem." He smiled enigmatically. "To comfort you for the next few hours: in about two years, millions of people will know nothing about these phenomena!"

"Is that also a V-construction?" Recke's new question sounded doubtful.

"Do you think this phenomenon is connected with



their behaviour technically possible?"

"Technically impossible!" Reimer immediately thought in Recke's place. "I would most likely consider it a meta-physical matter."

"You mumbled a name earlier," added Recke. "You know..."

Gutmann cut off the subject with an energetic movement. "I know - but I've already told you that you'll have to be patient for a few hours. There are more things to say than you realise!"

"That's your quirk, always playing the mystery man!" sulked Recke, scowling at the airspace.

"Absolutely not," the reprimanded man defended himself. "Now that we're almost there ..."

"... soon at our destination," Recke mimicked, "we will first eat properly and then sleep in a bed. I assume that our famous organisation has provided the appropriate comforts!"

"Certainly! - You will be able to see for yourselves in a short time."

Once again, the glances of the passengers flew through the cabin windows. Ice and water everywhere, as far as the eye could see. Attractive and tiring at the same time.

"Our mate Juncker flies his route quite safely," Reimer remarked casually. "Apparently without navigation; just following the terrain, which has no special marks around it. Can't the magnetic pole play any tricks on us?"

This was the first time Juncker had joined in his comrades' conversation. "We are being instructed by magneto radio! Our aircraft is guided by a direction finding beam that leads us to every target within the radius of action and back to the home field. Our flight is controlled from the station by a television disc."

Reimer pursed his lips. "If the Yankees find us here one day, they'll use their bombers to destroy all kinds of valuables that must be concentrated in a confined space. Since we're bound to attract attention in this area after a certain time ..."

"Don't worry!" Gutmann reassured Juncker.

"It will hardly be the case that an enemy aircraft will ever find us."

"The Yanks and Canadians won't be so obliging as to play blind man's buff all the time!" said Recke ironically.

"Yes - we'll make them do it!" Gutmann clucked like a hen. "From our station, we are able to irritate approaching foreign aircraft by magnetic rejection, so that their localisation devices give a barely noticeable deviation. These artificially induced navigation errors guide the aircraft around our base. As navigation in the Arctic zones is notoriously difficult, any foreign influence on the devices can hardly be recognised. Minor errors are therefore quite credible. This method is better and more reliable than our

otherwise excellent flak."

"For crying out loud," Recke rumbled again, "Why are we taking these magic devices to the arse end of the world instead of using them to distract the bomber units of the civilian killers at home? - I think our supreme warlords are getting a soft head!" He tapped his forehead angrily.

"That's not what it looks like!" Gutmann defended. "Magneto radio for these purposes is also of recent origin. Besides, hardly anything within the territory of the Reich is safe from betrayal any more. Nor can we bring about a turnaround in the fortunes of war with this alone. Neither with these tools nor with our latest V-weapons and similar things. We have simply missed the time and the past opportunities. We were already quite clear about that in Vernäs."

Recke twitched the corners of his mouth slightly. "Even if it's partly true - you're a pessimist by nature!"

Gutmann tightened up. With a quick movement, he pulled the zip of his suit down a little from the neck. Instead of the expected grey-blue pilot's blouse, field-grey cloth with the collar patches of the Waffen-SS was revealed. Four silver stars indicated the same rank as Juncker's. Without looking at the astonished faces of his comrades, he said: "I hope that this uniform, which is actually mine, will protect me from certain suspicions.

protects. In any case, would I otherwise be familiar with the last secrets of our warfare?"

He received no immediate answer. Recke looked straight ahead silently. Only his facial muscles showed signs of excited thought. Reimer, on the other hand, had leant back in his seat and then asked: "How did you come to be here in Vernäs, so far away from the hustle and bustle of the war?"

"That's easily explained! Before I came to you, I was involved in the development of this machine - the V 7 - in Breslau. Gutmann and disc - that goes better together, doesn't it? - But back to Breslau; I had got fed up with the highly superfluous posturing of certain party people and opened my mouth wide at a necessary moment. I was very badly criticised for this, as the bigwigs felt they had been stepped on. I took the view that where there are entry bans for soldiers, this applies at least as much to the pompous civilian generals, no matter how many gold braids and buttons they may have. The game ended in a draw. In other words, the gold pheasants didn't get a step into the area of their curiosity, whereas I was transferred from there to the Luftwaffe as a captain and then came to Vernäs by order of the OKL. A short and simple story."

"And now?" Reimer's voice was full of expectation.

"I've been promoted to major and called up for further duties with honour. I received this message shortly before our departure from

Vernäs. Colonel Troll and Major Küpper knew about it. Nobody else. So ..."

Junckers cut off the conversation. "Point 103 ahead!" - The simple message from the man in the driver's cab immediately distracted from personal and problematic matters. Four pairs of eyes scrutinised the area that promised the approaching destination. The sky was brighter than average and the sea of ice shone between the ice fields. Like a network of small rivers and streams, the water broke its way between the cracked ice surfaces, floes and small bizarre mountains that glided like small glaciers in the open water. From the background, a raised area came closer, on which a small ring mountain rose, showing the observers in the flying disc a gate-like interruption. There was nothing to suggest that there was a station here. It was undoubtedly the mainland and only here could the announced point 103 be located.

"Point 103?" Reimer had asked.

"Call station ZYX is identical to point 103!" Gutmann pointed into the interior of the small ring mountain range.

"Here is the station!"

Reimer and Recke could see nothing that suggested a human presence. They shook their heads in amazement.

The gyroplane descended steadily during its horizontal approach. At a low altitude, the aircraft passed the open ring interruption and then came to a halt.

The disc remained motionless in the air for a moment, as if held by a magic hand. Only the disc continued to rotate, indicating that the gyroscope was working. A few seconds later, the flying machine descended vertically. The occupants felt as if they were travelling downwards in a lift.

Juncker looked through the floor window to check the landing. To the extraordinary surprise of Reimer and Recke, it suddenly went dark for a very short time, then artificial light shone into the cabin from outside. A gentle push and the sound of the rotor stopped. "End of the line - all aboard!" Gutmann joked, gloating at the amazement of his comrades who had been picked up. The floor hatch opened and the crew climbed out behind Gutmann into the underground space.

A spacious hall presented itself to the eyes of those who had landed. The two Waffen SS officers walked confidently ahead of their two comrades. A number of men in field grey and blue-grey Luftwaffe colours hurried past the arrivals and saluted them in a military manner. Reimer and Recke could not cope with their haste. The lowest rank they encountered wore the epaulettes of sub-officers. Not a single crewman was to be found among the numerous personnel. The bustle and behaviour of the men betrayed prudence and planning. Hardly an order could be heard.

The bright light from the ceiling spotlights dazzled the

Eyes. The four officers deviated slightly from the straight line of their path as a large flat railway carriage forced them to make a turn. So far they had been walking alongside the track of a railway line. While they were still turning to the side of the hall, the warrior, who was looking all around him, nudged his comrade Reimer and pointed into the background. At the end of the track, which ran in semi-darkness, a strange steel construction loomed up, its purpose and meaning unclear. Gutmann, however, did not give them time to take a closer look and pushed forwards.

They came to an opening that had no door. Nevertheless, the air force captains, who were here for the first time, felt a noticeable change in temperature. Reimer could not refrain from exclaiming. "Why? ..."

"The warm air curtain closes against the outside temperature instead of a door," explained Gutmann as he continued. "The interior temperatures come from an electronic heating system!"

"Not even the Berlin Nobeleta blissements have made it this far," said Recke, shaking his head. He breathed in the mild air comfortably.

After walking through a few corridors, the new arrivals came to a series of rooms, all of which had doors with numbers on them. Gutmann halted his steps roughly in the centre of the row of rooms. "Here's my room," he said and opened the door.

The men entered a small chamber, which looked sparse but clean. Two camp beds, a simple locker, a folding table and two matching chairs made up the furnishings. The overhead lighting was switched on and provided a bright light.

"Juncker and I each have a free bed in our rooms," Gutmann explained. "If you want to stay with me, Reimer, our friend Recke can move in with Juncker. His room is diagonally opposite here. I have room number twenty-four, Juncker has twenty-nine. As you can see, we are close together!"

"Anything is fine with me," replied Recke. "The main thing is that I'm allowed to fall into one of these inviting beds very soon."

"And I'll ask for a hearty meal first," added Reimer. "But not an Eskimo menu!"

"Wouldn't a bath be nice first?" Gutmann asked.

"Would be nice," Recke added. "If you said it one more time, I'd be tempted to accept this luxury as credible."

"Then I must repeat my question!" laughed Gutmann. "There really is everything you need for a longer existence everywhere."

The two captains were astonished. Helping each other, the officers slipped out of their fatigues and took off their belt and handguns.

"After the bath, we pick up our things from here



our place," Juncker turned to Recke.

"After the meal", improved Gutmann. "The definitive order is: bathe, eat and sleep!"

"Agreed - let's go!" shouted Reimer,

The following evening, Reimer and Recke sat together in Gutmann's parlour and listened to the first explanations for their presence here. Both captains sensed with their healthy instinct that Gutmann was cautiously endeavouring not to go beyond the generalities of this hidden base at the beginning. Even if it was undoubtedly not mistrust that could have stood in the way, the two officers still found no explanation for their comrade's cautious behaviour.

"Everything you see here and which arouses your astonishment and admiration," said Gutmann, "was created after a carefully considered plan with long preparatory work. The fact that this operation and the base have so far been protected against treachery is due above all to the particularly thorough selection and testing of the personnel. It has required preparatory work and endeavours that are unparalleled."

"One question!" interjected Recke. "The expansion we have seen so far certainly suggests that work on this base has been going on for some time, not just for weeks. But I hardly believe that the Reich government has been anticipating such a distress in our military situation for some time.

or would even have been prepared to accept it. What reason was there to tackle this work here?"

Gutmann looked at the questioner in surprise. "Logically and thoughtfully spoken, dear friend! - That is precisely the point I wanted to leave for later."

"I realised that," said Recke dryly.

The major deliberately ignored the objection. "In the next few days, you will have to change your previous views and see things that will present you with a new world view. It will show you power-political relationships that are by no means geographically fixed and will overturn all common expectations. However - I must confess to you - it was not intended to transfer you both here because you have a good description, but because the Do-Ju twin construction was to be flown here in front of everyone. It is not our fault that this did not succeed. But I took full responsibility for introducing you here as reliable and hope for your support in a battle that goes beyond the seemingly limited war!"

"Aha, werewolf..." said Recke sarcastically.

"Pah," said Gutmann. "Werewolves could be used in the Thirty Years' War. In densely populated Central Europe, dependent on technical supplies and sufficient provisions, this type of combat is limited at most as a disruptive factor, but not at all

fundamentally effective. What is possible in the Balkans or Eastern Europe ..."

"But you don't seem to realise that at a higher level?" Recke's interjection sounded cool and matter-of-fact.

"Yes, comrade! - But we must not forget that the ill-advised demands of Casablanca, which call for unconditional surrender and would entail a super-Versailles, are forcing us to acts of desperation."

"We know that," Reimer confirmed bitterly. "Also that the realisation is already spreading - the demand for capitulation is not directed against the regime, but against the German people in general. Somehow, the shawms have been blown before: War against the kaiser, not against the people - but in truth it was precisely the people they wanted to see oppressed!"

Gutmann looked over the two comrades as he continued thoughtfully: "Old and familiar things. It's all idle polemic. We have to reckon with facts and take a practical stand on them. My previous introductions therefore mean the explanation of world political forces which are active and effective on a higher level and which I will reveal to you all. If I am not prepared to do this immediately with all thoroughness, it is because the whole complex of circumstances would seem too improbable, indeed downright fantastic to you."

"We're not small children," grumbled Recke, showing an offended expression. "After all, we did get to this fairytale castle with a new machine. That is," he improved immediately, "almost got here."

"Actually, an aircraft was planned for this tour that should have already had diesel engines. We could have easily landed with this model and restarted later," Gutmann interjected. "However, there seems to have been a mix-up from Berlin. Whether intentional or unintentional will be difficult to clarify."

"You could really soon get fed up with the whole circus," Reimer said angrily, having kept a fairly low profile up to that point. "We front-line soldiers always have to pay for the filth of a few ragamuffins!"

"We have to get past it," said the major.

"We at Punkt 103 in particular form an activist task force that will serve its goals even when there is no longer a German government. And unfortunately that will soon be the case."

"Yes, for crying out loud," Recke roared, "I'm not talking about mistrust, but who are we supposed to fight for if there is no order and no authority at home?"

"Our friend Reimer mentioned earlier that it is already common knowledge that our enemies pretend to fight our imperial government, but our people

mean," Gutmann replied calmly. "So we serve a higher order in the interests of our people."

"If it doesn't go against our oath as soldiers and our will to serve isn't abused ..." Reimer spoke hesitantly. Gutmann cut off the sentence with a metallic edge: "There are no Stauffenbergs here!"

"Sorry!" muttered Reimer. "But it's good when everything is always said clearly!" With firm pressure, he took Gutmann's hand, which he held out to him. Recke followed Reimer's example and added the question: "What's going to happen to us next?"

"I think you deserve a few days' rest. Ahead of us lies a time that harbours manifold secrets behind veils and will also bring dangers to life and limb. Make the most of the few days you have left to rest before an order to deploy arrives. And one more thing: if you come across other uniforms and foreign civilians here in the next few days, don't be surprised! We have friends and allies in the world who are all willing to serve a new order." Gutmann's voice became warning and insistent: "But above all: ask few questions and learn silence!"

"... as if we were washerwomen," Recke growled softly ... " Before Gutmann could reply, Reimer intervened: "A comparison comes to mind; we have an amusement park in Vienna known as the Prater. Between the shooting galleries

and sausage stalls, there is a grotto railway pulled by a hideous Lindwurm locomotive. Once you have paid your six-figure ticket, you are allowed to board the train and are pulled into a dark tunnel by the beast, which is a mixture of crocodile and herring. It's a bit like going to Hades. Then suddenly, small illuminated grottos appear on either side of the dark corridor, animated by cute figures and representing a moving magical realm. In other words, a menacing entrance with all sorts of funny gimmicks afterwards. And it seems to me that we've just been allowed to pay a sixpence to whizz into a new gallery of joy!"

"So what?" It was meant to sound joking, but there was no hiding the ambiguous undertone.

"... so what!" Recke grumbled again. "For snot and bollocks, isn't it? - Why don't you at least tell us a fairy tale, Gutmann, like our friend Reimer can? There must always be something in the mind's eye to cheer the soul before one gets a bullet or something else!"

"Why not?" Gutmann spoke slowly and broodingly. "As far as I can remember, you are both somewhat well versed in history. Do you perhaps know the lore of the old king Mithradates Eupator, who was also called the Great?" When the two captains shook their heads in the negative and Reimer interjected that he had not heard of the school of

The major continued: "Mithradates fought three protracted wars against the then world power Rome with varying degrees of success. At the time, he also had the support of the Silician pirate state, which was in reality an exile kingdom of Mithra cult followers driven out of the neighbouring countries. The strict discipline and order of the Mithra people from Silicia, who had to fend for themselves against a hostile environment, made them feared adversaries and so their help was of great importance to Mithradates. And it was not Rome's fault that the king fell, but the apostasy of his sons brought about the suicide of the ruler of Asia Minor."

"The world has always been shabby," said Reimer.

"Not the world, but the people!" Gutmann corrected. "In any case, I am comparing point 103 with the time of Mithradates Eupator, a Silicia where men resolutely defend themselves against an environment. Guided by invisible, evil forces, this environment is the visible expression of an intolerant and domineering age. It must have been due to the times that Mithradates, the one given by 'Mithra', was unable to achieve his historical high goal. The environment of his epoch was simply stronger. But it doesn't always have to be that way!"

Reimer nodded. "Absolutely not. It just depends on how far you can go with the power of the old and the new."

of the earthbound."

"Everything new is usually just as earthbound; it's just that people don't want to recognise it because the bearers of an existing order don't like to be replaced by a new order. This explains the hostility of an environment!"

"Very nice," said Recke. "That explains everything. But the fact that old Mithradates ..."

"There's a reason," Gutmann defended. "Causal connections will still emerge!"

"Wash me, but don't get me wet!" mocked Recke. "Somewhere I read the sentence: Dark is the meaning of speech!"

"Let's leave it at that," decided Reimer. "I understood Gutmann. Our company's slogan would have been more realistic and more timely. Namely: Ultima Thule. But at least ..."

Gutmann spread his fingers so that the joints cracked. "One thing interlocks with another ..."

"Ultima Thule, the island of the last heroes," shouted Recke, slightly theatrically. "As far as I'm concerned, I'll keep flying if it means I can help our homeland. If it's not already too late!"

"It's never too late," Gutmann replied cautiously. "Our slogan is: Salvation and light do not come ex oriente lux, but from the north!"

In the days that followed, Reimer and Recke had enough time to familiarise themselves with their surroundings.



make. To their astonishment, they were not ordered to report to the base commander or his adjutant, nor did anyone else look after them. Recke had found a sociable comrade in his roommate Juncker, with whom he got on well and who took great care of the two captains in place of Gutmann, who was often unavailable.

During their extended tours, the two flight officers realised with great astonishment that their great amazement on arrival at the base had only been directed at a fraction of the facilities they had now found. Among other things, Juncker had explained to them during a partial escort that the ceiling hatch of the underground disc hangar was also used to deploy a missile launcher. In addition, caverns had been blasted into the semi-circular interior of the Ringgebirge to accommodate various types of aircraft, which had an excellent runway on the hollow level. As Juncker indicated, there were types here that were not yet in series production and were far superior in many respects to the aircraft currently in use. In this way, at least some of the military secrets would be kept out of the hands of enemies invading the empire's soil, Juncker explained.

In the centre of the Ring Mountains was a weather control station, humorously called Frog Glass for short. They also learnt that the station had its own underground power station, which generated a

high performance capacity.

Pointing to the landing site, Recke said: "Only for experienced pilots ..."

"You have to approach the aircraft for landing, veer off to the side, intercept the aircraft again and only then land," explained Juncker.

"It's not possible any other way," admitted Recke.

In response to an occasional question from Reimer about the functioning of the replenishment, Gutmann himself gave an astonishing answer: "The technical supplies come from home, the food supply mainly from the USA!"

"Lazy jokes!" rumbled Recke angrily.

"It's true," Gutmann confirmed. "As I mentioned earlier, we have friends who have relieved us of these worries. There are people in the USA and Canada who are aware of the existence of Point 103, but don't know its location and would never find us against our will. Our magneto radio is safer than a series of anti-aircraft batteries. Even men from the American Federal Court are aware of the existence of our base."

"And what about the support?" asked Reimer.

"Very simple! - Our supporting forces on this continent believe that they are not acting against their country's interests because Point 103, as a stacking point, deprives the Empire of potential that could currently serve an ongoing operation. Moreover, the whole unit is seen as a kind of opposition

against certain forces of the imperial government, which are labelled with the code 666. These are not the official bodies of the enemy power, but only the small circles of the tolerators who have a different political outlook. It is these circles that supply our transport machines with provisions and certain metals and alloys that we need here. We also have workshops and a laboratory here; you will also get to know these facilities in the next few days."

Reimer grabbed Gutmann firmly by the arm, while Recke clammed up. "If point 103 is a potential extraction point ..."

"Don't get so excited," Gutmann reassured the captains. "There are two ways of looking at it: an earthworm perspective and a bird's eye view! As fliers, you should be ashamed to be counted among the earthworms."

"Rubbish!" barked Recke.

"All you have to do is replace the word potential removal with the word potential rescue and you will have grasped the true meaning of the station!"

"Juncker already hinted at that too," admitted Reimer. "It's better to heed such hints," Gutmann said coolly. "Then certain rocket minds won't have to explode!"

Recke saw that Gutmann was close to losing his otherwise inexhaustible patience. He put his massive hand on his shoulders and said good-naturedly: "No offence, stargazer, but you also have to be understanding."

for us ignorant sheep who are constantly being assaulted by new insights and facts. We have the utmost confidence in you, but it could be that we are all just puppets in an infamous game whose background is not recognisable. We've seen horses puke in these times!"

"It's fine," replied the major, reconciled. "But whatever may come, we can serve with confidence!"

The next morning, the captains were in for another surprise. Dressed in warm fur parkahs, they were out for a short morning walk when a plane rolled out onto the runway bearing a foreign signature instead of the expected national emblem. This time they were alone. They both stopped walking and stared at the wings and the fuselage of the aircraft as it climbed into the sky, where black dots were emblazoned as a distinguishing mark.

"Potzblitz!" shouted Recke and looked round. Some of the men who had been present at the launch had just disappeared into a rock cavern. "What was that midnight Japanese?"

"Let's see where Gutmann is." Reimer pulled his comrade away with him to climb inside the station. "Strange, very strange," he muttered.

"I had met a mate in Oslo who claimed to have seen an aeroplane that was also in Oslo.

had a black dot on its wings and flew in the direction of Sweden."

"If I hadn't seen the same thing now, I'd say he'd mistaken a ladybird for an aeroplane!" said Recke. "Hallucinations like that sometimes happen after a night of drinking. But like this ..."

Rushing through the underground halls and corridors, they searched everywhere for Gutmann. This was also the first time they came across the civilians mentioned by their comrade, who were moving freely and at ease among the German personnel. They did not take the time to take a closer look at these strangers. They could only gather from the passing that there were exotic types among them. A few foreign military personnel also crossed their path.

Right now they couldn't find Gutmann. It was only on the way to their rooms that they came across Juncker, whom they immediately stopped.

"Where is Gutmann?"

"At a meeting, gentlemen!" Juncker asked them both into his room. "What's the problem, mates?"

"Hm," Recke began hesitantly. "There's this thing with black dots ..."

"Our aircraft registration number! So what?"

"Our - ? ..."

"You don't know that yet?" Juncker snapped his fingers. "Gutmann will be back around noon. He can explain it to you better. I'd like to leave that to him."

Well - goodbye for now!" He pushed his cap back onto his neck, tapped the peak with his index finger and walked away.

"Simple thing," Reimer surmised. "Must be the new Schutzstaffelluftwaffe that Mr Himmler always wanted. They just didn't want to tell us so as not to offend us as rival club members."

"What do you mean, offend?" Recke sat down on his cot. "They can paint whatever they like on the aeroplanes for all I care. The main thing is that we remain intact enough to at least prevent an invasion from the east over our unfortunate homeland!"

"Which has already begun!" Reimer added thoughtfully. "The last Wehrmacht reports already mention German place names from both fronts. East Prussia is already gone!"

"I know that just as well as you do! The poor women and children. It's unthinkable! It's a stupid strategy to hoard weapons and people here instead of doing everything we can to protect our civilian population. I'll tell Gutmann to put in a good word for me with the local commander, the great unknown, to get me transferred back to a front-line unit!"

"Is there still any point?" Reimer doubted. "Whatever we can do, the time would already be too short and the fronts too pressed together for us to stop the rollers from East and West.

Even the celebrity can't hide that."

"The Ministry of Propaganda is just playing more of a roller," Recke admitted. "But then what?"

"Gutmann has already hinted at this! Persevere and force a liberation and reversal of the situation on the higher level unknown to us. Your return to the home front would not change the existing facts. I share your feelings and have never shirked a mission either. Let's leave it at the tasks intended for us, because we are soldiers and not politicians!"

The two men sat together for just over an hour before Gutmann turned up. "I heard from Juncker that you were looking for me. I'm sorry, but my service ..."

"It's not our fault if we're not on duty," interjected Recke, who didn't like the idea of doing nothing. "Besides, we wouldn't have come looking for you if there hadn't been something we needed to know. After all, one must at least know what friend and foe are!"

"Junckers has already indicated to me that it's because of our aircraft registration plates. Is that true?"

"Yes," they both admitted.

"That can be explained," said Gutmann. He threw his cap onto the bedspread and sat down on the edge of Juncker's couch. He then slowly leaned back, resting on the elbows of his bent arms,

he began to speak: "I will explain without much introduction why we do not have a crossbar on the machines here and have chosen a black roundel as our symbol. Above all, it has already become clear to us that the homeland will have to capitulate sooner or later ..."

"We talked about that just before you came," Reimer replied. "A bitter realisation!"

"That's right! - But you can't bury your head in the sand like an ostrich. It's all the more bitter because we've already marched through the whole of Europe and were almost at the Suez Canal. But you know the saying about times that change. Whether a huge portion of sinful politics or a number of missed opportunities are to blame for this is of no particular importance at the moment, because it is not the past that is decisive, but what is given in the present. If the case should really arise that Germany has to capitulate or the war is declared over after an occupation of the Reich, all hostilities must cease from a point in time X. This would mean that the German Wehrmacht would be forced to surrender. This would mean that the German Wehrmacht would cease to exist and no one would be authorised to continue fighting under the banners or insignia of the Reich!"

"Oho!" Recke let himself be heard.

"Unless - as unrecognised belligerents who ..." Gutmann made a shooting gesture. "If the fight continues nevertheless, then the Reich must not



The fact that our machines must not be compromised because otherwise the impact on the civilian population through reprisals would increase hardship and misery. For this reason, we have decided to introduce a new symbol for our machines as an independent organisation, which will be discussed in more detail later. This black dot, as you call it, is Sol nigra, or the black sun, as it is called in German. It has a deep symbolic meaning and should actually be a deep dark red in place of the visually visible black. It is the sol nigra of alchemy, the colour of which indicates a certain phase of lapis."

Recke's mouth twisted. "What does that have to do with alchemy?"

"Just slowly! - Firstly, the meaning of the sun: it is the same symbol as the gamma stage, but with the aspect of the crucifixion. Exactly: our beam cross!"

"Ah!" Reimer furrowed his brows. "What does the symbolism of the crucifixion mean? - Does it mean that we are to be sacrificed? ..."

Gutmann looked past his two friends. "You can interpret things however you like. The round shape of the sun can become a sign of salvation and save the German people, who are destined to be sacrificed under the sign of the cross! World politics is not only conducted by governments alone, but also by forces that are above the visible powers."

"These are no longer big secrets," said Reimer calmly.

"It all depends. You speak of forces that are hardly visible, but at least recognisable. But I mean forces that are neither visible nor recognised! That's a big difference. Behind the scenes of world history, a great trial of strength is taking place, which will definitely be won by a force known to the initiated few as the esoteric world centre or the high seat of ethically positive forces. It is the true Ultima Thule; not only of the Aryan peoples, but of the whole world!"

Recke laughed mockingly, but Reimer leaned forward with interest: "Where is this centre?"

Gutmann shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know that either. Globally speaking, it can't be far from here, but very few people are likely to know the exact location of this mystical point. Not only we from Point 103, but also other organisations and groups of people are striving to find this place, or at least to receive the support and protection of this power. The future will show whether our search will lead to success."

"In connection with the words myth and esotericism: can't that be a mere assumption that, if mistaken, would have dire consequences for the gullible due to an incorrect assessment of world forces?" Reimer gave Gutmann a warning look.

"This centre exists!" the major replied with certainty. "Even the ancient Egyptians knew about it and called it Mount On, somewhere in the north."

Likewise the ancient Sumerians, who called the mystical place Kharsak Kurra or "World Mountain". In the Bible, in the book of Isaiah, it appears under the name Har-Moed, which means "mountain of the assembly."

"No proof yet. Only traditional assumptions!" Gutmann ignored Reimer's objection. "In Asia has now even been connected to this force in recent times."

"By radio?" said Recke ironically.

"No - telepathically!"

"Haha, now the oriental storytellers are coming back into their own!"

"I appreciate your critical mind, Recke. But always remember that a person's knowledge is only a fraction of what is available. We Westerners, as subjugators of Eastern peoples, have for centuries looked down on the so-called natives with arrogance and contempt and must now realise with shame that their history and tradition are at least as old, that their art and philosophy are just as great and that some things are even superior to us. Their transcendental knowledge and their powers in this field are highly developed, while we Europeans still stand before a gate that is closed to us. You will get to know Mongolians here on our station - I can see you are surprised! - Perhaps after a few conversations you will see some things differently than before."

"Why not?" replied Recke affably. "But what about the connection?"

"Very simple. Tibetan lamas of higher degrees came into contact with the centre mentioned. They also know of a world mountain and high seat, which they call Ri-rap-lumpo in their language. I cannot say anything more about these things at the moment, but our connections with Tibet will undoubtedly be very helpful and provide us with details worth knowing. An emissary, a Ta Lama of the Black Cap sect, is even expected here today or tomorrow!"

Recke swayed his head. "What options does Tibet currently have to help the German Empire?"

"None at the moment. But it has helped and it will do so again if the opportunity arises. Until not so long ago, it provided the German Reich government with important documents on the English war effort via its liaison offices in England and was also able to inform them of the results of secret sessions of the English House of Commons within twenty-four hours. The whole thing is said not to have been particularly difficult!"

"What interest do the Tibetans have in this?" asked Reimer.

"A very big one!" smiled Gutmann. "Above all, the visit of the German Tibet expedition under Professor Schäfer established a valuable and favourable personal relationship between Germans and Tibetans. Even if the people in charge of the expedition did not

managed to solve certain esoteric tasks and gain insight into secret books in the Potala library, which are said to contain, among other things, secret prophecies about a resurrection of the former Mongolian empire, the visit fulfilled enough expectations. It also led Tibet to see great political opportunities, as it expected to be relieved of British and Soviet pressure by supporting the new Germany. Not only did it assume that Germany would bind Tibet's two dangerous neighbours, it certainly hoped for a better opportunity to win over the West to Lamaism as a result of the repression of the Roman Christian position of power and to do preparatory work for the prophecies unknown to us. We do not want to examine whether this would ever be possible or whether it is a miscalculation; the political short-term goal of relieving each other by throwing the balls to each other is a good move and Tibet has the greatest interest in Germany remaining strong or becoming strong again. And inconspicuous helpers are often better helpers than so-called strong friends."

"I don't know much about the Tibetans," said Recke. "Just that they like to drink tea with rancid butter. But I could still sympathise with them. Apart from the seal blubber, I liked the Eskimos too."

Another smile flitted across Gutmann's serious features. "You should never judge nations by their menu

judgement. This often leads to wrong conclusions. Furthermore, let me advise you: Take the Mongols seriously and do not doubt them. They have a keen instinct and can sense immediately whether you are trying to please them or whether you are not taking them seriously. If they notice a trace of mockery, they turn away and become as dumb as fishes!"

Recke swallowed. "Mhm ..."

"Black cap lamas are coming to the realm of the Black Sun," Reimer whispered broodingly, more to himself. But Gutmann had heard the quiet words.

"Yes, it is the realm of the Black Sun! It is the meeting point of the esoteric circles of the Schutzstaffeln, whose knowledge Mr Himmler also suspected but was not given access to. It is that circle of men who, according to the instructions of one of our spiritual leaders, Standartenführer Rahn, seek what is right and just, who, regardless of the Mosaic Twelve Commandments, have found it out of their own right and duty; men who do not expect help from Mount Sinai on their own authority and pride, but who have gone to a 'mountain of assembly in the farthest midnight' to fetch help and bring it to the people of their blood!"

Reimer pondered for a moment. "Rahn? - Isn't that a man from the modern Cathar tradition?"

"Ah - what do you know about it?"

"Actually, nothing at all. I heard about it in passing, to a certain extent."

"Yes, that's right. The Cathars in the Schutzstaffeln and

The Blackheads are the ones who look to the far north and Tibet in particular. Rahn has also made particularly important connections that are only known to a select few."

Recke straightened up from his casual reclining position. "I can see more clearly now. I don't know any more than Reimer, but your explanations have only just opened my eyes. I am a soldier and know nothing of esotericism and metaphysics. But if people continue to serve the empire here, then that's fine. I don't care what you call things or how you explain them. I already said days ago: I'm flying on for the island of the last heroes. See to it, Gutmann, that I can get into a box again!"

"I'll see what I can do. I have to leave anyway, maybe I can get an order for the next few days. We can then discuss further details of our topic in the evening." He stood up and smoothed his skirt. Reaching for his cap, he said: "See you later, comrades. Goodbye!"

The two captains heard him cross the corridor and enter the room opposite, which he shared with Reimer, at the creak of a door. Immediately afterwards he left it again and moved away with slowly fading steps.

"I must go and see what else Gutmann wanted in the room," said Reimer curiously. Followed by Recke, he also went out.

In the other room, everything was as usual. Reimer saw that Gutmann's locker was ajar. He gently opened the door and looked inside.

Recke saw that Reimer's face was surprised.

"What's wrong?"

"Not much," he grumbled, putting on an indifferent face. "I found a red cloak in Gutmann's wardrobe two days ago. Some kind of robe. Now it's gone. What could Gutmann have to do with it? A strange thing! ..."



## THE BOTH

Grace be with me and you, Providence and Fate, as I write these first mysteries handed down, solely for my child Immortality, a Mystic, worthy of this power of ours, which the great god Helios Mithras has given me from his archangel, so that I alone, an eagle, may soar the heavens and behold all things.

(Translation from the Mithras liturgy)

The Arctic sky was a bleak grey. A pale glow behind the crest of the horizon hinted at the light of a distant sun. Gusts of wind whirled small ice crystals and blew fine veils up from the crest of the Ring Mountains.

The two airmen went on their daily short walk outside in disagreement. Gutmann had returned so late the previous evening that the conversation they had started during the day could not be continued. Left to their own devices, the two men found the boredom that had arisen downright oppressive.

In the long run, all the novelties of modern technology and the serenity of their surroundings could not replace the inaction to which they had become accustomed.

were apparently sentenced to indefinite detention. Somehow, however, everything went according to plan, as they had come here from Vernäs with valid orders from their commander and Major Küpper from Berlin must also have been in the loop. Furthermore, the presence of the Waffen-SS men, all of them above team rank, was further visible proof that Point 103 must be of extraordinary importance to the Reich. For this reason, it could not have seemed particularly strange to them that the core personnel of the secret base was made up of religious orders who might have taken on a special mission within the Schutzstaffel order. Gutmann's reports from the previous day had now revealed a corner of these secrets.

The two officers had pulled the hoods of their warm fur parkas low over their faces. Just as they were about to turn back, they suddenly saw three bright lights high up in the sky, travelling at a steady pace and in a triangular pattern. Pale green iridescent discs, like the apparition above the Eskimo settlement on the Boothia Peninsula. The men could not estimate the height or size of the discs. Nevertheless, they got the impression that the strange flying objects were considerably smaller than the disc they had first seen. They sailed silently along like light-emitting discs and disappeared from view after a short time.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," said Recke. "However - aviation could become a little uncomfortable over time!"

Reimer stretched out his arm and pointed over to the weather station in the centre of the mountain. "The men in the frog glass have also seen these illuminated discs. You can clearly see their heads behind the frosted window of the station!"

"I guess they always watch when there's nothing else to see!"

"There!"

A subtle humming sound came from the air. A V7 gyroplane rotated closer and remained in place over the side centre of the landing area. Shortly afterwards, the camouflaged bottom flap opened into a dark maw. You could clearly see how the flying machine made a slight correction to its position, then it glided vertically downwards and disappeared exactly into the ground opening, which closed again immediately afterwards.

"Just like ours!" said Recke. "The first landing we see as observers. Because as often as we are out in the open, we usually find the airfield deserted. For the level of activity here, you should actually see more"

"I think we're sleeping too much. That's the problem!" grinned Reimer.

Recke looked at him askance. "Would you know something better to do about doing nothing?"

Reimer suddenly changed the conversation. "I have the

I had the feeling that it might have been Juncker who came back with the machine. If this is not deceptive, then it might be possible to get some news. Because the aerodrome command doesn't let V7s take off for weather flights!" Followed by Recke, he walked to one of the station doors in his thick flying boots.

"When the wind blows, this dog cold outside is almost unbearable anyway ..."

They made their way towards the large landing hall. Coming through a connecting corridor, they saw the downed gyrocopter standing not far ahead of them, and in the background of the hall two more that they had never noticed before. Reimer approached one of the men who was looking after the aircraft that had landed.

"Has Major Juncker landed?"

"Yes, sir!" the man replied. "As far as I know, he's with the commander's adju right now."

Reimer thanked him. Turning to Recke, he said: "Juncker will certainly return from the Adju to his room to take off his combination. It will probably be best to wait for him there."

As they walked on, they suddenly heard a loudspeaker announcement: "Attention - listen up! - Clear hangar three for landing! - Hangar three ... - Also: Ground crew stand by for the outfield! - I repeat: hangar three ..."

"It seems to me that the shop is finally getting going somehow!" said Recke.

"I already noticed a higher level of activity this morning!" Reimer agreed with him.

"I wonder if that has something to do with the illuminated plates we saw earlier?"

"Hm - on the Boothia Peninsula it has also begun to initiate a change of pace and location. It was quite nice back then - Aladdin's magic lamp above the magnetic North Pole! - If it hadn't been for the tragedy with the old shaman ..."

"It was somehow connected back then," replied Reimer. "For the time being, this story is still a mystery to us. Perhaps we'll find an explanation for it later. And by the way, we were wrong when we landed; the magnetic pole is no longer to be found on the Boothia Peninsula, but has now moved north-west to Prince of Wales Island. I spoke to Gutmann about this a few days ago and he explained to me that our maps still had the old positions. The magnetic pole is moving and has already shifted about three hundred kilometres from the point we had assumed. The concern of our magnetic needle was quite understandable, even at this distance."

"Nobody told us before we left. Bloody negligence in Vernäs."

Just outside the corridor where their rooms were located, they came across three Japanese men in uniform. The stripes on their shoulders identified them as officers.

Reimer and Recke saluted militarily and the Japanese also thanked them, smiling obligingly. They were all three small in stature, but looked incredibly intelligent.

"The Japs probably didn't dream of the North Pole half a year ago any more than we did!" said Recke when they had passed. "They're good soldiers!"

Reimer had guessed correctly when he assumed in the landing hall that Juncker would soon come into his room. The two captains had not been in the room that Recke shared with him for long when Juncker entered in his flying clothes.

"Hello, comrades," he greeted and began to open his combination. Recke willingly helped him undress. He even wanted to hang the overclothes in Juncker's locker compartment, but Juncker refused: "Leave the suit on the bed, Recke! - I may have to start again soon. We don't have many men who can fly with a gyroplane. Would you like to do a training course?"

"Why not?" laughed Reimer. Recke also nodded in agreement.

"We don't have enough men here for everything now," Juncker said casually. "You will certainly find many uses in the very near future."

"I hope so," grumbled Recke.

"Why are you grumpy?" Juncker asked, looking at his mate.

Reimer replied in his place: "He is curious and

actually expects scalding hot news!"

"Ah - and you don't?"

"Also," Reimer admitted and laughed.

"Hm - actually, we're just about to get the news. I picked up an emissary from Asia from a certain point outside the Arctic. We have quite a few people here now and some are expected later today. At the Great Assembly, much will be revealed that we do not yet know."

"We met three Japanese officers," Recke confessed.

"Oh, they've been here for three days! They're the emissaries from the Black Dragon."

"Oops - how gruesome!" Recke laughed broadly. "What kind of club is that?"

Juncker remained serious. "The most powerful organisation in Japan! It has an influence that extends far beyond the borders of its country. They are valuable allies, these Japanese?"

"Did you land here on your own plane?" Reimer wanted to know.

"No. We picked them up in a long-haul aircraft about halfway there. We always do this for safety reasons, and it's also very dangerous to fly in this area!"

"Why?" asked Recke. "If you can manage the navigation and have a good machine -"

"That's not what I meant," Juncker replied. "But there is a certain area - not too far from here - where there have been missing persons who could not be found despite a thorough search. It's forbidden land."

"I don't really understand that." Reimer shook his head. "With the current state of aerial reconnaissance?"

"That's just it! - I would just like to point out the sensational case of the polar aviator Levanevsky. In 1937, this Russian flew a four-engined aircraft with five companions over the Pole on a non-stop flight to Alaska and suddenly disappeared from the scene. A radio message from him reported that he had flown over the Pole, later a message arrived that the right engine had broken down and immediately afterwards all radio communication ceased."

"Crashes happen from time to time," said Reimer laconically.

"The unusual nature of the case is based on the disappearances and the presumably misguided search flights. We old people who have been here at Point 103 for some time are well acquainted with this story. Listen further: The aviator Wilkins carried out ten flights from northern Canada, as did the experienced Grazianski. The Russians themselves sent an icebreaker with aeroplanes into the Beaufort Sea, but had no success in their extensive search. The most interesting aspect of all the research flights, however, is the fact that a reconstruction of the flight route on the polar maps shows the



It was determined that the search planes should have discovered a trace of the missing persons at a distance. However, the routes forked conspicuously around an area; it seems as if some forces had diverted the search planes from their original course in order to keep them away from a particular area. The Russians later made a number of flights from a base on Crown Prince Rudolf's land, but all their dogged efforts were in vain. The mystery surrounding Levanevsky and his companions has remained unsolved to this day. Since we ourselves are able to keep foreign aircraft away from our island here, it is quite possible that

..." Juncker made an indeterminate movement.

"If you have reconstructed a flight route, it should be easy to make flight corrections on the basis of this," objected Recke critically. "A strictly fixed route ..."

"I told you earlier," Juncker repeated, "that our magneto-radio equipment is known to be able to deflect any aircraft approaching us without the pilot noticing."

"That would mean that Levanevsky must have discovered something and no longer had the opportunity to transmit. That left two questions: what did he discover and who could have caused the Russian to crash or prevented him from transmitting?"

"Correct!" confirmed Juncker. "However - the answer to that is still open."

"Very strange." Reimer ran his hand over his forehead.  
"There's no parallel for this incident."

"Yes, but not so tragically!" Reimer  
looked at Juncker. "Which one?"

"Point 103!" replied Juncker, clearly enjoying the astonishment of the two captains. "Land was once found in this area too. During the First World War, the Canadian Macmillan undertook an expedition in search of Cracker Land, which the famous polar explorer Peary reported on in 1906. Macmillan undertook expeditions with sledge teams from Ellesmereland and Axel Heiberg Island and penetrated beyond the 82nd parallel, but was unable to discover the land. It must have been easier to find back then. Since then, Cracker Land has become a legendary land ..."

"That such a thing is possible?" Recke marvelled.

"Oh, science knows of two more such cases! In 1907, the Koch brothers sighted an island that was later named Fata Morgana Island. Around thirty years later, Lauge Koch repeated the search for the island suspected to be on the Nansen Ridge in an aeroplane, but was also unable to find it. Around the same time, a larger Russian expedition under Samoilovich set off to search for the legendary Sannikov Land, among other things. Despite modern aids, the Russians were also unsuccessful. It is said to be north of the

New Siberian Islands lie around the 80th parallel."

"You are well informed about the history of polar research!" Reimer had to recognise.

"Pah," Juncker said dismissively. "Gutmann knows a lot more!"

Reimer looked up. "Gutmann spoke of a mystical high seat ..."

"Ah - really? -" Juncker raised his eyebrows. "When did he tell you about the Blue Isle?"

"Blue Island?"

"You're saying! ..."

"Gutmann didn't mention a name," Recke remembered.

"Then he was probably just speaking in general terms. But still: this could possibly be the solution to the Lewanewski problem. The command staff at our base is working on this still unsolved mystery."

Recke got up from the edge of the bed, put his hands in his trouser pockets and stood with a broad stance. "That's very interesting, dear Juncker. But doesn't our staff here have any more pressing concerns at the moment?"

"I think that Gutmann has given you clues that point to causal connections!"

"You must understand Recke," shouted Reimer in between. "He probably understands everything, but at the moment he's only ever thinking about the obvious. We all have relatives back home and are worried about the chaos that is about to ensue."

"That's understandable," Juncker admitted. "I'm not much better off. I have a family in Magdeburg." A slight wince crossed his sharp-featured face.

"It's clear that we need to get out of our ruminations. When the Great Assembly is over, there will be an abundance of deployment orders!"

"What kind of meeting is this?" Reimer wanted to know.

"Big council meeting!" said Juncker mysteriously.

Recke scuffed his heels on the floor. "Like the Fiji Islanders ..." But Juncker didn't listen. "I'm a bit tired. Let me sleep for half an hour!" Reimer poked Recke angrily. "You should take certain things a little more seriously."

"Don't blame him!" Juncker said to Reimer while lying down.

"It's always good to look at things with a dry sense of humour. We all understand each other, don't we?" He waved his hand in an agitated manner and then turned his face to the wall. A few minutes later, his deep breaths revealed that he had fallen asleep.

When Gutmann came into his room late at night, Reimer was already asleep. He was about to leave early in the morning when Reimer woke up.

"Hey, Gutmann!"

"Yes?"

"Where to so early?"

"Lots to do today! - I have to hurry." He pushed the door open and left before Reimer could ask any more questions. Through the briefly opened door

Command announcements from the loudspeaker system.

Reimer stretched his arms and jumped up with a jerk. He had to yawn while he was still dressing. He had had a somewhat restless sleep and had been dreaming. While he could hear the hurried patter of footsteps through the door from the corridor outside, revealing increased activity, he tried to organise his thoughts and recall the dream images of the night.

However, he was only able to piece together vague ideas connected to the mysterious high seat in the centre of the Arctic. Gutmann's hints and Juncker's remark about a blue island had stimulated his imagination and conjured up images in his dreams that would not return in his waking life. Somehow he had retained a memory that the strange glowing discs had played a role in his inner vision. A feeling that could not yet be explained made him suspect that these phenomena could be connected with this unknown centre.

However, he immediately became uncertain in his combinations when he used his technical knowledge and logic for his observations. There was a gap here that he was unable to bridge. While he was still picking up his towel to go to the wash and bath room at the end of the corridor, he decided to keep these mind games to himself for the time being.

and wait to see what Gutmann would say about it from time to time.

In the washroom, he met Recke, who had also got up and was about to leave. "When did you start getting up with the chickens?"

Recke wiped a splash of soap off his right boot with his towel. "Funny comparison, when there are not only no chickens here, but no zoo at all! Your comparisons are a bit flawed."

"My God - idioms!" Reimer placed his small shaving kit on the top of the wash basin and brushed off his shirt. "Gutmann has flown out again."

"Juncker too!" replied Recke. "The whole corridor seems to be empty today. The hustle and bustle and the loudspeakers woke me up."

Reimer had turned on the hot water tap and started soaping himself up with the shaving brush. "Yes, no more people in the neighbouring rooms around us. I think we could have the whole bathroom here to ourselves for a while. No-one's crowding in."

"Come on - have a bath! - I want to see what's going on today. The station is open like a beehive."

"The messengers must all be here by now, I reckon." Reimer slowly began to scrape his chin.

"That's exactly why. Hurry up with mowing your stubble field and pick me up for breakfast."

"Mhm," said Reimer. He hurried to the toilet to get out of the bathroom as quickly as possible.

out. After just under a quarter of an hour, he took Recke out of the room and went with him to the dining room. None of the known and unknown comrades were still there. Only the three Japanese officers seen the day before were sitting around a table in the corner of the hall, chatting animatedly with a bald Mongolian wearing a wide black overcoat.

The strangers were engrossed in their conversation and paid no attention to the breakfast stragglers. Their expressions were serious and calm. No gestures disturbed the dignity of their conversation.

"I once got my hands on an illustrated work by the great Swedish explorer Sven Hedin," Recke whispered to his mate as they took their seats. "Among other things, it showed a Tibetan abbot who looked exactly like this black skirt here with the Japs!"

"It's possible that this man is the Ta Lama Gutmann was talking about," Reimer replied. "An interesting person!"

The bald stranger exerted an indefinable attraction. Recke kept glancing furtively at the man. "The Tibetans are strange and seemingly impenetrable people. I almost wish I could get to know their strange country!"

Reimer was just about to reply when he saw the man in the monk's habit put his black

jet eyes suddenly turned to Recke and stared at him piercingly. The lama's face resembled a carved mask.

Attracted by the power of this gaze, Recke withstood the scrutiny for a few seconds, then he became restless. He moved his lips slightly, as if searching for words, but couldn't get a sound out of his throat. Only his fingers made a few fidgety movements on the tabletop.

"What's wrong with you?" Reimer tapped one foot lightly against Recke's shin. At the same time, he noticed that a fleeting smile slipped over the stranger's features after his comrade's wince. It was only a slight twitch of the corners of his mouth, which lent an ironic touch to his otherwise impassive expression and betrayed an underlying meaning. The small black eyes glittered almost piercingly under half-lowered lids.

The Japanese also sat silently and did not move. A spell had fallen over the people. Then the lama stood up and said loudly and clearly: "Buddha's ears are everywhere!"

"Buddha's ears are everywhere!" Recke repeated with difficulty. "The man can't speak German and yet he understood everything! ..."

The Tibetan nodded briefly to the Japanese, then tightened his robe and walked slowly out of the room. His gait was slightly slurring and his gaze was now turned inwards. A few minutes later, the Japanese followed.



Reimer looked thoughtfully at his comrade, who was still staring at the exit through which the Asians had disappeared. "That wasn't a pickpocket trick! ..."

"Truly not! - But we'll probably never be able to find out what it really was. It must be a strange mixture of telepathy and metapsychics."

"Asia will always be a mystery to us Europeans. No matter what you call or label the inexplicable, it goes beyond our intellectual horizon. The materialism of the West has drawn its own boundaries, which only hinder any view beyond."

"Maybe that's a good thing," said Recke slowly. "Otherwise we would perhaps no longer be ceaselessly creative, but dream and twilight. We must constantly create and build, but not always have one foot on the ladder to the afterlife. Otherwise the world will decay!"

A man from the kitchen staff came over and put breakfast on the table. Black coffee and conig bread with jam.

"I just want to know where the blokes here get their coffee beans from?" asked the man from Kassel, who always drank two or three cups. "In Vernäs, they only had beetroot water, called negro sweat for short!"

"Probably from our patrons in America. Gutmann was alluding to that."

"Hm."

During the quick early morning meal, the meagre conversation between the two captains was interrupted several times by loudspeaker commands for airfield operations. Standbys were constantly being called. As little as it was possible to estimate the number of personnel at Point 103, the ongoing instructions indicated that a considerable number of men had already been flown in. The great strategic importance of the North Pole was unmistakable.

The two men were clear about this without words. At the moment, however, their thoughts were still mainly focussed on the strange man in the black robe, who must have understood Recke's thoughts.

Recke suddenly said: "When I get home safe and sound, I will read books about Tibet and also look into Lamaism. I am now very interested in how far our knowledge has progressed. If the inner core is likely to remain a mystery, I would at least like to delve into the outer world."

"Buddha's ears are everywhere," Reimer repeated his mate's translation from before. "I wouldn't be surprised if the Ta Lama also felt the repetition of a similar wish."

"That is so incredible that I would have denied it most vigorously at any time if I had not been proven wrong by the facts. If one

However, if we disregard the strangeness of this occurrence, guessing such a wish is meaningless. One may be able to guess thoughts. You can never put them into practice!"

As the day wore on, the tension between the two officers eased. The extremely high level of activity on the station and the hustle and bustle of the men made Recke in particular grumpy again, as he was already fed up with doing nothing. Only the hope of the imminent missions kept the men's spirits down. Reimer was also beginning to wear down.

The captains slept through the afternoon in their rooms. Recke, who woke up first, sought out Reimer and shook him awake. "Get up, Herbert! - Before I stumbled into your bower, some guy from the staff came running through the corridor shouting something about the cinema. They want to see if they're showing a film with salon heroes and sugar dolls. You don't even know what a pretty girl looks like any more."

Reimer pulled himself up and blinked. "Who's talking about a cinema here? If that were true, Gutmann would have said something about it long ago."

"Nobody talks here!" grumbled Recke. "I've heard the word 'cinema hall', so something like this must exist."

"Whatever." Reimer got ready and stepped out into the corridor with Recke. Heading in the direction of the dining room, they didn't meet anyone. It fell

They noticed that, in contrast to the morning, there was an unusual calm. There were only a few men on duty in the hangars of the gyroscopes. All work was at a standstill.

Recke approached a technician he already knew by sight. "Where is the cinema?"

The man looked at him in astonishment. "He's ..." He interrupted the beginning of the sentence and showed uncertainty.

"Well?"

"You should actually know! Or - ?"

"For crying out loud - not even a police dog can find its way around this labyrinth!"

The man breathed a sigh of relief. "I see. - From the corridor that leads to the frog glass, just before the weather station, there's a dead end that leads to room Roman thirty-eight. Go through there - you can't go wrong!"

"Mhm - thank you!" Recke greeted briskly and pulled Reimer along with him. "Funny bloke. He acted like it was the secret laboratory of Peenemünde."

They followed the path indicated. Their shadows on the floor grew or diminished depending on whether they entered or left a circle of light from the overhead lighting. In contrast to the other connecting corridors in the station, this corridor was somewhat less well lit due to its extraordinary length.

In front of the stairway to the Frog Glass, they came to the entrance of the dead-end street indicated, which led for about fifty metres to a small door with the Roman numeral XXXVIII emblazoned on its smoothed wood. At

A guard stood at the door, keeping a firm stance.

Passing through the half-open door, they entered a small hall with a wall opening straight ahead. Dim light pointed to a continuation of the path. A low murmur of voices drifted out.

The two airmen had no idea that the next few seconds would bring them the biggest surprise of their lives so far. Unsuspecting, driven only by the need for a little change, they entered the next room and stopped in surprise. What presented itself to their eyes was neither a cinema, nor any other sober or technical facility, as they had found everything so far to be fully functional, but modest and only according to the aspects of military needs.

They were in an anteroom with a bronze astrolabe hanging from the centre of the ceiling as a light fixture. An opal lamp formed a luminous centre in the middle of the intertwined metal rings, spreading a mild, pleasant light. Two-thirds of the way up the otherwise bare room, the walls were decorated with the symbols of the twelve signs of the zodiac, while the ceiling featured brightly coloured dots of the figures of the northern night sky painted on a dark background.

Their eyes wandered. On the wall to the left was another opening, with a red curtain drawn to one side. From the next one

The murmur of voices came out of the room like the sound of the sea. A large part of the station crew seemed to have gathered there.

A realisation struck Recke's brain like a bolt of lightning. He clutched Reimer's arm: "The Great Assembly!"

"Very strange," he said as he walked on. Behind the curtain a spacious hall opened up, to which a series of steps led downwards. And here they saw what they thought was the product of an exalted imagination. A strange hall with strange people.

The room looked like the nave of a church. On both sides of the elongated hall were rows of benches where some of the men from the ward sat. The centre aisle was lower and the hall continued into it with four more steps. The whole thing looked like a street, flanked by the walls of a low parapet on both sides, leading to the rear end of the hall. A kind of procession of people, most of whom wore red cloaks, stood on this lane. The white cloaks of the temple lords must have looked something like this.

At the head of the procession were foreign guests, whose garb also emphasised the strangeness of this gathering. The helmet-like black headgear of the Tibetan Ta Lama towered above all the men, making the Japanese standing behind it look almost small. Whilst the Tibetan man

The Japanese officers were probably wearing their uniforms, but they also had black cloaks over them. A little later, the two airmen could see that these cloaks had a dragon outlined in silver on the left side of the chest.

The presence of officers from other nations, including two American officers, was also striking. Some of these men also wore red robes, some of them black. A number of Indians with their tight white trousers and black, frock coat-like outer garments were also at the head of the long group. A few tall black men, one of them a typical Ethiopian, Arabs in black burnouses and two Persians with their lambskin caps completed the picture of a worldwide rendezvous.

They all stared at a man in a German uniform who, throwing back his red robe, raised his arm in a solemn gesture. A silver oak leaf gleamed on either side of his collar.

"We welcome the messengers!" His voice sounded full and audible throughout the hall.

The two captains sat inconspicuously to one side and waited for what was to come next. All the quiet murmuring in the hall had ceased. With a quick glance round, Reimer and Recke noticed that to the left and right of the man who had just spoken the greeting stood a statue from ancient mythology. One of them represented

one depicted the lion-headed Kronos, the other was the well-known statue of Helios.

At the side of these mythological figures stood a German and an Italian officer of higher rank, representing a kind of guard of honour. The back wall of the hall itself had a large sculptural mural; it showed the depiction of Mithras, also familiar to all people with a humanist education. The Lord of the Sun, slaughtering the bull, and on either side the torchbearers, the lion, the dog on the bull's belly, the snake, the scorpion on the victim's genitals and above Mithras the raven.

In the meantime, the red coat from the end of the hall had started talking again:

"Praise to the Supervisor, the Lord, who rewards those who do good deeds according to their own will and who purifies obedience in the end!" A slight murmur answered him as he lowered his arm. "The messengers know why they have come and we are eager to hear what they have to tell us. Let the messengers speak so that we can make decisions together!" He nodded to the messengers and stepped aside a little.

A Japanese captain in a dragon cloak was the first to step forward and address the gathering. He bowed deeply before beginning to speak.

"We envoys of the Black Dragon bring the greetings of our covenant to the Lord of Point 103. The dragon is ready, together with the others



organisations to fulfil the Great Commandment of the world and to contribute to its reshaping. In the struggle on the mental and mystical level, the Federation, together with the members of the Oomoto Centre, will do everything in its power to achieve the great goals in its field. The Red Sun and the Black Sun serve the same Lord! - This is our message and we will convey the decisions made here to the dragon in front of our Sacred Mountain." Once again, the Japanese man bowed solemnly and then stepped aside.

Another messenger emerged from the small circle of Indians. Plainly, without ceremony, he approached the assembly, bowing only in a measured manner. His almost flawless German had a slightly sing-song tone.

"What is above the sky and what is below the earth and what is between the two, the sky and the earth, what they call the past, the present and the future, is interwoven and interwoven in space, so it says in the Upanishads. - I am a Chaprasi, a messenger of my country, and we greet the Lord from point 103, who, like us, is in the service of the Lord of the world! Our message is the same as that of the brothers of the Black Dragon and our mission is to communicate to our Guru the decisions taken here by the Great Assembly in the service of the Supreme Power. Here, near the Su-Meru, the ancient sacred high seat, the power is given that will open the gates of a new world for humanity.

age will open." The Indian's eyes burned and mesmerised the crowd present. "When the people who serve the Lord of the Sun here touch the hands of the world clock, they will also be supported by centres of ancient wisdom. This is what the Great Guru is saying through my mouth!" With a slight bow to the German officer, placing his right hand to his forehead, mouth and heart, he stepped back and made way for one of the two Persians.

"I am the Sāfir, the envoy of the sons of the Black Widowers We also look unwaveringly towards the World Mountain, which we pure ones call the Hara- berezaiti in our language and to which we are all close here. Ahura Mazda's grace has opened our eyes and found us worthy to bring the greetings of our community to those gathered here on behalf of the Ustad. Those who are among the knowledgeable know whose message I am echoing and that it cannot be other than that of the men before and after me. Whoever is purified by the fire and remains waiting in silence will have all doors opened to him. We the pure are ready to do what must be done. My brother Mukaddasi, the Sāfir of the Sufi Bi-Shar, is like me ready to take the message as we have delivered it. It is time for the flames of light to blaze higher and for the forces of darkness to be repressed. That is all I have to say!"

"That's right!" confirmed the second Persian, also emerging from the procession. "Im nāzdi bākūh dunjāi - we

are close to the mountain of the world, may the Great Power be with us! We are ready!"

As he stepped back, the first Persian added:  
"Huda wānd dunjâi 'l-ed'an-e mubarāk nikân-ra negâh nhi-darād - The Lord of the world, who must be obeyed, protects the good!"

The Persians were followed by a Chinese man, again wearing a uniform, whom Reimer and Recke had overlooked. Smiling obligingly, he introduced himself as an envoy of the Hungbund and repeated in English phrases similar to those spoken by his predecessors.

"We summon the spirit of the North Pole, Si Nen Ti, who lives in the Great Bear, and look towards the Tien tze shan, the mountain of paradise!" he exclaimed.

"It is the Tao," he then concluded, "that creates the harmony of the universe and to which we are subordinate in service. The Tao that was taught by Mount Tai shan and is recognised and preached by the Heavenly Master and the Hungbund as the foundation of all being. So we, the knowers of our gross covenant, also look to the secret high seat of humanity, the Kwen-lun, to receive the power to fulfil our task. The sage Kung Futse said in his book Lun-Yü: The superior man is skilled in duty, the common man is skilled in gain! - If the hour has now come when the knowledgeable are called, then we too are ready. This is the message of the great Koh, our old man from the mountain, and his two Hiong-ti!"

After the Chinese man, the following took it in turn to the

Ethiopian, a Brazilian officer, a Venezuelan, a Siamese and a Mexican full-blooded Indian with the rank of captain all sent the same messages. All were ready to serve the same goal at the given hour. The penultimate messenger was an Arab, the only one accompanied by his two companions, who strode onto the platform with the two mythological figures. He raised his right hand with dignity before beginning to speak. Beneath the dark kaffjeh, a striking face looked out at those gathered, passionate eyes flashing.

"We are the Sufâr, the messengers of the Guardians of the Mysteries, the ancient Ali Sikh from Cairo and the Guardian from the Valley of Wisdom of Jebel Hadhur! We are sent by the men who guard the ancient black stone Anât in the 'Tower of the Transient', which is considered the mother of all being. Their words are: 'Bring our greetings to those who are on their way to the Mountain of Assembly! We too are willing to complete the time and reach perfection ourselves. Countless people have sought the path to the light and yet ended up getting stuck in the thorns of doubt. We no longer seek knowledge, because we have been given knowledge! The realisation of the secrets of the world that separates being from appearance. Just as the Yezidis at Jebel Sinjar still sacrifice to Melek Ta'us, the Lord of Evil, because they believe in the forgiving redemption of the High Judgement, people all over the world are bowing to the increasing forces of the negative pole and its magical influences."

The Arab took a short step towards the audience. His throaty voice rose as he continued in flawless German: "But no one can escape where his path has led him. A sura in the Koran says: "When the coming is near, there is no denial, no diminishing, no exaltation. When the earth writhes in labour, when mountain rubs against mountain and atomises into nothingness, then you will be ranked threefold!" - The Arab grabbed the burnoose.

"There is no crescent moon over the world, but there is a cross over humanity. The guardians around the stone Anāt see a division of the earth into a western and an eastern half coming. This is the visible horizontal bar of this cross. The polar forces: of white and black magic, the top and bottom of the invisible, the vertical bar, dominate the horizontal! Thus the physical force is above the mental level and the ethos of humanity is determined by the Midnight Mountain, to which we recognisers turn our eyes. Hence the message of the Shêch: We have received the invitation to the Great Assembly of the Black Sun and at the same time we have seen the luminous discs in the sky. We read the signs that herald a turning point in time and promise a new paradise to the people of the coming Age of Aquarius. Before us is the High Time of the Great Mother. Let the gate of the 'Tower of the Transient' therefore be open to those who know! - Insân idhab ilâ 'lbhabi waftahhu!"

Murmurs of agreement could be heard. The explanations of the man in the black burnoose had made an impression and identified him as a personality in his group. The Arab had undoubtedly studied in Europe and had also spent years in Germany. His way of expressing himself in this language was astonishing.

Sipping slowly and leaning slightly forward, the Tibetan Ta Lama stepped into the centre of the semi-circle formed by the previous messengers. Reimer and Recke used this brief moment of expectation to push themselves even closer to the front. Nobody paid any attention to them.

The Tibetan paused for a few breaths, completely absorbed in himself. Then he turned round and let his enquiring eyes wander over the assembly through half-closed eyelids. To those standing further away, he gave the impression of being asleep. The strangeness of his person was heightened by the fantastic-looking headdress; the typical Tibetan monk's cap with the large dragon helmet-like crest that curved steeply.

When he began to speak in English, everyone leant forward to understand the Ta Lama better, as he didn't speak very loudly.

"I come as Ku-tshap, as a messenger, of the Mahasiddha Lugtog, who is in contact with the sages of Shangri La and to whom the voices come from midnight and from the subterranean realm of Aggartha. And this is his message and his prayer: I

offer the lamp that illuminates all the kingdoms of the world and is filled with the light of the sun and the moon, in whose precious vessel, wide as the three thousand worlds, and in the sea of fluctuating butter, soaked with butter, is the wick, strong as Mount Meru! - The lamp illuminates the world, which is about to perish in chaos if people do not come to their senses in time. The shining discs of Mani are signs in the sky and they will multiply as the gulf between the peoples deepens. Ngönkyi Tsao Kung's message from the Lord of the World did not reach the ruler in the West, who has his soldiers fighting against the whole world. He has not been warned and his enemies will therefore benefit from it." The Tibetan's eyes narrowed even more. "The Mahasiddha will mediate between those who seek and those who wait. I also see men coming to us from here who are well received by us. They all have to follow the path to which they are destined and everything will be fulfilled in time."

"At this time, everything will be fulfilled!" repeated a voice from somewhere with a resonance that is characteristic of all sounds coming from loudspeakers. At the same time, an indirect light shone out and covered the cultic relief of the background with a bright red glow. While all those present remained in deep silence, the voice of the Invisible One continued: "We have heard the words of the messengers and now know that the

The communities represented have gained the same insights and are following the same paths. We are therefore also now revealing our messages, which will determine our actions! - Above all, the Yalta Conference on 1 February this year was an agreement between the Japhetites of Crimea and the Shriners, the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant in New York. These forces represented themselves through the figures of visible world politics. The result, beyond the fate of Germany, was a dictate to divide the world into an Eastern and a Western sphere of power for a period of ten years. These powers, both subject to grey magic, will be responsible for the chaos that will befall Europe and, especially in Germany, a terrible time reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War. It is the terrible fulfilment of Walter Rathenau's prophecy: Germany will be a desert! ..." There was a slight modulation in his voice. "It is already clear that a huge wave of persecution will be unleashed, comparable to the collective persecutions of earlier times. Just as the Albigenses, the Cathars, the Templars, the Waldenses, the Patarenes and the Bogumils were once persecuted for belonging to their orders or communities, so in the near future a collective agitation will begin against the Schutzstaffeln, the Vlasov people, the Ustasha members, against the men of the Italian Monte Rossa Division and also the Slovakian Tiso people, as many



The French and Flemish will be caught in the mill of an incipient East-West conflict."

A brief pause in the art followed, during which a few half-loud exclamations from the audience could be heard. Dispassionately and soberly, the voice of the Invisible One continued: "The persecuted Collectives will have the same path ahead of them as the hunted of an intolerant world centuries before. They are also destined to be preserved as a substance in order to enter the magical plane as such. The gates of Aggartha will therefore open to them! - Those who have acted contrary to the ethical principles of their communities and contributed to their misfortune through personal guilt are doomed to world judgement. The investigation and clarification of how and to what extent the collective persecution will begin is the coming task of the tactical group on point 103 - For the messengers of the communities close to us, it should also be said that point 103 will endeavour to expand its technical-military potential over the next five years in order to be able to appear as a co-determining factor on the mental level in due course. We request the support of our friendly organisations for the related actions, which will be carried out globally. Furthermore, we will devote ourselves increasingly to the discovery and exploitation of certain sources of raw materials and, in addition, to the search for and exploration of the technical-physical

potential of ancient civilisations. We would also welcome closer co-operation with the other groups in this area! And a reminder to all: we have no time to lose, as the Shriners in particular are endeavouring to gain the protection of the Great Pole. Their latest creation is the establishment of the United Nations - UN for short - which has been underway for some time now and whose symbol is a blue flag with the pole as the centre of the globe. This gesture and the symbolic bowing to the pole, this second edition of Wilson's old plan, must not be overlooked. The measuring of forces on the mental level has begun, the work on the mystical level is intensifying! We must therefore make decisions immediately after the messengers have arrived and we have heard their words. We will inform the messengers of the outcome. As commander of point 103, I order the staff to the command centre immediately and interrupt the meeting. The Ia must give an introductory report on the situation based on the latest reports and bring the relevant documents with him. The reconvening of the Grand Assembly will be announced by loudspeaker. The guests will be invited to the parlour for the duration of the interruption. I repeat once again: The staff will report to the command centre immediately!"

When the voice fell silent, the red light also went out. Into the silence that had fallen, the voice of the officer who opened the meeting could be heard

had. With polite words, he asked the messengers to follow him.

While the men in the rows of benches on either side remained standing up in their seats, the speaker with the red cloak walked slowly towards the exit, followed by the black-capped lama, the three Japanese from Aikyojûku and the rest of the sentinels.

Climbing up the first flight of steps behind the red coat, the Tibetan saw Reimer and Recke, who had pressed themselves against the wall and were scrutinising the train. The Ta Lama stopped walking for a moment and the train faltered.

"Sang-gye ku-wang tschem-po!" he said loudly and fixed his eyes on Recke.

The man from Kassel hesitantly put his right hand to the peak of his cap. "I don't quite understand," he stammered.

A smile flashed across the Ta Lama's mask-like features. Continuing, he turned his head slightly and repeated in English: "Buddha is omnipotent - Buddha is all-powerful!" A secret knowledge sounded from the Tibetan's sentence, the meaning of which lay hidden in the future. Without taking any further notice of their surroundings, the messengers left the hall. The strangest thing was that the interlude had not caused any surprise. The eyes of the other men had not rested on the man addressed any longer than the Ta Lama himself had paid attention to him.

It was only after the messengers had left that the rows of benches emptied casually and the men crowded in without

The crowd hurried towards the exit. Only the two officers next to the statues of Kronos and Helios, the German and the Italian, remained in their places.

Reimer and Recke, who were not hurrying either, saw a man pushing through from the side of the messengers' redcoat suite and coming towards them. It was Gutmann.

"Who brought you here?" he asked, not unkindly, as he stood next to his comrades.

Recke had been dwelling on thoughts that had filled his mind since the Tibetan's departure and didn't even understand Gutmann's words. Reimer answered in his place:

"Feeling lonely and abandoned, we wandered in the labyrinth of the immortal gods and ..."

"... and so on," Gutmann cut in with a sneer. "I know enough of those sayings too!" He took both friends by the arm and pulled them along. "It's actually a good coincidence that you came here on your own. In the last few hours, I really didn't know what I should have thought of first. Your presence shortens my explanations!"

Between small groups of men, they walked through the cosmic vestibule, as Gutmann jokingly called the anteroom, and then through the corridors and halls to their rooms. Juncker arrived immediately behind them. Both officers took off their red capes and made themselves comfortable in Gutmann's room.

"The red robes at the meeting were reminiscent of

reminds me a lot of a court of law," said Reimer, pointing to the coats.

Gutmann sat down on his cot next to Recke and replied seriously: "This impression is not so incorrect. It's actually - metaphorically speaking - an arm of a world judgement!"

Recke looked up from his brooding. Looking at Gutmann, who was sitting next to him, he said: "Court or no court - it doesn't matter to me! Something is happening on this sick planet that the little Landser at the front has no idea about. There's still a lot of fog around me, but it always seems to be the case in politics that some things have to remain hidden. One question: Who are the Shriners?"

Gutmann leaned backwards. "If you remember what the commander said into the microphone earlier, he called them the guardians of the Ark of the Covenant. In this, a shrine, they guard the magic personified by Yahweh as the power centre of a partly national, partly cosmopolitan active substance that is effective in both directions. Their political representatives on the visible world stage include the American President Roosevelt. Churchill and other men of world politics also belong to the world brotherhood of all lodges, whose mysterious head, the H.O.A.T.F. based in Chicago, is also above the Sanhedrin in the world's inner government. All lodges are subject to the 'Head of all true Freemasons', the auxiliary troops of the

Mount Zion will be led to the goal of One World Government under many profane guises. It is a power that has its net above all other forces and storms together with all of them against the Midnight Mountain."

"Oh, I'm beginning to realise," said Recke. "As far as the mystical or magical level is concerned, there seems to be a very old conflict between spiritual directions and ethical concepts!"

"That's right," Gutmann agreed with him. "The districts mentioned go back to the Golden Age of a long-gone human epoch. In the fragments of the Lost Paradise of the Atlantis period, there is also talk of an interregnum in which black magicians of Semitic origin ruled over the Aryan Atlantians. No doubt they also placed their Bealim - their Baal gods - next to the dominant god Poseidonis. The old black-magical god cults of the Baal direction were rooted in the Semitic habitat; the Bealim survived the Old Antarctic catastrophe and were preserved - by a place name following in the genitive or with the article to characterise the god - as lords of the places concerned, predominantly as mountain gods. Thus Baal Lebanon and Baal Tabor. Baal Melkart was a Phoenician city Baal. The latter was also worshipped in Israel-Judah at the time of the Omri dynasty. Before the immigration of Israel, the indigenous inhabitants of the Palestinian region worshipped

The Bealim, who merged with Baal-Yahweh when the ancient places of worship passed to Israel, were worshipped by the Israelites. Esoteric concepts and mystery wisdom from the eastern circle of life seeped into the Israelites and gave them the knowledge of an esoteric world centre, Mount Meru, known by various names, the Midnight Mountain! This high seat of ancient Atlantis from a time when Greenland was still the Green Land reminded the Israelites of the interregnum their race once held there. Isaiah referred to the mountain in the Bible as Har-Moed, the mountain of assembly. This gave rise to a spiritual variation; Mount Zion as the Jewish centre with Yahweh as Baal-Zion. They labelled the mystery of Asgard-Aggarth in Semitic: Gabbatha. The knowledge of these things intuitively connected the Israelites with a longing for the happy time of their rule over generations of Atlanteans. This mystical subconsciousness is the true reason for their historically persistent restlessness and infiltration into the western and northern regions of life. In these they currently form a grey-magical circle with a black-magical centre, as they are unable to detach themselves from the black-cultic primordial ground. This focus on the Arctic World Mountain is now resulting in the advance into the areas of the Great Pole in a race with the white-magical forces of the Indo-Aryan groups, who are striving for an Atlantean renaissance. A long-term decision is **i n** the offing: Either the

Shriners the tablets from Sinai to Midnight Mountain and assimilate the White Power for the reign of Baal Yahweh, or the coming Aquarian Age of a new Yuga passes through the purifying fire of the North!"

"This is an invisible front that is labelled irrational by the mass of people," Reimer interjected.

"Invisible - in part, yes - irrational only for those who do not seek! - Incidentally, the irrational as an antipole in the dualism of all things is also a primal force that acts on us naturally without calculation and without the will to reason and cannot be replaced by consciousness. The materialistic world view of modern times denies all relationships to the primordial and, as rational, always remains on the fringes of all events. To know this is the secret of Asia. It is the result of the factual that we in Europe are slowly becoming desolate or "monotonous" because Europeans sacrifice their inner strength, the irrational, to the coolness of reason, to the coolness of the ratio. But those who know about these things can understand many things that might otherwise seem incomprehensible in life. If Tibet, the roof of the world, is connected with the Ri-rap-hlumpo and the Tschang-Shambala - the latter refers to Aggartha - then this is a result of obedience to irrationalism." Gutmann lowered his voice slightly. "And Tibet will be our best ally ..."

"But it can no longer help prevent the collapse of the empire," said Recke gloomily.

"No. - Germany will temporarily be the victim in the battle on the mental level. Not least on



Due to certain mistakes in its own politics ... However, it will reach for the torch offered to it by the North at the same time as other peoples. Until then, however, we must take defensive action under the sign of the Black Sun to prevent grey-magic forces from entering the area of the White Circle!"

"So there won't be a holiday for picking flowers and kissing girls for a long time yet," sighed Recke resignedly. "It's clear that I won't leave you in the lurch ..."

When there was a slight pause in the conversation, Reimer asked a question: "Why can we never see the base commander? So far, he hasn't received us for a report, nor has he shown himself on any other occasion."

As Juncker lay lazily on Reimer's cot and lolled about, Gutmann replied: "The commander lives among us unrecognised, so to speak. I'm sure we've all seen him without realising it was him. He comes into the halls and workshops as a fitter, a non-commissioned officer and God knows what else. As a result of the group organisation of the quarters, it is almost impossible to identify him. Everything here is very finely organised. Only the Adju and the Ia know him."

"And why all this?"

"For personal safety reasons! He has outstanding knowledge and losing the boss would be a disaster for us!"

"I thought the base would be shielded," said

Recke with hidden irony.

Gutmann looked at him disapprovingly, then said briefly: "Better safe than sorry!"

"Then even Ta Lama's magic eyes won't be able to harm him," grinned the man from Kassel.

"What do you mean?"

Recke hesitated for a moment. Then he told the two Waffen SS officers about the two brief episodes with the Tibetan. He did not conceal his feelings, which had made him feel strangely self-conscious. He reproduced the few words of the Ta Lama true to memory.

"Such words have weight and meaning," Gutmann explained. "I shouldn't be surprised if they should influence your fate. The man. knows more about it than he says!"

The conversation faltered. After a short while, the man from Kassel got up and went to his room. Juncker followed him. Before Gutmann lay down to doze, he said to his comrade: "I have the feeling that a lot is going to happen now. We have a difficult time ahead of us!"

The time the men were allowed to rest flew by.

One person's waking dream or another's light slumber was disturbed by a noisy loudspeaker announcement.

"Attention - attention! - The Great Assembly enters into

twenty minutes! - The messengers are also requested ... - In twenty minutes! - I repeat ..." Once again a voice croaked out the words.

"Hey, Reimer, get up!" Gutmann had jumped up springily and reached for his red cloak. A squeak from the door diagonally opposite signalled that Juncker and Recke were also on their way out. In fact, the former pushed the door of Gutmann's chamber fully open with the tip of his foot, while other doors in the corridor began to screech or slam dully shut. "Out with you, you sleepyheads! ..."

Just as drops of water gather in a stream, the ordered men streamed together from several sides in the main corridors and headed in the same direction towards the meeting room. Now Reimer and Recke no longer found anything strange about the men in the red coats who were travelling in the same direction as them. It no longer alienated them; everything was just unusual and strange details no longer stood out.

The loudspeaker warned us twice on the way. A myriad of little things showed again and again that strict discipline was observed. Everything was strict and exactly like in the barracks of a reserve unit.

This time Juncker took the two airmen with him into the rows of benches in the meeting room so that they had a good view at his side and no longer had to stand against the wall in the back of the room

had to go. Gutmann apologised as he was part of the messengers' escort and wanted to meet them.

Reimer and Recke still had several minutes to scrutinise their surroundings more closely. Their eyes were once again drawn to the Mithras relief on the back wall of the room.

The dimmer light from the ceiling lamps in the background conjured up soft shadows on the relief and allowed the figures of the god of light with the phrygian cap and the two torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates to stand out vividly on either side. The room itself was otherwise unadorned.

"What is the significance of the wall relief?" Reimer asked Juncker, who was sitting next to him, quietly. "I've already lost part of my humanist education."

The person asked turned his head slightly. "It is the Lord of the Sun! The one who is always awake, never asleep, the all-knowing and all-good. As the god of light, he is the irreconcilable enemy of darkness and its evil spirits. As the protector of all truths, honesty and peacefulness, he deals severely with all adversaries. His importance ..." He was abruptly interrupted by the appearance of the messengers. All the murmuring in the hall died down.

The procession of emissaries came striding down the centre aisle again, led by the Waffen SS officer who had greeted them at the opening of the meeting. Behind the men from various parts of the world came a number of officers from the

base as escorts, including Gutmann.

The leader of the procession climbed onto the platform between the two statues, while the following messengers formed a semi-circle in front of the steps. Once again he raised his arm, formally demanding attention.

"Whoever sees the upper world pure and lonely and none of the gods approaching, expect to hear a mighty thunderclap so that he is shaken. Then say: Silence, silence! and the prayer: I am a star that walks its path with you and shines out of the depths. After these words, the disc of the sun will unfold!"

The spokesman lowered his arm and continued in a changed tone: "We have asked the messengers into our midst so that they can hear the decisions of the task force from point 103 with us!"

Stepping back, he pulled the red cloak tighter and assumed a waiting position. At the same moment, the red light flared up again and covered the wall relief with a fiery glow. The full-sounding voice of the invisible man came from the hidden loudspeaker system:

"The Great Assembly has convened so that the time may be fulfilled as it is marked out in the plan of the world. May the messengers hear: In addition to the statements made earlier about the great tasks of Base 103 of a general nature, operational orders are now being given to a number of men. One does not need to be a prognosticator to know that the chaos

the earth is already beginning to flood and the politicians can no longer control the spirits they have summoned. We therefore do not yet know what difficulties our soldiers will face. If, contrary to expectations, individual members of our base are displaced to areas where men from friendly organisations live, we expect that they will receive help and support. From now on we will throw all available forces into Germany to rescue technical potential and plans. The subsequent actions will be concerned with scanning the forces opposing us in order to determine their strength and positions. Independently of all planning, however, a special task force will be deployed immediately to devote itself to intensive exploration of the Arctic. Anything significant that should occur during the operations or as a result of them will be communicated to the friendly organisations in an appropriate form. In return, we also expect to receive information quickly through the exchange procedure." There was a short pause. Then the voice continued: "At the end of this meeting, all off-duty officers will go to Hall 1 and take note of the new duty roster drawn up by the Ordnance Officer on my behalf. All officers who are not on duty for the next eight hours will remain at my disposal in their rooms or in the common room on call. During this time, they will be called to

Part called to receive deployment orders. This means we are now involved in world events under the sign of the Black Ronde!"

The voice, speaking in military terse sentences, broke off. Almost simultaneously, the red light went out again. The men in the rows of benches looked at each other and exchanged meaningful glances, while the messengers' expressions remained unmoved.

Recke leant over to Juncker: "Are Reimer and I also among the room prisoners?"

"If you're not on the new rota - then yes!"

"Hm..."

Now the messengers began to leave the estrade with the red-coated man leading the way. They walked back down the aisle and then turned into the side rows of benches. Spreading out to either side, they took their seats in the first two empty rows at their leader's request. At the same time, two men in the sub-leader rank ran to the front and lowered a screen skilfully set into the ceiling. Unnoticed by the meeting participants, a mobile film projection machine had meanwhile been brought to the hall entrance. The cables were connected with precise precision and minutes later a bright white cone of light flooded the screen.

This was followed by half an hour or so of extracts from mainly German and sometimes foreign newsreels. The skilful editing clearly illustrated

the true situation on the front lines in Europe. On the one side, vast quantities of American war material prepared for deployment; on the other, exhausted units of desperately resisting Germans. "We must recognise the situation as it really is," explained the accompanying voice of the tape.

At the end of the film, a map of Europe was projected onto the screen. A tall officer stepped out of the darkness to the edge of the circle of light and explained the true situation on the fronts in detail with the help of a stick.

Juncker smacked the two captains: "That's the Ia!" The one brought with responsible objectivity lecture left no doubt about the seriousness of the situation. The staff officer relentlessly explained the actions of the Allied troops, the withdrawal of their own units and the failure of supplies due to a lack of fuel and material. He concluded his speech by saying that the occupation of Germany would be an inevitable consequence of developments and appealed in his closing words to the men at the base to serve a greater future without wavering. He concluded: "May the messengers take with them the certainty that a collapse of our country will not hinder the endeavours of the communities. And however persecutions may occur, they are the refining fire of the highest trials. And the highest of all things is duty!"



The projection machine stopped and the room went dark for a few seconds. When the room lights were switched on again, those gathered saw the Chief of Staff leaving the room. The red cloak waved behind him like a flag.

"The meeting is closed!" the speaker shouted into the hall. Those present rose from their seats and allowed the messengers to go first before they also began to leave the room.

"I'm gobsmacked," said Recke to his comrades. "This openness ..."

Juncker raised an eyebrow. "Do you also believe that the SS front organisations are made up of mutton?"

"Mhm - not that ..."

"The Schutzstaffeln have an esoteric core, as Gutmann has already explained. The Reichsheinrichich - my Himmler - stands outside, but he knows of its existence. This creates a delicate situation that must be handled with great care."

"I really appreciate openness," Reimer joined in the brief conversation. "Especially when you have to be clear about certain things. But does it promote a fighting morale? ..."

"If a team is good, the truth will never paralyse it. Rather encourage the willingness to get the best out of it!" Juncker's explanation was dry and matter-of-fact. "This recipe is proving its worth here!"

The three men joined a small group

of officers, who were heading towards Hall One in lively discussion. There was a queue of curious people in front of the notice board. The men who had arrived first were already pushing backwards so that the others could follow. In a short time, Recke was the first of his comrades to stand in front of the board and look for the names.

His voice drowned out the banter of the others. "Hey, Juncker, you seem to be with the chosen ones! Off duty! - And Reimer? - Stay in the back, old chap! - Free too! - You've got a mighty pig, both of you!" His broad back arched a little and you could clearly tell he was tensely searching. "Eureka!" he roared, "they've got something planned for me too!"

He pushed back like a bull, laughing all over his face. He pulled Reimer and Juncker, who were both wedged into the crowd, with him and pinched the Linzer's arm with exuberance.

"You must be mad!" he said indignantly, partly in anger, as he felt real pain. Recke didn't have too delicate a grip.

"Don't be so silly," said the man from Kassel. "Let's see to it that we get to room arrest quickly."

Over the next few hours, the three men waited together in Juncker's room as he endeavoured to entertain his comrades. His remarks were repeatedly interrupted by loudspeaker announcements,

that came in audibly through the open door. They were mostly calls from officers who were ordered to report to the commander. Recke was inattentive, only Reimer answered Juncker from time to time. Time was slipping away.

"Now we've forgotten to check whether Gutmann is listed as off duty on the rota!" Reimer slapped his hands together.

Juncker was about to reply when the loudspeaker interrupted his intention: "Major Juncker and Captain Recke to the command centre! - I repeat: Major ..."

Recke was up in a flash. "All good spirits praise the Lord!" he exclaimed. "Onwards, forwards - both of us, Juncker! - Hey, what about Reimer?" He interrupted his spontaneous outburst and listened. But the loudspeaker was already silent and didn't mention any more names. "For crying out loud - they're not going to tear us apart, are they?"

Juncker was already standing by the door. "Don't grumble, listen first," he said reassuringly.

When Recke entered the command room with his companion, he found himself standing in a relatively small room with a large table in the centre surrounded by a few shifted chairs. A pile of cards covered it and lay seemingly at random around a towering microphone. Opposite the door, there was a glass pane set into the opposite wall, which did not provide a clear view.

"Major Juncker and Captain Recke!" reported the former. "There's nobody here yet!" said the man from Kassel in astonishment.

"Shh!" said Juncker. "You can see out through the glass, but not in. That's one of those things ..."

"Don't talk so much, Major!" rebuked the voice of the invisible man. "At the moment, we only want to deal with one mission. By the way - the Adju will be with us immediately."

"Höhö, be with us," Recke mocked half aloud. He looked at Juncker, who was standing there with a bright red head.

"Don't forget the microphone, Captain!" the commander also warned mockingly.

The man from Kassel bit his lips. Now they had both got rid of their reproach. He didn't even dare to look at the maps in detail now. Whilst he was sheepishly dragging his feet on the floor, the door opened and the adjutant came in. He had some papers in his hand and greeted him in a friendly manner. His collar tabs showed the same rank as Juncker.

Now the invisible man intervened again: "Unfortunately, I don't have much time and we have to get to the heart of the matter straight away. Just one thing for now: Captain Recke! - I am well aware that you are a dedicated officer with a great sense of duty. Due to certain circumstances, you came to point 103 without being prepared or screened beforehand. Major Küpper has for

the crew of the destroyed twin construction took responsibility and gave the best description for you and Captain Reimer. Let me cut a long story short! You don't actually belong to our community yet, but your comrade Gutmann - and I think Juncker too - has already informed you about everything as far as possible. You will also be informed in good time about our organisation itself. Based on the current state of affairs and your present knowledge, are you prepared to fly and deploy under the sign of the Black Ronde?"

Recke looked at the glass pane as if he could see the commander physically in front of him. "As long as you stand by your words - yes, Herr Kommandeur!"

A soft laugh came back. "You have character. I like you, Captain! I'll keep an eye on you and encourage you." An indeterminable noise came through the PA system. Apparently paper was rustling. Then the voice continued:

"I am ordering you to Prague with a new Dosthra aircraft, gentlemen! - The new model has a crew of seven, which means five men on duty in the aircraft and you as a special commando for the intended tasks. According to the current state of technology, this aircraft can be described as attack-proof, as it has flak-proof armour. I can see that you are astonished, Captain! You'll have to get used to other surprises! Of course

the entire crew bears the highest responsibility for the safety and secrecy of this model. When you land near Prague, no-one is allowed to approach the aircraft. Juncker, you take the lead!"

"Yes, Commander!"

"You have heard my words in the Great Assembly, gentlemen! It is now your task to protect certain plans or constructions of a flying gyroscope from foreign hands. It is a model that is fundamentally similar to our construction. The difficulty of your task will be that you will only be able to act during the beginning of the disintegration phenomena. At the same time, however, you must observe the collective persecutions that begin and report as accurately as possible on the proceedings. As far as it is within your modest power, you must provide all possible assistance if it does not jeopardise your task and the preservation of the machine. I have already **clearly indicated** in my remarks that forces in favour of the persecuted will make themselves felt. In this respect, gentlemen, it is particularly important to keep a close watch! Our later decisions will be decisively influenced by your reports. Always remember that!"

"Yes," the officers confirmed in a disciplined manner.

"In the Dosthra aircraft you will find a complete set of aeronautical charts r e q u i r e d for your route. I will also leave you

Army maps on a scale of one to one hundred thousand of the Bohemian region. The time of your departure has not yet been determined. Use the next few days to familiarise yourself with the peculiarities of the new aircraft and above all with its armament. These are still secret weapons that the enemy does not know about. You are both exempt from base duty, gentlemen! According to previous reports, your deployment may take place in about ten or fourteen days. Nevertheless, you must always be prepared for an earlier order. Before you start, I will send for you again. In the meantime, you will receive precise instructions for your mission from the Ia. Thank you in the meantime!"

Both officers clasped their hands together and saluted. The adjutant accompanied them to the door and shook their hands in a friendly manner. "Congratulations!" he said. "You've been given a fine commission."

"Blimey," Recke suddenly said to Juncker on the way, "now I've completely forgotten to ask about Reimer!"

"Just don't ask," warned Juncker. "At best, we'd deprive Reimer of a good chance. Besides, our team is complete. The boss doesn't like substitutions!"

Instead of entering their room, they first went over to Reimer's together. There they found him in animated conversation with Gutmann. "What is it?" he asked as the two of them entered.

"Everything's fine!" replied Recke, using a common soldier's expression. "We're flying to Prague!"

"And with a dosthra," added Juncker. Gutmann whistled through his teeth. "Our best model.

The big surprise of the airspace. If the boss uses this machine, then there's a lot to the job!"

"It seems so," said the man from Kassel. "I'm really curious about the new machine, by the way!"

"Let's see them tomorrow!" Juncker ran his hand over the top of his head. "I already know them well enough, but I'll explain them in detail to our warrior. Incidentally, I'm also in charge of the machine."

"I'm just curious when I'll be called to command?" Reimer interjected. To everyone's surprise, Gutmann replied: "Not for the time being!"

"Ah - why not?"

Gutmann blinked his eyes in amusement "He doesn't want to interrupt the tranquil life you've just started."

"Rubbish! - Seriously, what's going on?"

The interviewee put his hand on Reimer's shoulder.

"Together with me - zbV!"

"For special use?" The Linzer was amazed.

"We stayed together in pairs. - That's nice of the invisible boss."

"It all has its meaning." Gutmann made a mysterious face, the expression of which was already familiar to his comrades.



"Old mystery man!" rebuked the Linzer.

"Oh - not at all - to prove your assertion wrong, I'll even tell you that we'll be joining t h e inspection of the Dosthbra aircraft tomorrow. The boss wants you to get to know and familiarise yourself with this type as well. So it's all in one."

"The boss's wish is also my wish. He is a very polite man when he calls his orders wishes!"

"One more question," objected Recke. "What about the other five men in the crew?"

Gutmann made a casual gesture with his hand. "I'm sure they'll be in touch with us in the next few hours once the Adju has got them on their feet!"

Gutmann had been wrong. The excitement of the eventful day made the men forget that they were still exchanging views at midnight. The constant artificial light could easily confuse the concept of time. It was Juncker who, with a casual glance at his wristwatch, realised that it was actually bedtime.

In the morning, the telephone rattled. When Recke picked up the receiver, the adjutant answered and t o l d him that the other five crew members would be in touch in about an hour. He and Juncker were to stay in their room at this time.

The two men had enough time for their breakfast and to get ready. At the expected time

there was a knock on the door. When Recke opened it, he saw a young Luftwaffe first lieutenant standing in front of **him** and behind him, on the opposite side of the corridor, a Luftwaffe sergeant and three Waffen-SS subordinates in a row.

"First Lieutenant Jensen and four men report on the commanding officer's orders!" He brought his right hand to the peak of his jaunty cap with a casual finger position.

"Ah - I'm glad it's you!" said Juncker, who had stepped into the corridor behind Recke. He shook hands with the flight officer and introduced him to the man from Kassel.

"Jensen and I have already flown together a few times."

Looking at the four men, he said: "Well then - we all know each other already!" Then, turning to Recke: "That's us in order: Beer - an old Stuka man, then Paulsen, Krammer and finally our Flying Dutchman, Oberscharführer van Huys!"

They were selected men who had enlisted. They all had decorations and battle badges. Gutmann, attracted by the chatter in the corridor, had also come out of his room with Reimer and grinned. "A fine crew," he realised when the new greeting was over. "Already trained Dosthra personnel..."

The two airmen, led by the two Waffen-SS officers, entered a hangar room blasted into the rock of the Ringgebirge, which was protected by a

was extended by a small camouflaged porch. A few men from the ground crew stood ready to help.

Gutmann left it to Juncker to give explanations. After the initial astonishment of the two captains had subsided, he pointed to a large machine that stood like a monster in the bright light of the room. Reimer and Recke had expected a construction that would resemble a larger Heinkel or Dornier type. Instead, they saw a machine that resembled a real combat aircraft. "This is the Dosthra machine, version E!" said Juncker. It sounded as if he was simply pointing to an ordinary object.

"The latest standard large fighter aircraft, the series production and use of which is no longer possible at home."

The two pilots, who were seeing this technical marvel for the first time, took a few steps to the side to get a better look at the design. They saw a high-set mid-wing monoplane in front of **them**, with a pentagonal fuselage cross-section and a thickened head section that gave the apparatus the appearance of a vicious insect. This visual impression was reinforced by the fact that a large black roundel on either side looked like the eyes of the beast.

"A mighty bird," marvelled Reimer in his observations. "It has a wingspan of forty metres."

"Forty-five!" Juncker improved matter-of-factly.

"Hull length about thirty-five metres."

"Boy, boy!" said Recke in awe.

"We still have the C and D models here," explained Juncker. "The Model E is a significantly improved model and, as the commander has already indicated, it is flak-proof."

"I can't really imagine that," Reimer interjected.

"It is made from the latest material. Namely crush metal. This is a highly compressed metal that has been literally crushed under a compression pressure of up to four hundred thousand atmospheres and therefore has maximum strength with a low specific weight. As it is usually radioactive, the activity is dampened by a plastic coating. This process can be used to compress almost any alloy, including steel, into a light metal. As armouring for aircraft, it is practically impenetrable. Furthermore, secret inserts prevent hollow charges from burning through."

"You speak like a book!" Recke's words sounded respectful.

"You have to know your machine!" The remark was a gentle rebuke. He approached the protruding head pulpit, which showed two hull-shaped fighting positions arranged side by side. "Here," he pointed to two wheels about four metres in diameter and taller than a man, which protruded from the head on very sturdy undercarriage struts like the pincers of an insect, "this undercarriage is just like the one on either side.

retractable under the wings! - The aircraft has four engines, namely piston in-line radial engines of the Argus type. There is a fifth engine in the fuselage for special altitudes and an additional loading jet engine in each wingtip. These jets can serve as control elements for narrow-angle course changes."

"Excellent!" said Reimer. "It's just the angular engine nacelles and the bulky stanchions that look a bit strange." He added, as if talking to himself:

"Hm, hm - short, coaxial hammerhead propellers with four blades." He let his eyes glide along the fuselage. "Interesting! - Not usually V-shaped. The fuselage looks like a giant cigar!"

"And indeed - a somewhat peculiar coat of paint," the man from Kassel said again. "Looks like the machine as a whole is speckled with countless eyes. Strange bird!" He also checked like Reimer. "Relatively narrow wings, with the split wings arranged one above the other. Slightly slanted and low-set tail unit. Mhm ..."

"An all-metal construction," Reimer concluded his initial observations. Juncker nodded. "Already two thirds shell construction without frames!"

"And the performance?" asked the man from Linz.

"Well - you won't want to believe it. But the plane actually flies at about eight hundred and thirty kilometres an hour and has a range of twenty-two thousand kilometres at

a summit height of twenty-three. Particularly noteworthy is the climbing performance of seventy-five per cent above the current hunter performance, so that a playful ascent is possible at any time!"

"By golly! - With an air fleet of such machines, we could still turn the damned war completely in our favour. Unless fuel ..." The impulsive warrior clapped his hands together.

"I'm far from finished," Juncker said dryly. "The armament is also new and still secret! The Dosthra has on-board cannons that are actually metal blasters." The Schutzstaffel officer feasted his eyes on the questioning expressions of his comrades before continuing:

"The effect of these metal blasters is based on the sandblaster principle and their cutting effect can easily cut through the wing of an enemy aircraft. The weapon has a normal trigger like a conventional on-board weapon and looks similar to one. The process is similar to chasing metal dust through magnetic fields and ejecting it as an extremely fine beam at high acceleration towards the target. The effect of this weapon surpasses all on-board cannons!"

"Oh my God," whispered the man from Kassel. "This Dosthra E as a whole can no longer be surpassed!"

"Yes," Juncker immediately contradicted. "In just a few years, the Type E will already be obsolete. In the new age of jet fighters and the surpassing of the sonic boom, the

speed, the speed of our large combat machines must also be significantly increased. We are already working on new ways of generating energy. We still have revolutionary changes ahead of us!"

"That's enough with the explanations!" Gutmann cut in. "Let's take a look at the inside of this thing!"

When the four officers left the hall at lunchtime, they were serious and silent.

## THE FLIGHT INTO CHAOS

**All darkness is admitted, indeed the mystery of evil still has power far into the upper room. But no longer to the angel: to him in the centre there was the fruit: to atone for his earth: to be redeemed.**

**(Weinheber: Between Gods and Demons")**

Three weeks passed without the hopes and expectations of Einsatzgruppe Juncker being realised. Recke and Reimer, like the two Waffen-SS officers, had now been trained on the Dosthra machine and were often involved in general operations. Being stuck at the base for so long and listening to daily Wehrmacht reports caused the mood to sink to a low point. Even Gutmann became secretive and avoided everything.

It had now become clear to the greatest optimists that the end of the war was imminent. Any use of miracle weapons and other surprises was undoubtedly too late in this situation, if such hopes could be realised at all.

The only pleasing thing in the monotony of the outwardly



The main attraction of the business, which was closed off from the rest of the world, was the prevailing clear weather, which tempted people to stay outside for longer.

A longer flight took Recke over the Boothia peninsula. Reimer flew in Juncker's place, driven by curiosity to the settlement of the Netsilik people. They found the small settlement without difficulty, but it was completely deserted. A short distance further south, where the peninsula jutted out from the mainland, the two friends were surprised to see two posts, which van Huys, who was experienced here, described as fur stations. So the Netsilik people had had some reason not to reveal the relatively close presence of police and trading posts to their guests. No doubt they also had more contact with the whites than they admitted.

Describing a large arc, the aircraft flew northwards again. The coastline of the Canadian mainland was the southern boundary for all test and training flights. This explicit order from the commander of base 103 was never to be violated unless there was a compelling reason to do so.

And so almost the month of April passed. Vienna had fallen, the Red Army was in front of Berlin, in the west the Allies were advancing rapidly into the heart of the Reich and Italy was lost. Just at the time when the bonds of a natural sense of home and human solidarity with loved ones were beginning to stabilise the mood.

were driven to despair, Juncker and Recke were ordered to command. The commandos and task forces designated for the time of the Great Assembly had long since flown off and no man at the base expected Juncker's group to be deployed.

When the commanding officers stood in the commander's command room and reported in according to regulations, they met the Ia and the adjutant present. The Chief of Staff, as the senior officer, shook hands with the two officers in a friendly manner.

"I have sent for you on the instructions of the commander, gentlemen! - Are you prepared to take on an assignment that requires your full personal commitment?"

Recke glanced briefly at Juncker, who tightened his body with an indifferent expression and answered the question in the affirmative. He immediately followed his comrade's example.

"I didn't expect anything else," the Ia remarked calmly. "I asked this non-military question solely because I need men who are willing to carry out the commander's orders under all circumstances. You must take the knowledge of the danger of your task with you and not be impressed by the possible consequences. It has been my experience that the best fulfilment comes from voluntarily accepted orders." The speaker's grey eyes slid over the faces of the airmen, scrutinising them.

"At the time, the commander spoke of a mission

to Prague," said Juncker. "The matter didn't seem particularly difficult at the time."

"The order hasn't changed," the Ia confirmed. "You have to fly to Prague. But be prepared for an extremely difficult situation. Above all, you must get to your destination immediately, otherwise you'll run into the chaos that has already begun and won't be able to complete your tasks. So pay close attention: Your first task is to secure the plans for a roundabout, which is currently still being worked on in the east hall - remember all the clues, gentlemen - of BMW Platz. If it is at all possible, especially if the object is ready to fly, then save the machine and the designer with his closest colleagues. The man's name is Schriever. If you get to Prague in time, you will most probably meet Major Küpper from Berlin, who will be a valuable help to you. The necessary decisions will depend on the situation you find yourself in. In addition, you will try to gain an overview of the treatment accorded to the volunteer units by the Allies through appropriate reconnaissance. Of course, this requires that you remain in the geographical area long enough to be able to report on it. But the top priority is always: Pay attention to the safety of the aircraft entrusted to you!"

"You can rest assured!" Juncker assured. Recke also nodded.

Becoming serious and insistent, the Ia added: "Whatever you may experience and whatever may move your inner being, switch off everything personal! - Think only of your duty!" He reached for a pack of cards and slid them over to Juncker. "Take the cards that have already been put together. They contain everything you need. We haven't skimped. The Adju will take care of the rest. Send Lieutenant Jensen to him straight away to organise the stowage of the provisions and other necessities. And now, gentlemen -" the Ia looked at his wristwatch, "- when can you take off?"

Juncker also quickly realised the time. "Half the morning is over. As far as we're concerned - in about two, three hours at most!" He took the pack of cards.

"Excellent! - It's very urgent. Every lost hour can be crucial. Do you have any requests?"

When the respondents said no, he shook their hands again. "Then get out of here with a broken neck and a broken leg!" he added half aloud: "God be with you! ..."

The adjutant warned Recke: "Don't forget - send Jensen to me here immediately!"

"Let's do it!" nodded the man from Kassel.

Both officers saluted again and left the room.

As the Dosthra aircraft stood ready for take-off on the matt white tarmac, an arctic phenomenon appeared in the sky. Like a white, colourless rainbow,

a snow-white arc of mist stretched like a huge gateway across the vast sky of the polar region. Like a gateway leading back into the human world.

In the air whipped by the roaring propellers, tiny snow crystals flickered silver as they were whirled up from the ground. The noise of the giant metal bird penetrated the vast silence of the seemingly endless Arctic like a defiant challenge.

The crew of the aircraft had already taken their seats. Recke said goodbye to his comrade, who had travelled with the adjutant to the Dosthra ready for take-off.

"Take care, Herbert! - If everything goes well, we'll be back here in two or three weeks. What do you mean if -" he improved, "- of course everything will work out." With a touch of gallows humour, he added: "Poor chap, you can't even catch flies for the time being because there are no such beasts here."

"Don't talk rubbish," said Reimer in an artificially rough voice. "We've got enough to do to fill the time. So make sure that ..." He faltered. After a firm handshake, he took a step back and pushed the adjutant forward. "He wants to shake your fin quickly too!"

The man from Kassel climbed into the machine with some difficulty. Juncker was the last to follow closely behind him. "Clear for take-off!"

"Clear for take-off!" came back.

While the ground crew cleared the runway, the Dosthra slowly rolled in; gaining speed, it lifted into the clear air in front of the exit of the Ring Mountains and thundered out of the safety of the base towards an uncertain fate.

Recke sat next to Juncker, who was driving the machine, and looked at the dashboard. "Six hundred kilometres per hour - that's a lot of speed!"

Juncker pointed downwards through the glass pane: "Grant Land. The northernmost Canada!"

The snowy land glided past as if pulled away by a treadmill. Then came an expanse of water covered in drift ice. Looking at the map, Recke realised that they were flying over Robeson Sound, which separated the remaining Arctic island from Greenland.

The men looked tirelessly through the windows at the captivating image of the white desert of land and water. Seen from a greater height, the water covered with drift ice looked like an endless expanse of marble veined with green. Then a coastline came into view again. Greenland!

Like the back of a whale, the high coast rose out of the surface of the sound, in which the only unevenness seemed to be scattered icebergs of various sizes, apparently standing still. The speed of the aeroplane gave no indication of the landscape's own movement.

A short time later, the aircraft was already flying over the mainland. Mighty glaciers on an almost completely frozen island, the

The glaciers, the largest on earth, towered into the pale sky like the mountains of a home of giants. The glaciations formed a grandiose relief, such as hardly any glacial landscape had ever shown before. The last magic castle Utgard of the Nordic Thursen, the picturesque boundary lines jutting out of the ever-advancing horizon. It seemed almost inconceivable that people had already travelled through this infinite white realm of Hrymthur, the frost giant. Peary, Rasmussen and Lauge Koch had diagonally crossed the eightieth parallel here and triumphed over the hostility of a defiant nature.

The machine relentlessly pursued its course, which would lead it from a sphere of eternal silence back into a blazing turmoil of humanity. As far as the eye could see, ice and more ice. Almost two thousand metres thick, the ice shield weighed down the realms of a prehistoric paradise. It was not to be called Green Land, but Hvidland - White Land.

Another change of scenery. The coastline dropped away and once again the sea was covered in drift ice. Large and small floes, icebergs ranging from the purest crystalline white to the most improbable blue colour and entire ice fields drifting across. In places, it was as if you were looking at a fairy tale in Nephrite.

Later, the ice thinned. The density of the floes loosened, blue-green areas of open sea increased and then - the open sea!

Isolated white patches were still drifting along.

Then in the distance, eastwards ahead, an island. Jan Mayen. Now the aircraft deviated further to the south and took

Course into the North Sea. Juncker's intention was to fly into German territory within sight of the southern Norwegian coast and reach Prague without a stopover. After just over two hours, the archipelago around Aalesund came into view.

Following the protruding curve of the coast, the Dosthra flew just south of Bergen to Stavanger and changed direction at high altitude over the open sea towards Esbjerg in Denmark.

"If we maintain this speed, we'll reach the mouth of the Elbe in about an hour," Juncker said to Recke. "Now we all have to watch out! - It's possible that we could run into an enemy bomber group at any time. Or worse still - into a swarm of fighters!"

"I thought our miracle machine was immune," joked the man from Kassel.

"I'm not particularly worried about that. But we've got other things on our minds right now than just curving around in the air!"

Darkness fell. The land to the left in the German Bight showed no sign of life. Neither a warship nor a returning fishing boat could be seen on the vast expanse of sea. It seemed as if a spell of loneliness lay over this part of the world.

Doggedly and silently, the men of the



aircraft crew through the windows. They deliberately avoided saying anything or looking at each other. They were depressed in their thoughts. Van Huis was no exception.

Home lay ahead of them!

Coming from the depths of their souls, the men felt a deep sense of foreboding, like an inner vision. The dawning night had spread a dark shroud of compassion over the bombed-out land to spare the men the sight of rubble and endless despair. The night was merciful, but the men's bright knowledge was stronger. Their eyes were burning and their hearts were beating up to their necks.

The men of the Dosthra were all soldiers. They could not choose their fate, but were placed by fate in a place of duty that made harsh demands on them. They had experienced war in all its dreadfulness in various theatres of war and had faced death without trembling. But none of their previous experiences had shaken them as much as the area of their homeland, which could no longer be protected despite their heroic deeds. Just a few hundred kilometres to the west, German villages were burning and to the east, people were being hunted down, martyred and massacred. Tanks drove into refugee trains, women were raped and children were speared.

Their hearts were heavy when they thought that at the same hour, while they were behind the

The people on board had to lurk in the air, countless defenceless people were at the mercy of an inhuman fate from which no one could save them.

Juncker pulled on the elevator controls and let the aeroplane make its way high above the cloud banks. Bathed in the pale light of the moon, the clouds shimmered like ghostly mist. Even the mother-of-pearl-coloured contrails iridesced in the glow of the Earth's satellite.

In the Magdeburg area they received weak anti-aircraft fire. A few clouds of explosives fizzled out at a distance, then the firing stopped again. The silver finger of a searchlight suddenly broke through a hole in the cloud cover and twitched around searching. After a few seconds it went out again. Apparently they were no longer paying attention to individual aircraft.

"They used to shoot out of every buttonhole when a suspicious aircraft appeared," Recke noted with resignation. "You can tell that the people down below are running out of breath and ammunition!"

Juncker just nodded. He controlled the aircraft's course with suppressed movement. After a short while, he added with feigned equanimity: "We'll soon have reached Prague. Then we'll see trees again after a long time. Real trees! ..."

"And somehow even rainy weather," said the man from Kassel mischievously. "Not just snow ..."

As the cloud cover receded, the men saw the matt silver ribbon of the Elbe. Juncker compared the twists and turns

of the river with the aeronautical chart. "We have

Leitmeritz ahead of us. - Beer, radio the aerodrome! - It's time for us to report in."

"Yes, sir!" came the sergeant's voice back through the headphones.

"Say the keyword 'Arctic fox!'" Juncker added to his order.

"Yes - Arctic fox!" -

From Raudnitz they headed for the Vltava. Prague would soon appear. The plane descended.

"Radio link established with the airfield," reported Beer. "We can land!"

"Good!" Using the map, Juncker headed for Gbely airfield in Prague. Beer liaised with the airfield management.

After a few minutes, an illuminated runway suddenly flashed into view. The Dosthra began to land, describing an arc, and rolled out onto the runway. Immediately afterwards, the lights went out again and the airfield lay in darkness.

"Everything stays in the box!" the major ordered. "Only Captain Recke and I are getting out for now. You can come out with us, Jensen, but you have to stay with the machine. Is everything understood?"

"Got it!"

The officers climbed outside. A cool night air greeted them, but it felt like the warm caress of a hairdryer. The harshness of the Arctic climate no longer had any power here.

Men from the ground crew rushed over. A

officer approached the disembarked passengers. They could only vaguely make out the insignia in the darkness. "Gentlemen are asked to stay with the aircraft! A major from the air force staff in Berlin will be here in a few minutes."

The dark hangars in the background of the square looked like huge humps. In front of them stood a number of knife-edge machines, their indistinct contours blurred by the darkness of the night. A familiar image that made everything he had just experienced seem like an almost unreal dream. The sensitive warrior ran his hand over his face as if to check that he was awake.

"What's the situation here, mate?" Juncker asked the foreign officer.

The interviewee took his time. Then he said sluggishly: "The Soviets are pressing on Prague from the east and north-east. The Czechs are restless and are already carrying out small raids. North-east of here in Kummer near Niemes lies the Immelmann fighter squadron under Colonel Rudel, who is constantly flying his tank-hunting missions. So far he has destroyed over five hundred enemy tanks alone! He is still keeping the Red Army somewhat at bay, as he is constantly coming up against their armour. On the other hand, the Russians in the north are already pressing on Dresden and will soon have us pinned down. It's all a rotten spell!"

"It's really not rosy," Juncker admitted. "Although I wasn't expecting good news ..."

He was interrupted. A Wehrmacht car approached at high speed and braked, screeching, in front of the Dosthra. The fine streak of light from the slits in the headlight caps was dimmed, then one of the two men sitting in the car jumped out and rushed towards the group. "Who is the leader of the machine?"

Juncker confronted him and spoke up.

"Juncker? - Ah, that's excellent. We already know each other. I'm Küpper!" They shook hands. Then the major approached the man from Kassel and tried to recognise his face in the pale night light. "We already know each other. You're one of the group that left Vernäs under Gutmann?"

"Yes, sir, Major. Captain Recke!"

"Oh - that's right! I remember." He grabbed the two officers in front of him by the arms and pulled them a few steps away. "High time you came! It'll only be a few more days before this whole mess is over. I'm afraid I can't allow you to rest, but must get you to your assignments. I already know your missions and am here to support you. Above all, however, you must not stay here with the machine. When daylight comes, I don't want anyone uninvited to see the aircraft's licence plates. In addition, the airfield is in extreme danger, as the Americans control the entire airspace and are constantly worrying us."

"Where should we go?" asked Juncker.

"A bit away from here." He walked back with the two officers of the Dosthra to the group of people still standing waiting in front of the machine. "Are you also part of the crew?" he asked Jensen. When he replied in the affirmative, Küpper continued: "Then be so kind as to let the driver of my car drive you to my quarters. I have to get into the plane instead of you to take her somewhere else!"

"Yes, yes!" Jensen replied when he saw that Juncker did not disagree. Without delay, he trudged towards the car in his fat combination.

Küpper gave a few brief orders to the ground crew, then climbed into the Dosthra with Juncker and Recke. The airfield soldiers cleared the runway, the engines roared again and the aircraft lifted off the ground once more.

The major must have known the aerodrome and its immediate destination with complete certainty. He had taken Juncker's place and explained in a few words that he had flown a Dosthra before. So it was understandable that the Berliner could take the risk of a night take-off under such dangerous circumstances without hesitation. With night-time ingenuity and calm, the major and the aircraft he was flying arrived at an emergency landing site not far from the capital of Bohemia. "We're still reasonably safe here for the time being!" he explained as the roar of the propellers died down. "And now get out of the box. Don't forget your handguns!"

After the officers, the rest of the crew emerged from the aircraft. They stood somewhat stiffly in a circle. A call from the darkness of the nearby forest startled them.

"Who is it?"

"Laughing gull!" the major shouted back immediately.

A line of people emerged from the dark wall of the nearby forest and ran towards the aircraft. They were soldiers with assault packs who immediately surrounded the aircraft, while a first sergeant reported to Küpper.

"Our protection team," said the major to the airmen. "Yes - and then we have to take the aircraft to the edge of the forest and camouflage it against aerial reconnaissance. We are protected against ground surveillance by a guard cordon. We have to hurry!"

Having landed in Prague, the men from the base were to 103 could no longer rest. Heavy fighting was raging in Berlin, the Russians were advancing rapidly everywhere and it was only a matter of days before the Allies would join hands from East and West. Küpper had lost all contact with Berlin and found himself completely on his own. He acted accordingly.

When Juncker and Recke demanded instructions from him about securing the gyroplane and its plans, he waved them away. "I already took care of that before the Dosthra arrived. The apparatus is about to be completely overhauled, as a



small imbalance caused some changes. The designer himself is responsible for ensuring that the gyroscope does not fall into the wrong hands and always has the plans close at hand. We don't need to worry about him."

Juncker furrowed his brows but remained silent. He secretly wondered whether the designer would find better security for his plans than in the Dosthra machine. When he later spoke openly to the man from Kassel about this, he immediately shared his opinion.

The major never seemed to get out of his uniform. Day and night, he popped up everywhere unexpectedly and dealt with reports or took important file material. So far, he had mostly done without the help of the base officers. Juncker and Recke flew reconnaissance flights in a limited area with his authorisation. Above all, they informed the Major about the location of the nearby Vlasov units, which the Higher Police Leader in Prague distrusted.

The flights always lasted only a very short time, as there was already a severe shortage of fuel. During one of his reconnaissance missions, Recke discovered that Vlasov's first division was moving towards Suchomast. At this time, Czech partisan activity was increasing in the countryside. He repeatedly noticed crowds of people dispersing in the squares of smaller towns in the Prague area as he flew low over them.

On this day, shortly before landing in Gbely

on a foreign aircraft that bore no national insignia. He tried to approach the aircraft from the front, but it evaded his manoeuvre with increased speed. It proved to be more manoeuvrable and superior. As it was not behaving in a hostile manner, Recke did not dare to attack it directly. He was only surprised that there were any other aircraft in the area apart from him, as he always had to be prepared to avoid an enemy group or squadron.

When he landed at the airfield, he first tried to contact Major Küpper to inform him of the strange aircraft. At the airfield control centre he was told that Küpper could be found at the office of the Higher Police Chief on the Vltava.

At his request, the officer on duty provided him with a bucket lorry. "Don't drive alone," he warned. "I'll give you two more soldiers. The air is thick in the country!"

Ten minutes later, Recke himself was at the wheel of the car and drove towards the city centre. He stopped the car at a major junction and asked the Czech police officer on duty for the German police station.

"To nevim!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. With a provocative gesture, he showed the Germans his back. One of the two soldiers cursed. "He wouldn't know," he said. So far, almost every policeman understood German. They'll be surprised what follows ..."

Recke called an army patrol that was coming along.

told him immediately. "Just after the big bridge  
..."

A double guard with machine guns and steel helmets stood in front of the police station. Recke learnt from the guard in the hallway that Küpper had already left the house and had driven away accompanied by an SS major. The information was given briefly and hastily. The whole house was filled with unrest and hinted at the immediacy of eventful days.

Recke got into the car and restarted the engine, which had been switched off. Just as he was about to put his foot on the accelerator, a man came running out of the house and called him;

"Captain Recke?" The  
man from Kassel  
replied in the  
affirmative.

"Call from Major Küpper asking for you! Captain, you are not to leave our office until you receive further orders from the Major. There's something going on in the city and you won't be able to get to the airfield safely!"

Recke whistled. "Is that how it is? - That's quite a mess!" As if to illustrate his thoughts, a few shots rang out from somewhere.

One of the gate guards shouted out the guard. Almost at the same time, the guard commander came out of the guardroom. Shots rang out again, merging into an irregular rattling. The guards snatched up their submachine guns and peered towards the two ends of the street.

"Drive the car in at once, Captain!" The guard jumped to the side to clear the entrance. Recke felt bound by Küpper's instructions. He immediately reversed the car, then shifted into forward gear again and drove into the courtyard of the house. The heavy gate was closed behind him. As he jumped out of the car, the two accompanying soldiers also jumped out and awaited his order.

"Stay at the station until the coast is clear. If necessary ..." The man from Kassel looked meaningfully at the two men. "Yes, sir, captain!" Both ran into the driveway with their rifles. They arrived just as the gate was opened a crack again after a heavy thump and three soldiers staggered in. One of them had a head wound that was bleeding profusely.

"Uprising in Prague!" shouted the wounded man. "The Czechs are armed!"

Recke also heard the man shouting and stopped on the staircase. As the men rushed past him to report the incident, he joined them.

In the corridor on the first floor, they encountered several police and SS officers who had come out of their rooms and wanted to see the boss. The soldiers were immediately asked what was going on.

"We were walking through Ulica Karoliny Světlé," they reported breathlessly, "when we suddenly heard shots. We immediately ran towards the nearby bridge, when we ourselves

We came under fire unexpectedly. Armed civilians were shooting at us from the opposite bank of the Vltava as we hurried along the short stretch of Františkovo nabeži. At the same time, we heard the sound of fighting from the railway station area. We immediately sought shelter here and -"

A door opened and a police major came rushing out. "The telephone lines are down! I can't get through to the city commander. I -" He was unable to continue in the tumult that broke out.

"Take up arms immediately!" shouted a lieutenant colonel in a commanding tone. "The spook will soon be over. Our forces are strong enough to bring order here. We can easily hold on for the few hours until then if we are attacked here!"

After a few minutes, Recke himself was standing next to the orderly at a window, holding his submachine gun, which he had retrieved from the car in the courtyard. Behind quickly improvised cover, the entire crew of the office stood ready to defend themselves. Roof gunners had also taken up positions.

A few scattered people turned up and were let in. They unanimously reported that the Czechs were gaining the upper hand in the whole town. "They hunt us like dogs! ..."

According to the latest reports received, it became clear that the insurgents had taken away weapons and food caches and were in possession of the radio and television stations.

station. The railway stations, the telephone exchange, the city centre and most of the Vltava bridges were in their hands. The situation undoubtedly looked very serious.

The sound of heavy fighting could be heard from Hradčany, where the government offices were located. Here the waves of Czech attacks came to a halt under fire from the defenders. According to the radio station, the security service office in Bubene also held its ground.

"They're coming! ..."

Czechs carrying rifles could be seen running along the street. The rooftop marksmen opened fire and drove the attackers back. Two men were left lying on the pavement. Their armbands identified them as irregulars.

A little later, the insurgents repeated the attack. They came from all directions and tried to drive the defenders of the German office away from the windows with machine-gun fire. Clouds of mortar dust and splinters of stone flew from the wall of the house, where the machine-gun shells struck with short, hard hammers. Every now and then a piece of glass shattered from the open windows on the floors.

Under the cover of fire from high sheds, several squads advanced. The German roof gunners concentrated their fire on an enemy machine gun group that had ventured too far forward and temporarily silenced the weapon. The other guns were unable to do much damage to the defenders, as

They were mostly positioned at an acute angle to the rows of windows. The Germans were immediately at the windows and pointed their submachine guns at the groups rushing towards them. Shouts rang out, men staggered and fell. The Czechs retreated again with heavy losses.

"That should be enough for now," said Recke to the orderly. "The blokes have had enough for a while!" He wrinkled his nose as the air reeked of gunpowder. "I've already shot two magazines. Can you grab some more?"

"I'll get some right away!" said the orderly.

"I know better in the house." He ran out of the room and came back in a few minutes.

"Here!" He threw a whole box of magazines onto a table. "There'll be enough for the next few hours."

The fighting continued throughout the day. The police station came under fire several times, but there was no concentrated attack. The rooftop guards reported that the insurgents had sealed off all entrances to the station and were lying in wait. It did not seem advisable to break through to Hradcany as a combat group,

As night fell, things quietened down a little. Only a few shots were fired, but the Czechs roared and shouted all night long.

The men at the station slept little. The events of the previous day and the incessant noise during the night meant that only a few of the men could really get to sleep.

Rest. One of the few was Recke, who lay wrapped in a blanket on a large desk and fell into a deep sleep after the tension of the last two days. Only a new series of shots fired nearby brought him awake in the morning.

The renewed fighting in the town suggested that the insurgents were now trying to fight off the individual German defence blocks. That morning, enemy rooftop snipers also attempted to hold down the police station from above with fire in order to make an assault from the street possible. However, their plan was thwarted by the German snipers. Several of the irregulars were shot down, whereupon the others retreated.

Hours later, all hell suddenly seemed to break loose. The bright bangs of rifle fire and automatic weapons were joined by the muffled firing of guns. A distant scraping and rattling sound suggested tanks.

The increasing noise of the fierce street fighting on all sides stopped quite suddenly. Shortly afterwards, German tanks were already rolling through the streets, followed closely behind by assault squads of Waffen-SS units. By the evening, most of the uprising had been temporarily suppressed. Before surrendering, the Prague radio station made urgent calls for help to Vlasov's General Bunichenko, who had joined the majority of the first



Vlasov Division was still in the Sukhomast area.

At the same time, the office of the Higher Police Leader and Chief of the Stapo Control Centre began interrogating prisoners brought in to determine the leaders of the uprising, and reports were received that the Czechs had committed inhumane riots and had also hunted down the German civilian population. The arrival of external SS units and, above all, the alerting of the SS replacement battalion of the "Das Reich" division in Prague-Rusin and the replacement unit of the SS artillery in Beneschau put a temporary stop to the continuation of these activities.

Recke decided to wait for the time being until he was informed by Küpper. He sent the two Luftwaffe soldiers back to the airfield by motor vehicle and told the operator which telephone he could be reached at.

Instead of a phone call, a light tank drove up in the evening to pick up Recke on the major's instructions and take him outside the city to the Dosthra aircraft. Küpper wasted few words, but acted without further ado.

As the tank rattled through the streets of Prague, the turret gunner told them that just a few hours ago they had seen Germans massacred in a way they had not thought possible in the long years of war on the various fronts of their operations. Even women and children were among the victims

of a fanatical crowd whose hatred of Germany knew no bounds. At Bubna railway station, weapons had been handed out to the insurgents, who had immediately fired on the hospital train carrying German wounded. Furthermore, a large number of Germans were missing, but the German relief forces were not sufficient to carry out a systematic combing of the town.

Undoubtedly, some of the missing had been dragged along by the retreating Czechs into their hiding places.

As the tank gunner described what he had seen and heard, he constantly peered through the slits in the turret, ready to fire at any moment. Now and again he cursed in between.

The sun had already set behind the White Mountain and purple veils sailed across the hazy sky of Prague. The tank drove along the country road leading out of the city, passing between houses and farmsteads that all seemed to be deserted. Occasional shots still rang out from somewhere. "We should be able to drive round behind the houses," said the driver. "But we have neither time nor petrol! ..."

After a long journey, they stopped in front of a wooded area. "I think we're already here!" muttered the driver, waving to the shooter.

He flipped back the tower cover and slowly jerked upwards, cautiously looking round on all sides.

"Bloody neighbourhood! Every forest has the same trees and there's no number board anywhere. Plus this approaching darkness ..."

The tank rumbled a little further, then the man in the turret opening was called from the edge of the forest. "Are you bringing the air force captain?"

"Yes!"

"Name?"

"Recke!" shouted the man from Kassel and squeezed up next to the armoured man before he could ask him.

"That's right!" Some soldiers jumped out of the bushes and a non-commissioned officer reported to Recke.

The man from Kassel left the vehicle to follow the men. He was mistaken, however, when he assumed that the tank would immediately turn round and drive back to Prague. He was astonished to hear the sub-officer relay an order from the major to the tank commander to pull in sideways and take up a camouflaged waiting position. Küpper's special mission became more and more apparent thanks to the aids he had been given.

A soldier led Recke into the forest, while the group with the sergeant remained at the edge as a field guard. The two men stumbled over the roots and uneven ground in the darkness, the branches of the bushes hitting and scratching their faces. The man from Kassel held his submachine gun in front of him for protection and ducked his head.

Then the trees parted a little and a

A larger clearing opened up. There could also be detectors stretching as far as another part of the forest, but Recke could not see this clearly. About twenty paces to the left, the dark outline of a strange shape cast deep black shadows. It was the dosthra draped in camouflage netting. A few wandering shadows showed that it was closely guarded.

One of the nearest guards uttered a half-loud call, which was immediately answered by Recke's companion. "... here safe and sound!"

The major came out of the darkness, followed closely by Juncker and Jensen. The three officers surrounded the man from Kassel and shook his hand. Küpper's tone was almost cordial when he said: "I'm really glad, Captain, that you're back safe and sound. You were looking for me, but you didn't reach me in time. The main thing is that ..."

Recke defended himself. "These days, you have to be prepared for anything possible or impossible! I actually had an important report from my last flight."

"That's probably already outdated," the major tried to cut him off. "You'd better tell us straight away how things went for you!"

The man from Kassel was not deterred. "I do believe that my report is still important. On the return flight of my short reconnaissance ..."

"... you have large gatherings of people

observed from the air. Of course - those were the gatherings for the uprising!"

"No, Major, I came across a machine that was vastly superior to mine and bore no markings whatsoever. It did not attack ..."

Küpper grabbed the man from Kassel by the arm. "How was that? - A machine without a licence plate? Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"- Hm. - The machine swerved, so to speak?"

"Yes!"

"Very interesting. Can you describe the construction or at least its approximate appearance?"

"Only superficially! It all happened very quickly. The most striking thing was probably the wing structure. They were relatively short, wide at the fuselage and pointed slightly backwards. The machine looked like a triangle with a tail. If I wasn't deceived, it was a turbine aeroplane."

"Very nice. You can already imagine a lot." However, Küpper's expression was unrecognisable in the darkness. "But the most important thing is the origin. Where no distinguishing marks can be made out or are present, all conclusions are just guesswork."

"And the behaviour?" asked Recke insistently.

"It's strange, but not unambiguous!" replied Küpper. He also turned to Juncker and Jensen. "Now you have to be very careful in the air, gentlemen!" Talking to himself, he added: "I'll probably take care of the gyro designer after all

have to. Maybe the bat bird was looking around in the air because a little bell rang in the BMW car park."

The officers spent the night inside the aircraft. The major had left a small hut in the immediate vicinity as quarters for the guard crew.

The next morning Küpper received a radio report from Gbely airfield that, according to reports received, the Bunichenko Division was marching on Prague and disarming smaller German units en route. Furthermore, an organised hunt for Germans by rebellious Czechs was beginning in the countryside.

Küpper immediately called the three flight officers and the first lieutenant of the guard crew together for a briefing. He bluntly told them the news in short words and concluded: "I don't think I can justify leaving the guard team behind after the Dosthra has taken off, cut off from all communications. Mr Oberleutnant, otherwise you would fall into the hands of the Soviets, if you could fight off the Czechs first!"

The leader of the guard smiled thinly. "I believe we only have a few days left before we ..." He drew the index finger of his right hand across his throat with a meaningful gesture.

"God forbid!" cried Küpper. "Do you have any suggestions?"

Gentlemen?"

An embarrassed silence was the only answer to his question.

The major looked at the men standing in front of him in turn. "Yes, it's a tricky business," he confirmed to them. "So let's keep it short: I'm ordering you, Lieutenant, to leave for Prague immediately with the guard so that you can withdraw with your unit if the situation becomes untenable. Our armoured vehicle will accompany you to the city limits. Get ready to march immediately!"

The first lieutenant raised his hand to his cap.

"Anything else, Major?"

"Yes," Küpper said slowly. "Leave me six bazookas. I think we might still need them urgently. You can follow up in Prague! - There, that's all!"

While the first lieutenant immediately called his men together and ordered the field guard to move in and secure the roadside, the major turned to Juncker: "Now our task begins. As I can't do everything alone, I must ask you to take over the command of the tank and, after the guard team has joined up with your own units in or outside Prague, to make an additional attempt to return here with as much fuel as possible. Don't stay away too long, because we are now dependent on the protection of the tank!"

"One question, Major!" Recke interjected. "What happens to

the men in the tank when we take off?"

"That's already clear too," Küpper replied promptly.

"The tank stays here because it is essential for our next tasks and our protection. If there's no other way, we'll blow it up with our bazookas. The people, on the other hand, will be dropped off in the west with the Dosthra today or tomorrow!"

"Without papers?" Jensen asked somewhat naively.

"These people are under my command for special use," the major instructed him. "I issue them with OKH marching orders so that they are not picked up as deserters. as deserters. Because on the few remaining airfields, of course I can't land!" The first lieutenant of the guard crew came back.

"Do you still want me to report, Major?"

"No!" said Küpper briefly. "We don't all have time for Larifari, just make sure you get on. And all the best!"

Immediately afterwards, the men of the guard marched off. Under a bush near the Dosthra lay the six requested bazookas. The sand-coloured warheads of these dreaded anti-tank weapons lay in the greenery like giant Easter eggs.

Juncker climbed out of the dosthra. He had grabbed his submachine gun and hurried after the retreating crew to take over the tank standing at the field guard. "Hurry back!" Küpper called after him.

Recke scratched his head thoughtfully. It was more



a gesture as a need. Then he said: "Major, now the Dosthra crew must stand guard. We must be prepared for all possible surprises!"

"That's right! - Have the four men come here immediately!"

The man from Kassel shouted for Sergeant Beer and the other men. When they approached, Küpper immediately took them in front of him and made them realise that they all had to go to their posts, regardless of their rank. The men grinned even as he explained. "Why are you bleating like hat-horses?" he asked.

"We're even enjoying it," said Beer calmly.

"Maybe we'll find lilies of the valley ..."

"Silly jokes," grumbled Küpper. "One of you has to head for the road to guide the returning tank, the others will protect our bird from the other wind directions. Get out of here now!"

"Yes, sir!" The four men were gone in a flash.

The major said to Recke: "Wait a moment!" He walked towards the aeroplane and took out a briefcase from inside. When he returned, he opened it in front of the man from Kassel and took out what looked like a wallet in size and format. When he flipped back the lid, it revealed a fine device with a row of small buttons. "A new walkie-talkie!"

The man from Kassel marvelled. "It looks cute."

Küpper sat down on the grass without any fuss and invited

Recke next to him. He then began to explain the device in detail and instructed the man from Kassel how to use it. After he had tried out the few handles, the major said: "Keep the device now! - I have secured a few pieces of it and we will have to rely on the use of the small apparatus over the next few days. As far as I know about the overall situation, the Red Army will enter Prague in the next few days, while the Americans will stop in the west shortly before that. This will bring a dramatic period of history to a temporary end and at the same time mark the beginning of a terrible tragedy. Our own fate depends mainly on our vigilance!"

"Then it would be time for us to leave as well," Recke interjected. He was dismayed by the situation.

"We'll let the tops of the Soviets roll past us," the major said calmly. "If it gets queasy, we can always fly out of the loose trap." Reaching for a map of the protectorate, which he took half-opened from his leather portfolio, he sketched the current course of the front.

"Undoubtedly all our units in the area between Bunzlau and Budweis will go towards the Americans and surrender to them in order not to fall into the hands of the Soviets. The Vlasov Division under Bunichenko will therefore also have to evacuate Prague, as they are in a double hurry,

if they do not want to be liquidated immediately on the orders of the Red commissars. Vlasov's second division under General Sveryev will already be on the westward march from the Budweis-Strakonice area. Details about these Russian volunteer units would be extremely important for us, but we must leave it to developing circumstances to find out more. We also need to find out what is going on at the BMW square. Hopefully the roundabout will still be afloat before the enemy bursts in and inherits the toy. That must not happen under any circumstances!"

"Hm," said the man from Kassel, lost in thought. He looked out of narrow slits in his eyes at a small beetle crawling slowly up a bobbing stalk. A physical tiredness paralysed his thinking. He was shaken by the looming end, which looked very different to what the victories of recent years had led him to expect. If he nevertheless managed to fight down the emergence of despair, it was partly due to the example set by the Major's display of calm.

"Are you already moping?"

"No, Major, I'm just wondering about the course of things that make up life on this earth." He gave a somewhat forced laugh. "The planet is constantly turning at the same pace and on its ponderous round it is constantly causing fates to tumble, triggering blood and tears. And it's all so

of course ..."

A strange expression flashed across the major's face, which Recke was not quite able to interpret. Then, standing up, he said: "If you want to philosophise, just remember one sentence, Captain: life is a game of rings!"

"That's military, Major, Barras philosophy!"

"It's the healthiest at the moment!" Küpper brushed a lump of earth off the heel of the other with the tip of his boot.

"Come on board the aircraft; I want to radio the aerodrome!"

Before the Major could get to the top, Beer emerged from the bushes, having taken over the observation of the road himself. He gasped for breath and was out of breath. "Herr Major - !"

"What is it, Beer?"

"I think it's starting again in Prague. An armed troop of Czechs has just marched towards the city, singing songs. Ivan will probably be in the immediate vicinity or pushing past from the side."

"So what!" Küpper thought about it for a moment, then handed the sergeant a walkie-talkie from the folder he had tucked under his arm. "Stay at your post under all circumstances and take the device with you! You've known it since yesterday. It will make it easier for you to pass on your reports to me. But you may only leave your post if there is direct danger to you and us. Understood?!"

"Jawohl, Herr Major!" The sergeant took the small

apparatus and made his way back into the forest.

Küpper now tried to get messages from Gbely airfield by radio. Strangely enough, the radio station there did not answer the call. Worried, the major came back outside and called out to Kassel, who had remained outside: "There's already some kind of devilry going on! Not a single tail is answering in Gbely."

"What do we do now?"

"Wait and see," growled Küpper.

The tank returned in the afternoon. Jensen, who was constantly on the lookout from the aeroplane, received Beer's transmission and reported promptly. Küpper and Recke immediately rushed to the road and waited until Juncker had driven the vehicle into a small lane and climbed out. When he saw the two officers, he immediately rushed towards them. "No turning back to Prague!" he reported.

"Why?" Küpper wanted to know.

"The Czechs have resumed the battle for the town with the support of the Russians. They are slaughtering our wounded and hunting down all German civilians. Gbely airfield has been taken and forty-six aeroplanes have fallen into the hands of the insurgents. The SS units and small parts of the Wehrmacht are fighting fiercely, but are barely able to cope with the situation. Our guards immediately set up the defence of a

hospital, which was about to be stormed by the Tchechen."

"Bloody bunch of pigs!" Küpper cursed.

"When they saw our tank," Juncker continued,

"They piled up like rabbits. By the time I had to turn off, they were already peppering out of holes again."

"And what about petrol?" asked the Major.

"We captured a lorry full. The Czechs abandoned a convoy of lorries they had taken when we rumbled past and an SS unit appeared at the same time. We loaded up our tank with canisters and the men from the unit took the rest."

"Excellent!"

"What now?" Juncker looked at the major, waiting.

Küpper thought for a moment, then said: "Leave the Tank to the Dosthra in a roundabout way, Juncker!"

While the tank started up again, the officers took the shortest route through the forest back to the machine and took Beer with them. "We don't need a Dosthra guard," Küpper had said. Juncker and Recke looked at each other but said nothing.

"I'll fly the armoured men out at once!" the major said afterwards, noticing the looks.

On Dosthra Square, the major had all the men assemble. After a few words about the recent events, he presented the armoured commander with a

Marching orders for home. He wanted to fly out himself together with Juncker. "Get your things," he ordered the armoured men, "and get them on the plane immediately!"

The people were clearly happy to get out of the witches' cauldron without risk. They immediately followed the staff officer's instructions. Küpper continued:

"I have made the following arrangement for you gentlemen: you, Comrade Juncker, will take over the tank with Captain Recke! I will also assign one man from the Dosthra crew to you. The rest of us will take over the aircraft to fly out the armoured men and meet in an approximate south-south-west direction from Prague. The way I see it, you'll be travelling through the Vltava valley, which is still relatively the safest because of the underground operations there - at least for the next day or two - and from seven twenty in the morning we'll start our ultra-short wave connection at half-hourly intervals. From that time onwards, I will fly over the south-west of Šumava until we have a connection. Is everything clear?"

Juncker replied in the negative. "I have been given command of the Dosthra on the instructions of the base commander on One Hundred and Three and do not wish to hand over the aircraft without express orders from my immediate superior!"

"My dear Juncker," said the Major gently, "you know exactly what my duties and powers are.

have. It is not so much a question of competences now, but solely of completing a task that has been started. We have every freedom within our action group and should not be petty. Don't you think so?"

"If you take full responsibility, then I will comply," Juncker agreed. He chose Krammer as his passenger, as the man was somewhat slight and would take up little space. The groups were now fully organised.

Krammer fetched rations from the Dosthra and, on the major's instructions, stowed three of the bazookas inside the tank, loading the rest into the aircraft. Some of the fuel was also refuelled into the Dosthra, to which Küpper added some additional chemical cartridges, the composition of which was just as much a secret as many other details of the flying machine.

At seventeen forty-five, the Dosthra took to the skies, quickly gained altitude and flew after the setting sun. Best wishes for the tank's journey came over the radio, which at the same time set its tracks in motion towards the Vltava valley. Juncker thought it wise to drive straight through the terrain. Above all, he shortened the route and avoided any surprise encounters with Soviet armoured columns, which could appear in the area at any time. Past individual farmsteads and small villages



the three men reached the Vltava after about an hour and a half at the confluence of the Beraun River. Travelling along the left bank, they came across some armoured personnel carriers stopping on the road. Juncker learnt from a first lieutenant that they had orders for Prague, but did not want to continue because of the unclear situation. The Czech capital was largely in the hands of the insurgents. The two officers in the tank were also unable to provide the lieutenant with any information.

These were the first signs of the disintegration of organised operations and fronts. The gears of a previously unsurpassable war technology began to fail.

They drove around Königsaal and were overtaken a little later by a lorry convoy, which was secured by an SS unit and was apparently transporting material westwards. There was lively movement all along the road and various lorry crews were busy loading various things that were to be taken from the factories underground to safety. As far as Czech loading labourers were **also** helping, they seemed willing to work. The German weapons were still respected here at the time.

However, a short distance from the riverside road they came under fire from ambush. The men in the tank immediately realised that the Czechs were just waiting for the German units to withdraw so that they could attack the rearguard or the German civilian population. At

Mirowitz they turned off, while a Wehrmacht convoy with loaded civilian refugees continued southwards.

The dawning night was bright and made it easier to get ahead. A woman called them from a detached house they were passing. It was a Sudeten German woman who, despite all warnings, wanted to stay on the small farm. She told the men that refugees had said that the insurgents who had captured Vlasov's chief of staff Trukhin and his adjutant Romashkin two days ago were in nearby Pibram. The Soviets had already pushed through and taken Truchin away from the village immediately.

Recke, who had spoken to the woman from the tower hatch, thanked her for the message. She declined his offer to travel with them for some of the way and get to safety.

The conclusion drawn from the woman's statement was that there was no longer a firm front and that the Soviets had already got behind the rear of the Moldavia Valley units on several occasions. Juncker therefore decided to drive around Strakonitz.

They were crossing the road to the western end of Blatna when they heard shots being fired in the immediate vicinity. Juncker stopped immediately while Recke carefully surveyed the area.

Half right behind them on the country road

a group of people whose screams and jeers were clearly audible. Then two more shots rang out between them. A woman gave a shrill cry.

"Go on, drive up!" urged Juncker from Kassel. "There's a mess going on ..."

"We can't," came the driver's voice, hollow and pressed, from inside the car. "We can't ..."

"Don't talk rubbish!" shouted Recke overloudly in despair, "do it or I'll jump out and run there alone ..."  
Before he could say any more, the woman from the dark crowd of people could be heard screaming again with a bloodcurdling scream. "Helpeeeee! ..."

Recke dived abruptly, swivelled the gun barrel and fired a shot.

"Fool!" cursed Juncker, "now it's all about the sausage! ..."  
He started the tank with a roaring engine and pulled up to the crowd, which immediately scattered.

There was a car on the road that had been stopped by the Czechs. Two dark bundles lay on the road in front of it, while a woman ran towards the tank without being hindered. The fleeing insurgents took cover in front of the tank and only after a few minutes did a few shots ring off the armour of the car. However, they did not prevent Recke from remaining in the open turret hatch. The figure rushing towards them was a young girl, her blouse and shirt hanging down in tatters. She held her arms crossed in front of her bare breasts and

plunged to earth a few steps in front of the tank.

Juncker had opened the viewing flap fully and stopped immediately. "Get the girl in, Krammer!"

"No longer necessary," Recke shouted back. He jumped out of the tower, rushed towards the girl and picked her up. She was completely distraught and let herself be picked up like a helpless creature and carried to the vehicle.

Kramer was already waiting and helped to get the girl into the car. As soon as the men had climbed in, the Czechs began to fire furiously, but they were unable to harm the tank. Tongues of fire snapped out of the nearby undergrowth. Exciting shouts followed.

"Nenechte nênce startovat - Don't let the Germans start!  
Usmrt te nênce - Kill the Germans! - Napred - Forward!  
..."

Despite mutual encouragement from the cover, none of the rebels showed up. Recke fired two shots from the turret, while Juncker drove to the stopped car and stopped again next to it. In the pale light of the rising moon, the two bundles lying next to the car's radiator turned out to be German air force officers who were no longer showing any signs of life.

Krammer jumped into the open and in two steps was at the car, whose door he pulled open. With a quick glance he saw that it was empty. He grabbed a small suitcase and dashed back into the armoured car just as quickly. While he was still getting in, another shot rang out.

The man squeaked. "Heavens arse! ..."

Recke took the suitcase from his hand and put it down. "Got something?"

Krammer merely mumbled. "I think I have a small scratch on my thigh..."

The turret cover and front flap closed abruptly, the tank's caterpillar tracks scraped across the road surface and then ground forwards in the soft earth of the terrain.

T h e r e were still screams.

"Zabite nênce - Slay the Germans! ..."

"Shoot, Captain, shoot!" shouted Krammer, completely beside himself. "I took a look at the dead officers. The Czechs shot them in the neck! I saw it clearly ..."

"Calm down, Krammer. Look after your leg!" Nevertheless, Recke peered out into the bright night as he spoke. Two Czechs jumped up from a nearby row of bushes towards which the tank was heading and tried to flee sideways.

The man from Kassel immediately swivelled and fired. One of the men jumped up and fell to the ground, half rolling over. The second ran on instead of taking cover. Despite the darkness, Recke still caught him. With a yelp, the man hit fell down like a piece of small game.

Again there was shouting all round, but nobody showed themselves. Even the shooting had stopped because the Czechs must have realised the futility of their actions. The

Panzer was invulnerable to them. Only incomprehensible curses followed.

Whilst Juncker drove on with his eyepiece open again, Recke looked after the girl and Krammer. The latter was leaning against the wall on the floor, had pulled down his trousers without a care in the world and was in the process of bandaging his injured leg.

The man from Kassel took the bandage pack from his hand and examined the wound with the help of a torch. It appeared to be a simple flesh puncture. He unwound the bandage over the thigh and placed two more packets over it, as the first roll was still bleeding through while he was bandaging it. "Lie still for the time being, Krammer!" he warned.

The girl was also sitting on the floor and was completely apathetic. When she touched Recke carefully, he felt a continuous shiver run through her body. So he reached for a blanket and threw it over the girl. "Wrap yourself up tightly!"

Instead of an answer, she suddenly sobbed out loud. "Oh my God! ..." She pulled the blanket over her head and the sobs turned into continuous whimpering.

Recke went over to Juncker. "What are we supposed to do with this poor creature?"

The Waffen SS officer stared steadfastly into the night.

"If we come across a column, we'll hand it over. Maybe we'll meet a unit behind Strakonitz that's heading home to Bavaria." Slight regret resonated

in his voice.

The tank ate its way through the wooded hills for kilometre after kilometre. In Strahl-Hoschtitz they crossed a watercourse, rattling over the small bridge regardless of any load-bearing capacity.

Immediately behind them, they were stopped by a strong group. They were soldiers of the Second Vlasov Division, who had not yet marched off to Krumlov with the bulk of the unit. When questioned, a Russian staff officer, who spoke fluent German, explained that the Americans in the south had indicated Krumau as a prisoner collection point. However, he himself and some other officers were of the opinion that they were not safe from the Red Army there.

"I have no desire to fall into the hands of the Americans so quickly," Juncker said to the Russian. "I wouldn't like to be in the immediate vicinity of the Soviets either!"

"We have our doubts too," replied one of the Vlasov officers who had joined them. "If the Soviet commissars take us from the Americans ..."

"Where are you going now?" enquired the SS officer.

"Straight ahead to the west. Far to the west!" The Russian staff officer waved his arm wide.

"It may be that we will meet during the coming day," said Juncker. "In any case - good luck!"

The Russians lined up in front of the tank and gesticulated animatedly. "Now, don't you go getting mad! With us, with us ..." Juncker feared an attack on the vehicle. "Make way!"

The staff officer brought his face very close to the viewing flap. "Germanski - good comrades! - Stay with us for a while! - We leave in a few hours. Protect our rearguard!" Some Russians repeated: "Germanski - good comrades!"

Recke leant towards Juncker. "I guess we'll have no choice! It actually suits us because it makes our observations easier. If the head of the organisation comes into contact with Americans, we can still slip away as the rearguard!"

Juncker nodded. "Good," he said to the Russians. "We'll stay with you for the time being!"

"Gutt, gutt!" The staff officer shouted a few words in Russian to the nearest soldiers. They ran off and came back a few minutes later, dragging a few cans of petrol with them. "Here's some petrol! - We're not driving any more. Everybody march! ..."

Recke got out and gratefully accepted the canisters. Juncker immediately refilled the tanks and threw all the empty containers out into the ditch. He then steered the tank into a field, while Recke remained standing with the Vlasov officers.

When the SS officer returned to the group after the vehicle had been parked, leaving the wounded Krammer behind as a guard, the



staff officer analysed the American handover negotiations in more detail. He and the other officers expressed reservations about accepting the Americans as a protecting power in the immediate vicinity of the Soviets. "They will hand us over if the commissioners make the demand. And they will certainly make the demand! ..."

The man from Kassel doubted this,

"Yes, they do!" claimed another Russian. "Americans don't know anything about Russia and Europe! - I was at the delegation and heard Americans talking. They don't know anything about the liberation army and are stupid friends of the Bolsheviks. You will see!

..."

"So what," said Recke. "But to deliver? ..." All the

Russians nodded briskly. "They will ..." The

The second staff officer informed the Germans that parts of the second division were already beginning the march to Kramau. However, parts of the replacement brigades and the officers' school wanted to continue westwards. He himself was also leading two battalions westwards. His mistrust of the Americans was too great here. However, he also complained that the Germans themselves did not have complete confidence in them. Nevertheless, he impulsively reached out his hand to the Germans. "We good friends!"

In the darkness of the fading night, the unit set off. Half-loud Russian commands brought the soldiers to their feet, who immediately

formed into marching columns in a disciplined manner. The leader of the rearguard and another officer asked to be allowed to sit on the tank.

The hustle and bustle that began, which was not without noise, had also woken the girl. Tiredness after the shock of what she had experienced had caused her to doze off despite her uncomfortable position, while Krammer had kept constant watch. As the two officers climbed into the tank, they looked after the girl. "Are you cold?" asked Recke.

"It's not bad," she replied. Her voice was husky and brittle. Shortly afterwards, she tried to say a few words of thanks for the help.

"Where are you from?" Juncker wanted to know.

"I was an intelligence officer in Prague. Two officers took me with them when we had to leave the city in a hurry. We got through the country quite well by taking detours, and at first we were several cars and armoured personnel carriers. Only when we turned south alone ..." As far as could be seen in the darkness of the combat vehicle, the girl had once again put her hands in front of her face. "Oh - it was terrible!"

"Cheer up, girl!" said the man from Kassel gently.

"They weren't people anymore!" she suddenly cried out. "They dragged us out of the stopped car, kicked the two officers and hit them in the face with rifle butts. And then - then - all I heard was the crack of gunfire. They tried to tear my clothes off and inflict violence on me.

They were like animals - like beasts! - Oh, there is no more God ..."

Krammer remembered: "Who did the small suitcase in the car belong to?"

The girl swallowed a few times, then she said: "That must have been my luggage. The officers couldn't take any more with them."

"Here he is," Krammer said simply.

"Oh - thank you." After a few seconds, she added: "At least I can put on a shirt and a blouse ..."

"You can do that now!" said Juncker. "We're already moving on again and we'll all have to look out of the tank into the open anyway."

Juncker squeezed himself into the driver's seat and pressed the starter. While Krammer limped after him, the tank started up again and headed for the road. The humming of the engine drowned out the patter of the marching soldiers' boots. Company after company moved in order into the gathering dusk. The tank rattled along with the last one as the rearguard.

The Russians sitting on the ground were talking half aloud to Recke, who was peering out of the open tower into the forest. They openly admitted that they were all possessed by a tremendous fear.

Recke himself could not escape the spell of this collective fear of death of the harried and desperate men.

The whole atmosphere was charged with the tension of a parallel mindset. Everything around the tank shrank into a limited mystical dome.

On both sides of the road, the black, threatening walls of old forests grew high, while the sky arched like a pale grey blanket. The columns of companies marching ahead looked like a snake of shadows, sucked in and swallowed up by the receding night. Only now and then did weapons clink or some cooking utensil rattle against the stock of a rifle. When the tank temporarily switched off the engine so that you could listen for the noise of other engines, you could clearly make out the small background noises in the almost unreal silence.

As the morning mists rose and the coolness made the men shiver, the ghosts of fear and trepidation marched alongside each of the Vlasovs as invisible companions, summoned as it were by the unison of emotions.

Keeping exactly south-west, the formation left the larger road and continued along narrow footpaths. As the marching columns spread out, the pace slowed temporarily. They passed another small, unsightly village whose inhabitants remained invisible. The dark crest of a large mountain of considerable height loomed in front of the head of the procession.

The Wlassow people moved along in a silent, hasty trot.

The path began to ascend and the forest drew closer to the path. The undergrowth became denser, large ferns adorned the edge of the path like a primeval magic garden and the broad branches of ancient giant trees swayed gently in the cool morning breeze, which also set the wafts of mist in motion.

The sound of the rattling armour at the end of the long train was an ugly scraping sound in the oppressive silence of the gloomy surroundings. The Russian officers crouched like gnomes, shivering on the steel hull of the armoured car.

The leader of the rearguard troop turned to Recke: "There are forests like this in our homeland too." His melancholy eyes travelled all around. More to himself, he said: "Will we ever see them again? Oh sswiataja Rossija - Holy Russia ..."

Suddenly the train came to a halt. Arm waving continued from column to column until the rearguard also stopped. Scraps of words buzzed through. "Engine noise from the side  
..."

The rearguard leader, who translated the message, asked for the tank engine to be switched off. The men listened intently. Some of the Russian soldiers had thrown themselves down and were listening to the ground for the sounds of the earth. Nothing. Just incessant silence. Not even the twittering of birds.

The stop was also used for a short rest,

while soldiers at the top swarmed out. As the Russians only had very meagre rations, the Germans shared their morning snack with the two Vlasov officers.

The girl was also a little more composed now in the morning and was not coy when she was offered breakfast. When she stuck her head out of the tower hatch, a little hungry for air, and was greeted almost humbly by the Russians, a trace of a friendly smile even stole across her face.

In the dawning light of the early day it was apparent that she must have been about twenty-three years old. Her tousled blonde curls could not disguise the fact that she was undeniably pretty. With a somewhat tired movement, she brushed her hair back from her face. She had large blue-grey eyes that were still red from crying.

"It's good that the girl is coming home with us," said the rearguard leader. "Otherwise we won't get through alone. Ceski like animals. Nothing good!"

Recke described the night-time incident to the Russians in a few words. Tears ran down the girl's cheeks again.

The Russians nodded seriously. "We've seen a lot in the last few days. But couldn't find anything. It was already too late!" The second officer added: "Ceski chabben beat the wounded to death in the military hospital, gouged out eyes, cut off ears and other tortures ... Chabben in a village

German women found. Naked, bellies cut open, breasts gone and babies thrown against the wall. We saw it ourselves, so help us God! ..."

The girl groaned. "My God, can people even do that? ..."

"No shit," the rearguard leader dismissed the question. "Ceski nix people!" More arm waving and half-loud shouts. The columns slowly started moving again. After a short stretch of road, the forest receded a little and overlooked a wider road that intersected the path of the Vlasovs. Behind it was the black-green curtain of a mighty forest, which in places stretched steeply up to the high crest of the mountain, which was now rising hard against the road.

"Bavaria begins behind this chain!" Juncker shouted from inside the car. He had glanced at the map for orientation.

The formation crossed the road and turned into a dark hollow path leading up the mountain. Juncker expressed his doubts to Recke as to whether they would be able to follow the formation along this path.

Before Recke could talk to the two Russians about it, a scream from several hundred throats rose into the already bright morning sky. Immediately afterwards, the crack of a grenade shattered the silence of the seemingly vast solitude.

The Vlasovs' hitherto muffled fear increased to an almost maddening horror when the mighty hulk of a

Soviet T34 with its wide caterpillar tracks appeared. Its long gun barrel swivelled in like a threatening finger and another shot was fired. Howling, the projectile travelled over the heads of the rearguard and burst with a bright thud a little way ahead.

The German tank had just reached the road and offered the approaching enemy a good target. While the Vlasov men broke into the high forest in a wide line to seek shelter in its rising depths, Juncker first had to turn round so that he too could drive into the undergrowth. The Vlasov officers had jumped off and hurried after their men.

Recke swivelled the tank's turret backwards, even though they were outgunned by the Soviet tank. Before he could get a shot off, an enemy grenade hit the track of the German tank and caused it to circle, preventing the tank from escaping.

One chain of the armour ground into a hollow in the ground next to the road and sank down. In a flash, Recke had knocked back the tower cover and pushed the girl out into the open. Despite her fear and horror, she clutched her small suitcase to **her**, and after a few jumps she fell behind a bush.

At the same time, Krammer had crawled out of the back of the tank, dragging a bazooka with him. Standing there uncovered, the barrel under the



Arm clamped and pull the trigger was the work of a few seconds. The red-hot firing cloud shot hissing out of the rear end of the weapon's barrel, while the mine head hit the ring between the tank's massive hull and the mighty turret at close range. A bright flare shot up and splinters and chunks flew around with a deafening crash. Then - a mighty jet flame, bright yellow, turning into a billowing red and an all-enveloping brown-black cloud of smoke - that was the end of the T 34.

"There, we've done that," said Krammer. Then he knelt down as if something had slipped his mind. The barrel of the bazooka clattered to the ground.

"What's going on, Krammer?" Recke and Juncker jumped in. As they stood by him, they saw that his face was white as lime. Krammer's mouth twisted into a grin. "It was all in one hair. But we're not so cheap yet!" He slumped further and propped his upper body up with obvious effort.

"Blimey, you've had it!" Juncker tried to subdue him, but Krammer fought him off. "Please don't - it would hurt me unnecessarily ..."

"So speak up, Krammer! Where did you ..." urged Juncker.

"It's just a little thing. The colossus gave me a few more beans from his MG sheaf. It's just enough for a free ticket to the kingdom of heaven or the devil's grandmother's kitchen."

The two officers looked at each other helplessly. The sound of exploding ammunition came from the burning Soviet tank and the stinking fumes spread out like a billowing wall. Another roar could be heard behind them. Krammer's face contorted. "Give me another fist! Quickly, quickly - they're coming!"

"Don't be silly, Krammer! We're taking you with us!" The major called out to Recke: "You take him by the legs ..."

"No, no!" cried Krammer. "I don't want to. Give me a fist! ..."

The men had not noticed that the two Vlasov officers had also joined them. The rearguard leader himself brought the two remaining bazookas out of the German tank without saying a word and placed them silently next to the seriously wounded man.

"Germanski brave!" said the Russian to Krammer. He knew that no more help was needed. He hurriedly said to the German officers: "Make haste - up into the forest! - Listen out! - The Bolsheviks are coming there ..."

"Please go!" asked Krammer, who had understood the words. Juncker jumped back to the tank and took out a leather bag and two submachine guns. In the bag was ammunition, some maps and the VHF radio. As the men jumped into the nearby bushes, a second T34 emerged from the smoke of the burning tank.

They heard him shout as he was walking: "Unterscharführer Krammer is signing off! Greetings ..."  
Then again

a detonation accompanied by a prolonged crash and rattle. Looking back, they saw that Krammer had also finished off the second colossus. He himself was lying face down in the dust of the road, not moving.

After a few steps, they came across the girl, who had been watching the whole scene with wide eyes and waiting to be taken away. She had felt unable to escape on her own.

It was high time the men had left the road. Despite two burning tanks, more were already rattling along behind the thick wall of smoke and gunfire could be heard.

The four men and the girl hurried uphill. In front of them and to the side, other groups of men broke through the matted thicket. As they ran, the rearguard leader shouted to the Germans: "We've already got a few dead too! First grenade - three men dead ... Behind us Bolsheviks - now many more will die! ..."

Sweat poured down the faces of the fugitives. Whistling, they pressed their breath through their noses, rushing on undeterred. Again and again, rifle shots rang out through the semi-darkness of the forest.

In mad fear, no longer able to mount a coherent defence, hunted by superior forces, the pursuers pushed closer and closer together and continued up the mountain in groups and squads. A high column of smoke in front of them magically attracted them.

Apparently, the Soviets had an advantage from the side

had a more favourable ascent, because suddenly troops of them broke out at the same height on the flank.

"Wperjod - forward!" their shouts rang out. "Urrä, urrä ..." Some of the Vlasovs fell to the ground. Their screams pierced the forest. Infected by the screams in the beginning tumult, the girl also began to scream.

The officers around them cursed and tried to silence them. Only a harsh order from Juncker was successful. Bullets were already whistling through the rows of trees near them, and some of the Vlasovs who tried to resist fell immediately.

They were still running, following an unconscious compulsion, towards the high finger of smoke that seemed to be coming out of the ground like a signal.

A clearing opened up in front of the fugitives. Behind it towered a weathered rock face, criss-crossed with cracks and crevices. Like a broad wave, the Vlasovs stumbled over the scrub-covered surface. Hundreds of them ran towards the rocks, as if they could find shelter in the gaping crevices.

"This is madness!" shouted Recke, holding Juncker and the girl back. The one Russian stopped and the rearguard leader also ran out into the clearing. After a few minutes, he collapsed after being hit.

"Over here!" Juncker pulled his companions along with him. They squeezed behind him through a thorny bush that grew at the foot of a huge boulder. A

The cavity at the bottom of the rock was just big enough to provide shelter for the four people huddled close together. At the last moment, the Russian tore himself away from the group, broke back into the open and tried to catch up with his comrades, running zigzag after them.

Juncker and Recke peered between the branches at what was happening. The first few earth-brown Soviet soldiers were already running across the clearing, mercilessly spearing the wounded Vlasovs with their bayonets. At the same time, the wave of desperate men, possessed by the fear of a terrible end, surged against the rock face.

And the two Germans suddenly saw a strange figure standing in front of them and raising both arms towards the sky with an imploring gesture. A Mongolian, dressed in the strange costume of his country and with the characteristic cap on his head. There was a tension in the air that was almost paralysing and undoubtedly emanated from the man who stood like a statue in front of the advancing Russians. A hypnotic effect was palpable.

The smoke coming from the crevice thickened and became a wall of fog that drifted towards the Soviets. At the same time, as if following a call, the pursuers rushed towards the largest crevice in the wall and disappeared inside as if they were being swallowed up. Behind the wall of smoke, the rocks danced in the flickering of the descending veil. And suddenly

the Mongolian has disappeared.

A short time later, the smoke had completely cleared from the ground. The Soviet soldiers let out cries of anger and surprise. The majority of the two Vlasov battalions had dissolved into nothing and had escaped the Soviets.

Recke and Juncker cautiously drew their heads back as the strange Mongolian disappeared just as suddenly as he had stood surprisingly in front of the rock.

The girl had pressed herself against the boulder and held her clenched right hand in front of her mouth. Her eyes were widened in horror ...

The officers glanced at their watches. The same thought had inspired them. It was around seven. Recke took his walkie-talkie out of his pocket and beat Juncker to it. Although the agreed time had not yet arrived, he was already signalling.

Nothing. The men had no choice but to lie flat in complete silence. Minute after minute passed. The dewy ground was unpleasantly cold.

After a while, Recke tried again. This time he got an immediate response. The Dosthra was already in the air and must be circling somewhere nearby.

Küpper's first enquiry was about her location. "We can't say exactly," Recke replied. "We're at mid-height on a high forest mountain, right next to a rock face!" Juncker took the Kassel man's

device out of his hand. He reported very briefly that Krammer had fallen and that the armour was unusable.

"Break out south immediately and maintain contact!" was the order from Major von der Dosthra.

However, it did not come to that. Thinking that the Soviets had already pushed on, the two officers crawled out of the undergrowth and told the girl to come with them. Holding their submachine guns ready to fire, they stalked forward a few steps when they were suddenly shouted behind them: "Ruki werch - hands up! ..."

Juncker and Recke dropped their weapons. The girl tried to run a few more steps, but a sharp "Stoj!" made her stop.

"Cursed and sewn up," Juncker half-raged.

"Such a situation ..."

In an instant, they were surrounded by a troop of Soviet soldiers. One of them picked up the lost weapons while another reached for the girl. "Oh girl - choroscho ..."  
A Russian sergeant pushed the butt of his assault rifle into Recke's side.

"Dawai, dawai! ..."

They stumbled forwards and were still glad that the Russians tolerated the girl in the midst of the captured officers. Making a small turn, they returned to the clearing where the dramatic action had taken place. They were immediately led to a group of officers.

A Russian captain turned to the prisoners. "Where Vlasov's soldiers, hey?"

Juncker looked at him. Then he pointed to one of the twisted figures lying there. The dead man was lying about ten paces away and still had one arm raised with cramped fingers. The white shield with the blue St Andrew's cross was shining on the upper part of the left sleeve.

"Pjos - dog!" roared the captain and hit Juncker in the face with his fist.

The SS officer stood stiffly still and did not flinch. A stream of blood shot out of his nose and stained his blouse. Only his gaze took on an aloof, haughty expression. It was as if he could see right through those standing in front of him.

The Russian grabbed Recke by the blouse. "You say - where Vlasov people?"

The man from Kassel pointed to the rock face. "There!"

The Russian raged: "Nothing there - you come with me! - Show me!"

The prisoners were pushed forwards until they and their companions were standing right in front of the wall. In fact, there was no trace of the missing men. Even to the Germans, nothing had ever seemed as mysterious as this event. For just a moment, it seemed as if a glimmer of secret knowledge flitted around the deliberately arrogant, angular features of the SS officer.

While the Russians were still shaking their heads, the group came across a man lying on the ground moaning with his hands on his stomach.



held pressed. It was the rearguard leader of the last Vlasov company who had been hit by a bullet.

One of the Soviet officers went up to him and kicked him. The Germans could not understand the questions asked in Russian. The Vlasov officer rose slightly from the ground and only looked at the Germans. "Germanski - brother! - We will see Russia again - through the womb of Mother Earth ..." A bang - and his head fell hard to the ground. The Soviet officer had unceremoniously put a bullet through his forehead.

Disgusted, the Germans turned away. Although their own fate was now completely uncertain, they were both worried about the girl, whose fate was certain in a few hours. Escape was impossible here.

"Dawai!" On an order from the Russian captain, they were led downhill with their original escort, who were still carrying the Germans' weapons and had even left the girl the suitcase.

The two officers deliberately faked a quick stumble and slide down the hill so that the accompanying soldiers would not come to rest. They had noticed the eyes that roamed the girl covetously.

Shortly before they reached the road from which the tragedy had started, they heard the low hum of a large aeroplane nearby. A brief exchange of glances confirmed the assumption that the Dosthra was searching after the connection had been broken. Resigned, Recke shrugged his

Shoulders.

The surprises of the day had not yet come to an end.

They entered the road a few hundred metres below the two still-smoking Soviet tanks and were taken to a column of wagons that were empty as transport vehicles for the soldiers swarming in the forest. The sergeant of the escort pointed to a small open wagon at the end of the procession. Again:

"Dawai!"

Some of the soldiers shouted at the sergeant. They raised their assault rifles and pointed them at the officers. The situation became threatening. Apparently, however, the NCO had a specific order that prevented the prisoners from being liquidated. With two Russians in the driver's seat and three more in the rear with the prisoners, the vehicle soon pulled up, heading north-east away from the nearby German border.

The Russians set a good pace. The hard driving on a bad road really shook those sitting in the car. The guards cursed.

At a bend in the road, the car stopped with a sudden jerk. Halfway across was an open car in which sat Russian officers, all of whom were Mongolians. One of them jumped out of the car and came over to the prisoners, whom he scrutinised closely. He hardly paid any attention to the girl, but he even took a close look at Juncker's black collar mirrors and the

yellow horizontal bar. Then he went back to his companions, with whom he spoke at length.

When the sergeant started up again with the wagon, the Mongols turned round and followed. After ten minutes they came to a small village whose houses were flying Czech flags. Irregulars with rifles and armbands stood at the entrance to the village and waved their weapons threateningly as the wagon with the prisoners passed.

"Zabite nêmce!

..."

They stopped in front of a better-looking house in the centre of the village. The Russians jumped off and pushed the Germans past the raging Czechs into the interior of the house. The sergeant went ahead and walked through a dark corridor that led into the courtyard of the building. While the prisoners had to wait, he paced the courtyard and opened several doors in the stable wing until he found a suitable chamber for the Germans.

"Pascholl - in there!"

The officers let the girl go first. The sergeant made a gesture as if he wanted to pull the girl back, but refrained from doing so. Only a mocking laugh distorted his features. "Abbends!..."

The room was completely dark. Only a fine streak of light penetrated through the cracks in the wooden door and drew a bright line on the opposite wall. It disappeared from time to time when the guard passed the door. The girl cried again and was completely broken. The two men did not dare to

to offer comfort.

Juncker's first instinct was to take off his wristwatch and empty his pockets. Recke followed his example at his behest. They then asked the girl to stow the small VHF set and her personal effects in her suitcase. Juncker's VHF set was unfortunately in his leather bag, which had remained with the Russians. They had been incredibly lucky that the girl still had the suitcase and that the officers had not been plundered immediately. They put this down to the hustle and bustle of the morning, which had brought the Russians such great surprises.

The two men talked in whispers. The most obvious thing was their fate, which at best meant deportation to the East. In the other case, their lives might only count for hours. They deliberately avoided talking about the girl.

A breakout was also completely hopeless. There was no way they would be able to get out of the place once they had finished with the post. Even the latter was just a mental game.

Recke thought about using the radio to send a message, but Juncker categorically rejected this idea. Knowing the daredevil Küpper, this would only jeopardise the Dosthra and its crew, without them being able to get help themselves.

"If we were in danger, we would be shot immediately!" explained the

SS officer. "We already know Ivan ..."

"Then we'll throw the device in the rubbish!" Recke angrily objected.

Juncker reassured him. "Time is of the essence, as the saying goes!"

"And lying in a cool grave is good in summer!" sneered the man from Kassel.

After a period of deep silence, Recke asked a little more conciliatory: "I want to eat a whole broom of straw if I can make sense of the miracle of the fog. Can you explain that, Juncker?"

"It's as strange as it is simple! The strange Mongolian, the personification of the roof of the world, has let his magical powers play out, as the Asians would say. We Europeans can come to terms with the fact that we are all subject to mass suggestion. The Ta-Lamas in particular are very good at it." Juncker stroked his rough chin. "The esoterics would say that Aggartha opened the gates for the persecuted and saved them from a threatening fate. The exotericists: a dazzling work of the gods has blinded the persecutors. To put it even more simply: the Soviets were fooled by a lama!"

The day passed without any attention being paid to the prisoners. Shots were heard a few times in the distance, but no conclusions could be drawn from them. Juncker suggested that they were witnesses to the mountain magic of

are likely to be of temporary value and therefore still have a grace period.

The narrow strips of light on the wall were already pale and went out completely after a while. A new night dawned and made the girl shiver as she clung to the men for protection. "Kill me," she pleaded, "before you leave me to these animals!"

As if to confirm their immense fear, the many-voiced noise and roaring from the village penetrated into the courtyard.

Apparently, intoxicated locals celebrated a cheap victory and fraternised with the Red Army soldiers.

The noise continued uninterrupted.

All at once, the wooden door was pulled open. The dark silhouettes of several men stood in the light-coloured doorway. One of them said in guttural German: "Up! Come with me now!"

Juncker was the first to step outside, immediately behind him the girl followed and Recke brought up the rear. There were four men covering them from all sides.

"Don't speak!" warned one of them.

Crossing the courtyard, the Germans saw the door guard staying behind and staring after them. The men pushed them into the corridor, where they had to wait for a moment. In a few minutes, a second guard came out and handed one of the four the prisoners' submachine guns and Juncker's leather gun.

bag.

"Go on!" said the speaker. In the light of an opening door, through which the second guard had come out with the things, the Germans recognised that they were being picked up by Mongols. They were probably the same people who had stopped their car in the morning.

Stepping out onto the village street, they were immediately pushed into a waiting closed carriage. While the Mongols sat down on the seats and let the girl sit backwards between them, Juncker and Recke had to squat on the ground. Then the carriage started up quickly.

The Mongols only stopped briefly before the end of the village. A few Russian words were enough to clear the exit immediately. As the car continued its journey, the prisoners saw that the armed Czechs at the end of the village were all drunk. Grinning, they stayed behind.

The car drove into the darkness of the night. After a short distance, it turned off the country road and rolled out of a cart track into a narrow forest lane. Recke estimated that the village was now more than ten kilometres away. A few houses at the side of the road had no light.

When the vehicle stopped at the edge of a hedge of bushes and night-black trees cast their shadows, the girl opened her mouth to scream. One of the Mongolians sitting next to her immediately stopped her with a quick

Moving her hand over the lower half of her face, stifling an attempt to scream. "Don't. talk - it'll break!"

The man's threatening tone intimidated her.

One of the men left the group and stayed away for a long time. When he returned, he spoke to his companions in a foreign idiom. Slowly, they continued to bump along in the wagon over the clearing, and after several hundred metres they crossed a clearing with fields. Rocking and groaning, the vehicle rolled over a small ditch and continued along a dirt track until it reached a detached house.

The door was hanging open on its hinges. No animal came forward and no occupant made himself known. The torch of a Mongol showed that the house had been left in great disorder or had been partly looted afterwards.

One of the Asians went back out to the car. The other three entered the bedroom of the house with the girl and the two officers, where there was a bed on each side of the wall.

The German-speaking Mongolian took the girl by the arm and pulled her to a bed. "Here - sleep for a few hours! Don't be afraid!" Then he turned to the officers: "We'll stay here. Until the morning."

"And what happens to us then?" Juncker asked without excitement. The Mongolian looked the questioner full in the face for a moment. A mild ray of the rising moon travelled across his broad face



and let the dark eyes glisten. "Buddha's ears are everywhere! - He has also heard this question and will answer it at the right time ..."

"Buddha's ears ...?" Recke stepped towards the Mongolian. Juncker also seemed surprised by the answer.

But the Asian turned away after the flawlessly spoken German sentences and continued talking to his companions.

As the Mongols remained seated on chairs around the table in the centre of the room, the officers threw themselves onto the second bed without a second thought. The physical and bodily fatigue immediately caused them to fall into a deep, dreamless sleep.

"Open up!" The Mongols were already at the door to the room.

"Quickly, quickly!" Another pale morning. Fog outside the house again and a cool chill. The carriage drove back over the field and forest lane to the country road and then at great speed over land. Juncker and Recke observed that the driver and his companion were carefully scrutinising all the signs at the crossroads.

Turning into a narrow path and after exiting the short stretch of woodland, the car stopped with a sudden jerk.

"Get out!"

They all trudged together over soft earth, turned around a forest tongue and suddenly stood in front of a large, strange aeroplane, whose strange design was strongly reminiscent of Recke's aerial encounter in the Prague area.

Over the metal fuselage played the

first rays of the rising sun.

The Mongols hastily moved towards the centre of the fuselage under the short triangular wings. The head of the aeroplane showed two horizontally protruding horns, which gave the construction the appearance of a karbau head. The two German officers could not figure out the purpose of this peculiarity. The most striking thing to them after a hasty look around was the caterpillar undercarriage under the centre of the fuselage and the lack of any markings.

There was no more time to look around. In a few minutes, the men and the girl were stowed inside. Two Mongolians waiting in the aeroplane took the luggage of the four companions from the car, which was simply left abandoned on the dirt track. Then the metal bird lifted into the sky with howling turbines and shot eastwards at increasing speed towards a destination unknown to the Germans ...

## SECOND BOOK

## SUNSET

The Exalted One said:

Thus I once proclaimed the devotional teaching to Vivasvant, Vivasvant communicated it to Manu, Manu Ikshvâku.

So it went from mouth to mouth, The royal ways knew it, - But through long time this teaching was lost here.

(Bhagavadgita, IV/1, 2)

Germany has capitulated! - The war is over.

While the whole world held its breath on the eighth of May 1945, the men at Point 103 stood in front of their radios and listened to the latest news, away from all the action.

"... Since midnight, the guns have been silent on all fronts. By order of the Grand Admiral, the Wehrmacht has ceased the battle, which had become hopeless, thus bringing to an end almost six years of heroic struggle. It has brought us great victories, but also heavy defeats. In the end, the German Wehrmacht honourably succumbed to an enormous superiority. True to his oath, the German soldier has made an unforgettable contribution to his nation. The homeland supported him to the last with all its strength at the greatest sacrifice.

supported. The unique achievements of the front and the homeland will find their final appreciation in a later just judgement of history. The achievements and sacrifices of the German soldiers on land, at sea and in the air will not be denied respect even by the enemy. Every soldier can therefore lay down his weapon upright and proudly and in the most difficult hours of our history bravely and confidently go to work for the eternal life of our nation.

In this hour, the Wehrmacht remembers its comrades who remained before the enemy. The dead oblige us to unconditional loyalty, obedience and discipline towards our fatherland, which is bleeding from countless wounds!"

That was the final part of the last German Wehrmacht report.

The men's expressions were more withdrawn than usual. The collapse of the empire touched the roots of their attachment to their homeland and depressed them. Their small secret realm and the unshakeable faith that animated their community were the only things that left them with a chaotic world.

For Reimer and Gutmann, the day of the surrender was doubly painful, as a shortwave message arrived at the same time, in which Major Küpper announced that Juncker and Recke were missing.

On the third day after this historic date, a rumour went through the ranks of the men at the base that a woman had arrived last night as a messenger who had left the base after a few hours.

would have left again within hours. The adjutant was more taciturn than usual and no-one from the group on duty at the airfield was willing to give any further explanations.

Towards the evening of the same day, a new radio message was received, announcing the return of the Dosthra aircraft under the command of Major Küpper. Other aircraft were still outstanding and had not yet reported in. The major was therefore the first witness to provide authentic reports from the day of Germany's capitulation and its initial effects.

All the rumours and announcements in connection with the events had triggered unbridled curiosity among the personnel at the base. In addition, the next day two aeroplanes flew in from the Canadian coast from which several American officers and Indians disembarked. Their aeroplanes were stopped and the foreigners remained on the base, locked up among themselves. Shortly after them came the Dosthra with Küpper and another German long-haul aircraft. Despite being visibly exhausted, the major immediately went to the command room to report to the commander.

People outdid each other in assumptions and speculations, but without coming to any credible conclusions. Only the returned Dosthrans made a few comments, but without exception they were pretty much at the end of their tether. They went

They immediately set off for their quarters with somewhat unsteady steps.

Küpper was directed to Juncker's room after the adjutant recalled him to the administration. A member of the staff on duty led him out of the command room after he had briefly reported the most important events and left a number of important papers with the Ia.

It was more a matter of course than coincidence that before entering his quarters, the Major bumped into Gutmann in the corridor, who had just come out of the roundabout and was also heading for his quarters. After the first brief greeting, Gutmann asked a direct question about the whereabouts of Juncker and Recke.

"Come with me!" the major asked him. He let Gutmann into his quarters and told him without introduction in short, sketchy lines about the events of the last few days around Prague. He concluded his account with the last radio communication he had had in the south-western Bohemian Forest and linked it to the assumption that both officers had fallen into the hands of the Soviets. "Under the circumstances, it was impossible to do anything for our comrades." Deep shadows lay around the major's eyes. He blinked wearily at his counterpart and closed his mouth.

"So there's hardly any hope, then?" Gutmann interjected, shocked.

"Hope?" The major made an uncertain gesture.



"As I was able to ascertain, the Russians - and occasionally even the Americans - usually put down captured members of the SS as soon as they are taken prisoner. Only larger groups and units were driven eastwards to Siberia."

"If that's the case ... !" Gutmann's face showed a desperate expression.

"For fuck's sake," rumbled Küpper. "We're soldiers after all! Aren't we?"

"Of course, Major!" Gutmann gratefully put his hand on his cap visor, then left the room with a heavy heart.

Reimer soon learnt about Küpper's landing and immediately set off in search of Gutmann. After asking around in vain, he found him in the room they shared. It was shortly after Gutmann had left the Major.

When the man from Linz entered the room, he refrained from asking any questions. Gutmann's expression was knowledge and answer enough for him. Just as his companion had very recently fallen into the resignation of hopelessness, he sat down on his cot with a feeling of inner emptiness. So he waited, oblivious to the wandering time, until Gutmann repeated Küpper's report in brief words.

After a long silence, Reimer said: "I can't imagine it. At the end of the war of all times ... ?"

"Junckers was clever," Gutmann murmured. "But even Archimedes fell at the hands of a common mercenary after the occupation of Syracuse."

Reimer stared as if he were looking through the windowless room. "The death of our comrades has not been confirmed. That's why I believe they're still alive! ..."

Both men looked at each other. But fate remained silent in response to the silent question of their eyes.

The oppressive calm of the previous week suddenly turned into a flurry of activity when a loudspeaker announcement called all the men at the base into the assembly hall. Apart from the few men on duty at the radar unit, the radio station, the television and steering link and a ground crew on standby, the base personnel made their way to the assembly point individually or in groups shortly before the appointed time. Even without any special instructions, all the men were clear and agreed that their activities would now begin after the conclusion of the latest world events. The announcement made at the Grand Assembly had to be fulfilled now.

"Today's meeting is for the knowledgeable and the ignorant alike," Gutmann had said to Reimer as they both prepared to leave.

"Ignorant?" The Linzer laughed somewhat mockingly.

"Certainly! - Knowing a goal still doesn't mean having fundamental knowledge," he was instructed

Gutmann. "I also believe that we will all be more ignorant than knowledgeable today, as we are facing fundamental changes. That's what I learnt from some of the aide's hints this morning."

"You think of everything but one thing: the end!" Reimer was in no hurry to leave. "We no longer have any authority. It used to be said: le roi est mort, vive le roi! Now there is no one left who could or should represent our people and our state!"

"As if that was the point," Gutmann said. "You have to be able to write off what has been lost. Authority and the state are more or less temporary concepts; they can be re-established by a biologically healthy people at the right time.

"Provided a nation retains self-reflection in its biological elite. For the amorphousness of the masses is a given factor due to the general decline of the West, which can only be balanced by superior leadership in order to enable a slow recovery of the overall substance."

"A task that requires a lot of patience; but it is the only way that leads to a lasting existence. Incidentally, authority and the state are not represented by the masses, but by those appointed from among the people. These appointments must come from the biological elite in order to ensure not a constructive, temporary development, but a natural development for a long period of earth's history. Only healthy

Peoples outlast times of fate. They always outlast the biologically and physically weaker ones!" Gutmann took his peaked cap. "Let's go now!"

When the two officers entered the assembly hall, most of the seats on either side of the centre aisle were already occupied. They found a few empty seats in one of the last rows of benches.

In front of them in the first row sat the American officers and Indians, whose special mission was still a secret.

"Watch out!"

A flight lieutenant posted outside the door of the hall had shouted the call. The men immediately stood up, took their positions and turned their attention to the incoming chief of staff, who, accompanied by the commander's adjutant, walked quickly to the dais. The insignia of the collapsed empire was missing from his left upper arm and cap.

His figure tightened as he turned to face the assembly. A quick survey of the men, then he began to speak:

"The falling rune bars of history have decided: Germany has ceased to exist at this time! There is no longer any state authority and four military governments have taken power in the quartered empire. I hereby inform you of the decision of the commander of our base: Point 103 applies from

immediately as detached from the Reich and is not subject in its military unity to the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht. All national insignia of the German Reich are to be removed from uniforms immediately! For the time being, the sign of the Black Sun is the sole symbol of our secret, independent Reich.

Only the German Wehrmacht surrendered! - There was expressly only a military surrender. The Dönitz government is and remains - irrespective of whether or not it can exercise its legal power to govern - the only legal government of a German Reich within the borders before the war under international and constitutional law. However the Allies in the East or West may act, nothing will change in this international and national legal situation. It is possible that the Allies will disregard these rights, use their power to set up satellite governments by force and try to keep Germany in pieces on the ground. But they can never eliminate a legal situation. A normative power of the factual can never override a right!

But we are building on the past:

In the geological period of the Older Quaternary or Diluvian, a cultural circle extended over a long epoch, which encompassed a large part of the then differently shaped continents. The bearers of this were the people of the then Arctic-Nordic and later branching off Atlanto-Nordic race.

Ancient finds, such as the twenty-five thousand year old inscription, the oldest in human history to date, on Monhegan Island on the coast of Maine, as well as the similar, almost identical characters of archaic Chinese writing, the sign stones of the Hedschra Mektuba of the Sahara Atlas, of Carisco-Rock and Desert Queen Well in California, of Tanum in Sweden and Hodein Magol in Nubia, are all the oldest witnesses of this enormous circle of the megalithic age. The continent of Gondwanaland, which encompassed the east coast of South America, Africa, Arabia, India and Australia, was separated from Arctic land, which consisted of East and North America, Greenland and Scandinavia, by the broad Tethys Ocean, of which the Mediterranean is a remnant sea. Two arms of this Tethys Ocean formed the later Atlantic Ocean. The face of the Earth was therefore significantly different in the Late Palaeozoic and Early Mesozoic. Similarly, the now submerged floe area of Atlantis can be assumed to have existed in the late Tertiary and Quaternary periods, north of forty degrees north latitude. The only remaining fragments of this continent are Greenland, Spitzbergen and Franz-Josefs-Land. Iceland also rests on a Miocene basalt floe of the old Arctic-Atlantic continent, which connects Greenland with Europe at a depth of four hundred to five hundred metres. Part of the large continent was also formed by the mighty North Atlantic Threshold, which extends from Greenland, Iceland, southwards over the Reykjana Ridge, the Faroe Islands, Rockall Island and

The telegraph plateau extends over the entire area and could only have sunk in the course of the Diluvian.

The Doggerland was also an area that sank in a more recent geological period. The subsidence of this area around the middle of the last millennium before the turn of the millennium is a historical catastrophe that still directly affects us!"

The chief of staff paused for a moment. Then he continued urgently: "This Doggerland was the main part of the old Forsete country, also called Polsete country. And this land was a heartland of the old Tuatha Empire, the oldest empire of the Germans! It was the homeland of the Ingvaeonian peoples, whose ships with swan-necked prows or swan spirals are still recorded in the images of the men of the foreign boat type in ancient Egypt and ancient Iran. These are the Pulsata people who, in biblical history, fought their battles as Philistines with the advancing tribes of Judah. The Tuatha were the bearers of the Neolithic culture of large stone graves and their name means the Germans! German means 'tuath' in Old Irish, 'thiude' in Old Frisian and 'tiutisch' in Middle High German. The past shows that the term 'German' extends linguistically and historically from the Baltic region to Scotland, Ireland and southwards to the pre-Roman Italics. This includes the later Stone Age or the period from six thousand to two thousand five hundred years before the turn of time. The sites located in this area

The large stone tombs, the megalithic tombs, dolmens and barrows in northern Germany, Scandinavia, Scotland, Ireland, Holland and north-west France are still existing witnesses of the unified cultural area, the North Sea culture. It encompassed the whole of Atlantic Europe in a cultic, religious and ideological commonality.

After the fall of Doggerland, the remaining Tuatha peoples were defeated by the Celts in fierce battles in the last millennium before the turn of time and the great traditions of the Tuathha empire were largely destroyed. The Ban Tuath, the folk mothers or the wise women of prehistoric times, the bearers and guardians of Uro-Nordic ethics and folklore, were replaced by the druid shamans, of whom the writers of antiquity reported that they worshipped a bloodthirsty superstition. Nevertheless, high ideological values from the megalithic tomb period of the Tuatha have been preserved, above all the concepts of their wise godly behaviour.

A common feature of their godly life was the belief in a god-father, the 'Great Spirit'; the world spirit beyond time and space. The great world law, the world order revealed itself to them in time and space through cosmic circulation. This was the 'Son' of God! Thus God the Father acted and revealed himself through the 'Son', the epitome of the cosmic world order, the eternal return, the year as cosmic law. This is the great, the world



The ancient Indian scriptures refer to this law as the order of Varuna, the will of the highest heavenly god. It can therefore come as no surprise when the old Irish sagas report that Patrick and his companions, who proclaimed the love doctrine of a 'white Christian', were not only greeted enthusiastically by the Irish as saviours of the blood rites of the Druid shamans, but also as returning hill people! It was not the oriental Christian with the strange guttural sound of the two initial letters who had come to them, but the old Nordic Krist, the god-son of the world spirit from the legendary Avallon.

This son of God in primal belief, whose runes appear in the prehistoric Scandinavian rock paintings and in those of North America, is none other than Thor. The Thor of the later Edda, the son of All-Father and the Earth; the hammer and year god of the Scandinavian peasant staff calendars. He appears in the prehistoric rock paintings in three symbolic arm positions of his annual cycle. Resurrecting at the winter solstice, reborn, as a figure with uplifting arms. The man-rune of the staff carving! This is also the great sign of salvation of the North Atlantic world mission.

At the beginning of the waning half of the year after the summer solstice, the Son of God descends and becomes a human being who must suffer and die in order to then enter the womb of Mother Earth in the winter night of his annual cycle so that he may be reborn.

The Tyr rune symbolises the figure with the sinking antennae!

Entering the Mother's Night - having arrived at the July or Consecration Night of the year - the Son of God reappears in the form of a cross at the winter solstice. As the primordial, reborn one, he begins his annual cycle. It is the old Nordic cultic cross, the spokes of the world wheel pointing in all directions in the form of the bond and the eternal sign. The bond itself, the primal religion expressed as realisation.

The worldwide spread of this calendar cult symbolism of the primal beliefs of the Nordic-Atlantic people was proven by the temporal and spatial coincidence of the same signs. To paraphrase the Italian philosopher Evola: The Uro-Nordic tradition is not a myth, it is the truth of the ancients. Even in the oldest prehistory, where positivist superstition until yesterday suspected the ape-like cave dweller, t h e r e w a s a unified and powerful primeval culture, an echo of which can still be heard in everything that the past has to offer us as an eternal symbol.

Examples of this extent are the petroglyphs in Owens Valley, California, of Umari Cachoeire on the Rio Caiarý - Vaupes in Brazil, in the Chicama Valley of Peru, various in Spain, such as those in Bacinete or the Cueva de las figuras, in Brastad, Sweden, the stone

Ingelstrup in Denmark, Retlo in the Caucasus and the previously mentioned archaic Chinese and Nubian and North African finds. It is to the great credit of the German-Dutch scholar Herman Wirth and the German Wegener that their research has enabled a clear look back into the past of human history. Laurence Snyder's blood seriological studies confirm the developmental picture of prehistoric times. The linguistic and written historical findings of the Frenchman Terrien de Lacouperie and the parallel conjectures of Gobineau, the archaeological results of Hubert Schmidt in China and the work of Röck on the ancient cultural relations of the Toltecs with the Old World in the *Mitteilungen der Wiener Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, all round off and confirm the great work of the first two scholars mentioned, which Julius Evola also approves of in his historical-philosophical structure.

To stay with Herman Wirth: The further back the layers of the cultural religions of antiquity lie, be it the ancient Sumerian, ancient Persian, ancient Indian, ancient Egyptian and ancient Germanic traditions, the more a fusion of the deity figures becomes apparent as specialisations of an originally uniform, cosmic concept of God, in order to finally dissolve completely into it.

The revelation of God through his Son in the cosmic and worldly year is at the same time the law of the

eternal change and eternal return. The moral world order is based on coming into being, passing away and being born again. The Son of God bears the light of heaven without being the sun himself. It is only his substantial manifestation as light and warmth, as a life-awakening principle.

The ancient Iranians also knew the god-sole with the light from the airyānem vaêjô, which lay in the far north and was not only the origin of their race, but also the seat of splendour. That mystical power which characterises the Aryan races and above all their divine kings. It was the place where the warlike religion of Zarathustra first manifested itself. The Island of Splendour, where Narayâna, who is the Light, has his seat in the North. The Son of God who stands above the waters, above the chance of events. They also tell of a Nordic primeval race, the Uttarakara. On the basis of the Stone Age written and cult symbol monuments of the Atlantic West, it is clear that the course of cultural development went from the north and west to the east. Only the lack of knowledge about the oldest documents, the Atlantean linear writing and symbols, was the cause of a previously contrary assumption. The light came into the world not from the East, but from the North!

The solar Apollo was adopted by the Greeks from a hyperborean tradition that led back to the oldest root of the Son of God. With the in

Apollo, who had become a native of Hellas, also remained a constant reminder of distant Thule, the mysterious northern land of the immortals, the island of heroes; the island of the sun, where the blond Radamantys reigns. It is the same Thule that the Toltecs knew as the land of origin Tula or Tollan, the ancient sunland and paradise of kings and fallen heroes. The Aztecs also preserved the memory of an ancient homeland in the north; Aztlan, the white earth, the land of light.

These are just a few of the common references that can be found in the most diverse traditions as a reminder of a Nordic primeval culture and origin, in which a transcendent, extra-human spirituality was most closely linked with a heroic, aristocratic and triumphant element. To a victorious form over the chaotic; to victorious superhumanity in Nietzsche's sense, over everything that is human and telluric.

It is remarkable that the pantheistic primal religion of the Urnordic tradition with the Tuatha son of God was not a sun-god religion, but a god-sun religion. That is an essential difference!

It was based on a logical realisation of nature in its entirety and was far removed from the sun god religions in the southern latitudes of antiquity. These only emerged as the end result of a more southerly settlement of Atlantic master peoples and their mixture with darker, lower-lying primitive races, such as in Egypt and Central America. The correctness

These findings are also confirmed by the palette found at Hierankopolis, which depicts the ruler of the kingdoms of Lower and Upper Egypt, Narmer, with purely Nordic racial characteristics, in contrast to the indigenous peoples he defeated. His heraldic animal was the bull, the ancient common symbol of the Atlantean-Nordic race.

Accordingly, the cult of Mithras is also nothing other than a renewal of an ancient form of knowledge of God that had long since been obscured at the time of its creation. Eastern mysticism had already overgrown the old Aryan mysticism by this time. Nevertheless, Mithras with the bull, the ancient symbol of the Tuatha and the ruler of the cosmic year - the Age of Taurus - is a hidden legacy of the oldest human history from its past heyday!"

An ever louder murmur went through the hall. A few exclamations were heard. The speaker commanded silence. "That's not all. The symbolism of Christianity is, after what has been said before, in its core - the death on the cross and the rebirth - nothing more than a profane, humanised repetition of a high culture religion close to nature! Surrounded by the Messiah legend and dressed up with oriental mysticism, the idea of redemption appropriated the subconsciously dormant longing of mankind for the bright heights of prehistoric times. Christ and Quetzalcoatl, both the same symbols of hope and originating from the same root, but in part an abused heritage.

It is remarkable that the conqueror of winter, of rigid death, the reborn and resurrected one, the re-awakener of light and life was depicted in the old symbolism as a horned man. This is the sign of the new divine life force. This also gives rise to the oldest form of Lucifer, the bringer of light, who as such, or as a devil, became the frightening figurehead of a very purposefully constructed show. The horned Son of God, the ancient revelation of God, had to fall because he stood in opposition to the new dogma of an oriental-mystical hierarchy. In his place, the pale fish-headed man was exalted.

Mithras, the Lord of the Sun, in his primordial beginning is nothing other than an attempt to save the Son of God with the bull symbol. He is the bridge that leads back to the sacred beginning. This beginning is eternal, as it is subject to constant renewal beyond time and space. Mithras' bull sacrifice is the conclusion of the Age of Taurus, whose continuation with the end of the cosmic year of Aries gave rise to the Son of God the Lamb. This ended on the worldly cross, the form of a cultic tradition. He ascended to the rebirth in order to end with a timeless promise. The fish symbol is the sign of his reign in the Age of Pisces.

Thus the horned one became Ba-al in the entymological mother house Ba, steadfastly obeying his cosmic destiny, but his worldly re-

waiting for the return. Mithra is the bridge so that Ba-al, the Bal-dr or Baldur of the Tuatha, may rise again with his people!"

A movement went through the assembly again. After a short moment, the learned staff officer continued: "I repeat: with the killing of the winter solstice beast, the bull, the lord of the cosmic year, the age, was defeated; thus the Son of God was able to free himself from the winter solstice house for his resurrection and at the same time begin his annual cycle. After the downfall of the land of Polsete, the people of the fish-headed man later condemned him to hell, the depths, the interior, to his previously declared mother's house. The hands of the world's destiny clock run incessantly. Europe, the old habitat of white people, is facing a spiritual renewal that will determine the Age of Aquarius. If it fails, it will become a peninsula of Asia and the spiritual grave of the Tuatha. It is the great task of the coming age to renew the legacy of the past for a reflective humanity.

With the appearance of the fish-headed man, the  
The destruction of the aristocratic principle by the revolt of the slaves, the disinherited, those without origin or tradition, with their resentment against everything that signified power and leadership. The poison of a proselytising fanaticism, with a barbaric Semitic



The wave coming over ancient Rome was at the same time a galvanising substance for all the Asian-Southern factors of decay that had already penetrated the fabric of the pagan empire and the germ of the Western visitation, as Evola also sensed. The collapse of Rome, the last solar bulwark of a bygone age, opened the way to all the aberrations and degenerations that followed, right up to the state of Europe today. This could happen all the more easily because at that time, which was already bound to the fate of the darkening of the divine - ragna rökr - the tribes of the Nordic racial element, scattered in their powers and leaders, allowed themselves to be partially detached from the old spiritual elements.

Evola continues: "In the Hebraisation of the Greek-Roman and then the Nordic world, which is largely due to Christianity, we have in f a c t the revolt of the lower classes of those races through whose domination the Aryan-Nordic peoples had achieved their glorious cultures. The oriental spirit, which already determined the collective feeling of guilt and atonement, but which emerged above all after the defeat and servitude of the chosen people and buried the remnants of the aristocratic spirit with prophethood, calls up the same inferior forces of Aegean-Pelasgian tellurism to which the Achaean tribes had been subjected; those of the çûdra caste, the so-called dark

In India, the hierarchies of the three higher castes of the reborn - dwîja - rose as a form above the chaos, the mingled, up to the type of the brahmâna and the king conceived as the "great god in human form"; finally, the forces of what myth tells us in the form of the Nordic Rinthursi or the hordes of Gog and Magog, whose path was blocked by Alexander the Great with a symbolic iron wall.

The Age of Pisces is the age of rebellion against tradition. However, it is not only an unwavering rebellion against the discipline and order of the slaves and the uncreative, it is above all the irrationalism of this epoch that awakens the chaos.

Eastern man shows the smile of the Sphinx. He knows that the coming millennia belong to him in the rhythm of world events, when the Occident comes together. Western man as a whole senses the decisions. He faces what is to come with a feeling of uncertainty. This is the hour of the descendants of the Tuatha, the Atlantean-Nordic people, who must walk the path with the man- rune of rebirth, as the ancestors did before.

The misery and decline of the Tuatha-Germans had to become so immense that they had to find their way back to themselves through purification and deepest renunciation in order to lead the way for mankind.

can. The death symbolism of the protective squadrons, entering into the cosmic winter solstice, is replaced by the rune of the arm-lifting Son of God and the return to the great light. And just as before the path of the Arctic-Atlantic migration of peoples led past North America to the Old World, so this time the spiritual path of the Tuatha must return to the New World in order to close the circle again. May the people who have migrated to the North American continent for centuries recognise, together with the original race, where they all came from, who they are and where their destiny is to lead them.

Men of the base - The Manis-Isolas, the shining discs, will be the messengers of the Great Mother who guards the Son of God. They will admonish people to reflect and realise. At the same time, it is the dawn of Germanism, which has reached the low point of the national cycle with the end of the Fijian Age and is making a new turn from the southern tendency of its forms to the northern tendency.

The cosmic winter solstice is also the solstice of the Tuatha Germans, who with their rebirth will carry the old sign of salvation and the light of the north into the distance. Over the Midnight Mountain, where the year has only one day and one night, the bridge leads to the Great Year, to the Primordial Light. There is the great gate into the eternity of being and the path of the sun, the Brâhman path. It is the devayâna, the

Sun Gate, which is also mentioned in the Matrayâna Upanishad. From there God the Father bestows the power of vocation - The sign of our base will be replaced at the right time by the colour symbol of the turning point, the sun in silver-white. Some forms will have to change.

Point 103 is in the highest state of readiness for the coming departure and will know how to fulfil its task under a new sign. The dark forces that are aiming for and want to reach the Midnight Mountain will experience the old Luther substitute: ... they have no profit, the kingdom must remain with us!"

The deepest silence followed the words. It was as if the silence of the vast Arctic had been transferred to the meeting. No shuffling, no clearing of the throat was audible.

The news of the surrender of the German Wehrmacht may have come as a shock a few days ago, but it was not entirely unexpected. On the other hand, the Chief of Staff's speech, delivered in a terse military style, was a revolutionary opening that made current world events seem like a passing second on the world clock. It shrank to a bitter but brief phase in the world view of human history, which allowed the descendants of the Tuatha to walk the path of humiliation in order to recognise their great destiny. Thus, out of the depths of dejection, the seedling of hope sprouted in the hearts of those whose thoughts were in the distant homeland ...

Never before had the men realised the importance of their base as much as they did with the simultaneous knowledge of a greater responsibility that arose from the perspectives of the boldest, most far-reaching historical research. The light of a mission rose radiantly above the mists of the past.

The chief of staff tightened up. As if this were a sign, all the men stood up at the same time, obeying an impulse, and took up their positions.

"Men, do your duty - the service goes on!" shouted the staff officer. He put his hand on his cap, climbed down the dais and walked with quick, echoing steps to the exit. The eyes of those gathered followed him until he had left the hall. Only now did the tension ease.

While most of the men remained in their seats to exchange views, the adjutant pushed his way through the eager speakers and took the Americans out of the crowd to lead them out. Only after them did the men slowly follow to return to their quarters or to their duty stations.

Gutmann had grabbed Reimer by the arm and was pulling him along. The man from Linz was silent, his forehead wrinkled in deep thought as he followed his comrade. The murmur of men's voices surrounded the two of them as they made their way to their room through the crowd.

Once there, both men made themselves comfortable.

As if he felt Gutmann's gaze resting on him, he broke his silence. Very slowly, still caught up in his thoughts, he said: "So far, my knowledge of things past has got me no further than Diodorus' report and Plato's Critias book. This recorded the memory of the legendary Atlantis. What the Ia built up today, looking back, was the pulling away of a great veil. The changing of the continental forms is not ultimately decisive for the fate of the earth. The main thing is always man. Everything creatively constructive, everything reprehensibly destructive results from whether man recognises his calling or passes by his destiny. It is not the devil characterised by dogma, but the animal man who is the bearer of evil in eternal conflict with the God-man of good. This is the battle that ethical man has to fight incessantly with the animal-man-devil, the bastard without animal instinct and without human reason. Even if a continent and parts of the original homeland have sunk or been buried under a thick layer of ice, the Nordic mission has remained. It is always the root that gives the tree the strength to return to green again and again. So we too must return to the origin before every beginning."

Gutmann just nodded: "I had known about the deep connections for some time. In the course of time, this Nordic tradition moved from the visible to the invisible; it became a legacy that was reflected in a

secret chain from a few to a few. It was always only the lonely, the strong, who were able to overlook these connections in whole or in part. Even the ethical aspect of tradition requires a superhuman measure compared to the materialistic average of a Macchiavellian epoch. Few people rise like shining comets out of the darkness of time and preach the return to high values or the superman - one of these few was Nietzsche, who collapsed under the force of his own realisation after he was able to ignite the illuminating flash."

"But you could have spoken to me about it earlier," Reimer reprimanded.

"It's easy to be mistaken for a fantasist at the wrong time. That's why I usually keep quiet. Just like other people who have long guarded a part of this great knowledge. There are also Cagots, - Cathar Goths, - who found the previously explained traces and images in the Pyrenees and guard many other secrets."

After pondering for a moment, the man from Linz asked the question:

"Why was the Mithras community created?"

"Mithra was the other force that wanted to force, as it were, a decisive choice for the further course of Western intellectual history when the world of antiquity was on the verge of collapse. It was a martial cult of the Aryan-Iranian tradition, the ruler of the sun, the hero with the old Norse symbols of the torch and the axe. The

Mithra is the symbol of the reborn through power, which a syncretic, but therefore no less meaningful, myth analogises to the Hyperborean god of the Golden Age. Mithra was subject to the Eastern mysticism of the Piscean period. Nevertheless, he was preserved in small communities. Even if it is outdated, it is half the way to the goal, which is to be achieved through military virtues, a cult of soldiers. Only for reasons of expediency is it still regarded as a bridge - as the la already said - into the now open gateway to the ancient truth. This community has tasks to fulfil. Above all, the hoarding of military potency."

"And why the encrypted route?"

"Everything in space has three dimensions, every concept is bound to a dualism. Good can only become the opponent of evil if it takes up the fight on all levels. The nature of the struggle and all its varieties are essential."

Reimer said nothing in reply. He slowly took off his pilot's blouse, took a penknife from his trouser pocket and slowly began to cut off the embroidered silver emblem of the defeated empire. Gutmann did the same. "The collar patches too?" asked the man from Linz.

Gutmann slowly looked up from the separation work he had begun. "The mirrors? - No, they stay!"

"That's strange," criticised Reimer. "It won't save us from being labelled as pirates if we're caught up in some kind of incident.



If the mission falls into the hands of a regular executive" Gutmann smiled. "If, my dear fellow, if ... !"

The service on Point 103 continued in full discipline. A number of aircraft of the most recently built models had been hijacked from the Reich territory, and a naval group had also arranged for two snorkelling submarines to be diverted. This created a lot of work for the base personnel, as a separate base had to be created for the boats far to the south. In view of the ice conditions, a location on the west coast of Greenland had to be chosen. Although this second base was only intended to be temporary, the work was carried out with great care. The necessary material was largely supplied by American friends. The connection was maintained by flying gyroscopes, which had no difficulties with the terrain because they could land vertically.

At this time, Reimer was assigned to gyroplane training. The ingenuity of this strange construction captivated his aviator's heart and he put his heart and soul into it. Within a short time, he had reached the point where he was ordered to join Gutmann on liaison flights to the submarine base. The men he got to know there were old naval officers, rich in experience and all of them were selected. He learnt from them that a number of boats had also broken out southwards at the time of the surrender, but that nothing was known about their whereabouts or destination. The men expressed the

They surmised that one of the boats had been carrying some personalities from the empire, but they did not know the details.

Gutmann had furrowed his brow in concern.

"Antarctica was named among the presumed destinations. That would be a misdirection! ..."

"The high seat of the apocalypse?" the Linzer tried to joke.

"In the esoteric sense - of course!" Gutmann was calm and matter-of-fact. "For the rest, however, the Apocalypse is the symbolic description of the development of mankind in the Age of Pisces. Only the ascending Age of Aquarius, at the same time the great solstice of Tuatha, will replace the time of the Lamb in the sign of Pisces. This means that we too have been assigned the task that our Ia spoke about in the assembly."

"Do we alone have the knowledge?"

"No," Gutmann replied briskly. "Even Rome and the Bible experts have the knowledge. They also know about the fulfilment of time in terms of the revelation of the New Testament. It says in the thirteenth chapter: 'Let him who has wisdom consider the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six ...'"

"That's cabbalism!" Reimer thought for a few seconds. "When we were brought to this base back then, did you also mention the cipher 666 as that of the dark forces in the realm?"

"Yes," Gutmann replied. "In many cases, certain

In some circles, Hitler himself tried to make the subject of this numerical mysticism. However, this did not get to the heart of the matter. On the other hand, the influences of this number were clearly recognisable in the empire. They are the results of cross-connections to the animal that has a number and a name. If one does not read six hundred and sixty-six arithmetically, but correctly sixty plus six plus two hundred plus four hundred kabbalistically, then according to a secret correspondence, which differs somewhat from the usual translations, the letter sequence s r d t and by inserting the corresponding vowels the name Soradt results. This, however, is nothing other than the hidden name of the sun-demon, which becomes effective when the Son of God returns to his mother's house in the south. Decreasing power of the Son of God means increasing power of the demon or vice versa. - 666 was the symbol of betrayal!"

"You know all about the numbers game!"

"You can only understand the thoughts and actions of others if you also know their language. Because one idiosyncrasy is conditional on the other! And when you read the Bible, you have to consider the magic of the Ark of the Covenant in order to understand the ciphers. Nietzsche confirmed these connections to a certain extent in his Twilight of the Idols! ..."

An excellent intelligence service connected the base with the wider world. Slowly the

Messages by, which about the The reports were about the persecutions that the commander had predicted at the Great Assembly. Particularly shocking were the reports that the Americans had large troops of the surrendering Wehrmacht and the Vlasov units and their commander that had been sent westwards were handed over to the Soviets. They also handed over generals and requested Waffen-SS units. The renewed collusion between the Shriners and Japhetites became increasingly recognisable. A small number of men had arrived later. Some from the prison camps in the United States, where they had been released by the friendly American group and flown north. It also became known that a military base had been established on the coast of East Greenland, but it was of no significance and was not identical to the base prepared earlier. According to reports, there were about eighty to one hundred Wehrmacht men there. Connection did not exist.

When Reimer spoke to Gutmann about these people, Gutmann explained to him that the presence of these soldiers was undoubtedly known to the Allies and that it would be in the interest of these men to return home quickly. It could not be foreseen how they would react to a transfer to Point 103.

Gutmann was wrong to assume that he would soon be returning home. He could no more rely on

The fact that these eighty men were only discovered and brought home in 1950 gives us an idea of the location of the base. Nevertheless, Reimer undertook two search flights with the commander's authorisation, but was unable to discover the base. Snow camouflage or fog made the search a failure.

In June, flying became more difficult and visibility was extremely limited. It was the time when the temperatures in the polar region rose and thick fog shrouded everything. It was precisely at this unpleasant time that Gutmann and Reimer were assigned a technician for training at the flight gyro.

The man was very intelligent and knew a lot. To the astonishment of his teachers, he grasped all the details in no time at all. In response to Gutmann's astonished question, he told the two instructing officers that he had already been involved in the creation of discs in the Reich, which were once used as bomber unit explosives. However, he knew nothing about the fact that designers in Breslau and Prague had also worked on flying discs.

He said that the explosive discs, Qualle and later Korkus, had been launched from Rechlin in the late summer of 1944 and deployed over Schweinfurt against a strong enemy bomber group. The explosive discs were fitted with sound detonators, had a diameter of around three to four metres and were attached to their guide planes by means of a winch with a cable length of 1,500 metres, which then carried the

weapons were raised. Behind the enemy formation, the discs were triggered and then set off with heavy smoke. The German squadron flew its attacks with the discs three times, shooting down a total of one hundred and forty-five bombers in the Schweinfurt area. Only when American escort fighters appeared later did the Germans descend steeply and fly off northwards.

However, the technician noted bitterly, the squadron leader had not received any praise for this tremendous success, but had been threatened with a court martial for unauthorised use of a new weapon. And strangely enough, Qualle and Korkus were never used again later, even though they had proved themselves so brilliantly.

Some of the material and plans had now fallen into the hands of the Russians. The same applies to the personnel in Rechlin.

"Is such a thing possible?" The Linzer shook his head at the report, while Gutmann preferred silence.

"Unfortunately," the technician confirmed again. "You just have to imagine it - one hundred and five and forty bombers in a short space of time!"

"And some of the things are now in other people's hands," rumbled Reimer. "Bloody mess! ..."

"There was a system here that was stronger than..." The technician didn't finish the sentence.

Reimer looked at the man. "This system is part of the plan of the great Anonymous. It also broke our

Lieutenant in Vernäs when he desperately put a bullet through his head."

"Hm," said the man from Rechlin. "Such cases were not uncommon ..."

Time passed and the month of June came round. The sky over the Arctic Ocean was constantly cloudy and shrouded the whole scene in a bleak grey monotony. The ice surfaces showed dirty grey wakes and the air saturated with water vapour fogged up the windows of the aircraft. No amount of swearing by the pilots helped. The sky only cleared up over the mainland zones, but the ground was very wet. For the beginning of July, instructions were issued to pilots to exercise increased caution, as shipping in the northern zones increased from then until November. In contrast to the initial period of his stay on Point 103, Reimer could not complain of boredom at Gutmann. After months of working in flight operations, he finally got to familiarise himself with the workshop operations under Gutmann's guidance. It was only now that he really realised why so many technicians and specialists were brought here as workers. In these underground halls, work was carried out incessantly in shifts. Transport machines were constantly flying in raw materials, tools and processing materials. The men at the base called their workshops, in

They processed various materials and formed a small independent armoury, jokingly referred to as the Vulcanos' forge. A large, excellently equipped laboratory was used for analyses and experiments. All kinds of metals and alloys were piled up in the storerooms. There was unalloyed titanium, which was more impenetrable than armour plates unless crushed metals were used for certain purposes, molybdenum to increase the strength and corrosion resistance of the steel, columbium for similar purposes, which was also able to improve the weldability of the steel, vanadium with its high wear resistance, germanium for high-frequency technology, hafnium, zirconium, tantalum and others. Furthermore, semi-metals such as gallium, which was used for special military purposes, thallium, which in a certain compound was infrared-sensitive and already used for night scopes, boron, caesium, tellurium, corium, indium and others.

For Reimer, the entire technical field of these sectors was uncharted territory. It impressed and fascinated him. Gutmann, who was also ahead of and superior to him in terms of knowledge, had a lot of patience for explanations. One evening, he surprised him by asking him to come to the Ia.

At first, Reimer had looked at his companion in disbelief. "Well, what's going on?"

"There will be some questions to answer," said



Above all, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and make requests yourself. I think there will also be a deployment order for us afterwards!"

When Linz entered the command room with Gutmann half an hour later, he was met by the adjutant, who directed him to Ia, who was sitting behind the centre of the large map table and gave him a friendly nod. He cut Reimer's military report short and also waved to Gutmann. At the staff officer's side sat three other officers who were already well known to Linz.

"Captain Reimer," said the Ia, "I have sent for you together with Major Gutmann to give you an honourable commission following the meeting of our small commission! For the time being, my only duty is to clarify your final position on base 103."

The Linzer involuntarily raised his eyebrows, implying a silent question.

The staff officer beckoned Gutmann to take a seat on a chair. Then he continued, leaving Reimer standing: "It is customary at our base to convene a commission from time to time when it comes to enlisting soldiers and other members of our community and testing their suitability. Suitability is generally given when the examinee has gained the realisation that he is serving a good and necessary cause. However, this cause must be

know too!"

This time Reimer didn't flinch when the Ia looked at him enquiringly.

"I'll continue: we've given you time to check out the things that may have seemed strange to you at first and have given you an insight into all the surprises that the base harbours. Comrade Gutmann has vouched for your character and that is enough for us. We ourselves have also come to the conclusion that we have before us not only a good airman and comrade, but also a soldier who takes in necessary things with open eyes and readiness. You attended our last meeting, in which, on behalf of the commander, I pointed out to our men the past and the related high goals for the resurrection of the Nordic peoples. Of course, I had to do this in the thorough manner of a scientist, although I am first and foremost a soldier like you. But it was undoubtedly enough to make the basic point. The men at the base understood me. Surely you too, Captain Reimer?"

"Yes!"

"As I was convinced during a discussion with my comrade Gutmann, he only recently explained the general meaning of Mithras to you. However, he neglected to explain the esoteric meaning to you. If you're interested - I'm ready to make up for it!"

"I'm asking for it!"

The staff officer smiled. "You can never know enough! Listen: the esoteric significance of Mithras to our military potency is based on the aspect of the Lord of the Sun, the initiation as a metal deity. This already emerges from the consonants M - T; accordingly, the Mithra mysteries today represent the path of initiation through metal moulding. They lift metal processing and metalworking out of exoteric civilisation, out of the world economy, out of commercialisation and elevate it to a culture of high esoteric significance. The work in the metals, the production of weapons and war equipment, corresponding to the warlike-heroic Mithras aspect, becomes an end in itself in the literal sense at point 103; for the purpose of gaining the self, of complete individuation and realisation. In detail, this means a gradual readjustment to the working and processing of metals, a mysterious work ethic that is, of course, completely different from the usual manufacturing mindset. Despite the most modern equipment, something of the craftsman's attitude is recovered here - one could even say something of the devotion of an alchemist. It is precisely through the highest possible degree of perfection of the working aids that it is possible to concentrate on the essentials of the work. This gives rise to possibilities of form and design that an industry can never imagine.

This process results in an absolute superiority of the workpieces, which are neither products nor should they be.

The work in the Met-All metal mysteries - i.e. the entirety of the metal world - understandably also includes the rarest occurrences of metals. Difficulties in creating rare species are relatively easy to overcome, as commercial considerations and profitability concerns no longer apply.

Furthermore, the metals, understood in a certain sense as *materia prima*, are naturally subject to the projection of archetypes in the course of the gradual initiation and in correspondence with the individuation process. This explains the fact that a high proportion of the products of the base show the typical forms of such archetypes. These include, above all, the mandalas in the form of flying spinning tops. The great interest of the base 103 in all varieties of such devices becomes obvious and clear for this reason.

The works of the metal adepts are favoured for their autonomous character; this autonomy of works can best be expressed in aircraft! As an independent system, these are almost unrelated and free. This is why aeroplanes of archetypal or runic shapes are the most popular works of creative adepts, who achieve true mastery in them. These works are also characterised by the metallic purple that the adepts under the

Projecting the instructions of the hierophants into the metals as a tincture; sometimes even extracting the opposite from the metals - this purple aura clings to all weapons and devices of the Mysteries. It makes them dominant and unconquerable.

If you want to smile, Captain, just wait a moment! - The dedication of our technicians and specialists in their work or in their experiments has already led to considerable successes at our base, which have yielded more than could be surmised. With the devotion of alchemists, nothing is more obvious than to look at alchemy, which is often ridiculed by the ignorant. Men are currently working in our base laboratory who not so long ago were engaged in secret experiments in the Reich on behalf of the Schutzstaffel Reich leadership. However, it was above all Himmler's wish here - to make gold ..."

The Chief of Staff twitched slightly with the corners of his mouth before continuing: "Basically, alchemy and its processes are of a chemical-physiological-psychological nature. They therefore require the personal commitment and personal involvement of the operator, in contrast to chemistry, where the process is only initiated or initiated. Alchemical work requires a high level of morality and a high-quality ethos on the part of the practitioner, since inner-human processes can be influenced in a suitable atmosphere by suitable

The means must be projected into suitable materials. The actual aim of alchemy is to reproduce and imprint these inner-human processes in the material. The operator redeems matter and thus in a certain sense takes the place of the Creator. In the alchemical process of projection, the purpose of existence of humanity is realised and thus humanity itself. Successful projection requires preconditions and has repercussions. Man and substance become one and are elevated together. The alchemist anticipates the state that will later be granted to the whole universe or at least to the earth. Since the alchemical process has to begin long before its material imprint in the human being, the self-refinement of the human being is not only an essential prerequisite, but the precondition for the work in general.

This involves integration, the gradual realisation and thus the overcoming of the collective archetypes, in short, self-actualisation.

There is an extremely large number of archetypes that need to be integrated. This integration can be carried out within a mystery community, but also in complete isolation. Or during the alchemical work itself, which is correspondingly arduous and can often take a lifetime.

If the alchemist sees lapis as an instrumental target, then

he will naturally endeavour to use it for the benefit of his fellow human beings, be it as a medical or technical means.

There is a special alchemical technique, just as there is a chemical technique. With the help of lapis, for example, it is possible to produce a so-called biomotor machina. The prehistoric flying system mentioned in ancient Sanskrit literature is partly based on this. There are a number of varieties of it. Some of them can be released into free space as autonomous creations. Others operate cult devices. Those in free space also serve as soul companions - psychopompos - as initiation devices and the like.

Incidentally, in classical alchemy, the production of a miniature planetarium was popular as a machina to visualise the solar system. All that was needed to make it was to produce a molten flux from the metals corresponding to the planets and project a little red tincture onto it. This molten flux immediately left the crucible and rotated freely on the ceiling of the laboratory for some time, imitating the natural planetarium. With the help of the lapis, it was thus possible to repeat the entire creation in all its unimagined parts at any time. In this way, the creation of the earth could also be modelled and experienced.

I can see from your expression, Captain Reimer, that this is all new territory for you! That's understandable, because in the

In the common sense of the word, we know no more about alchemy than about the laborious art of goldsmithing with incantations in the presence of black cats and phosphorescent-looking owls in a cellar-like chamber. This is, so to speak, the well-known dream book alchemy

...

You have to understand certain things in order to understand the full commitment of a laboratory technician at the base. And I can tell you, Captain Reimer, that our base has an even deeper space system in which special experts are attempting to analyse vril. Vril is a molecular force and, according to old reports, is hidden in the cave Od or in the solar Od. This force is said to be suitable as a driving force for flying machines and was already used in the ancient Indian flight system. In the Ramajana of ancient Indian lore, flying vimanas are already mentioned, although mercury was also cited as part of the propulsive force. In an English translation by Dutt in 1891, the text states that at Rama's command, a marvellous chariot ascended a mountain of clouds with a mighty roar. In another place it is said that Bhima flew with his Vimana machine on a tremendous ray, which had the splendour of the sun and sounded like the thunder of a thunderstorm. In the Mahabharata there are further precise figures and references to a terrible weapon effect. In the eighth book



striking details that are entirely indicative of nuclear weapons. - Our Indian friends, observing all precautions for secrecy, are engaged in reconstructing the old machines using all old sources. According to reports available so far, this work has been successful.

We are also looking at the extraction of heat from the air around us using a benzene-water vapour process developed by the engineer Doczekal, who died in 1944, and which is regarded as a kind of perpetual motion machine. So there's something going on at point 103!

The generation of electricity in all its aggregate states as a massless body - gaseous, liquid and solid - is also at the experimental stage. Only the lack of facilities prevents us from taking the practical route of thermal nuclear fission in order to make nuclear energy directly usable for our purposes. There is more, but that should be enough for now. Point 103 is not an island, but an empire, Captain Reimer!"

The flight officer just nodded. He was extremely impressed by the versatility of the Chief of Staff and realised that he had a superior of special stature before him. Even if he couldn't remember all the details of the explanations, the basics remained in his mind. Thinking back in a flash, he himself found the perfect explanation in

the conclusion of the given letters MT, in a common connection Mi-thra, Me-tall, Mo-tor, as a soldierly connected trinity. All that remained was the question of why the mystical. But Gutmann had already answered this self-question comprehensibly earlier. This was a battle on all levels. The visible and the invisible.

"Is something unclear to you?" the Chief of Staff asked mildly.

"I had to collect myself for a moment," Reimer admitted frankly. "I was also looking for a final explanation, but I found the answer myself!"

"It will certainly be correct," the staff officer smiled all-knowingly. "With the knowledge of the transition to the Nordic-aristocratic principles of ultima Thule, for the resurrection of the comprehensive Tuatha Empire under the sign of the Man rune, the actual meaning of point 103 can also be understood. We do not want to have lansquenets, but soldiers who serve a realisation!"

"The political soldier is always the best soldier," confirmed the man from Linz. "If politics is meant in a higher sense, this contributes to the physical superiority of a weapon bearer!"

"Right!" The Ia nodded favourably, while the other officers murmured approvingly. "Our views coincide. I hope that applies to everything fundamental?"

"Yes!"

"Then, Captain Reimer, I ask you: are you prepared, now finally and forever committed, to fly for our high-altitude targets and to continue as a soldier with all your strength and knowledge?"

The man from Linz looked firmly at the questioner. He answered brightly and clearly: "There is no higher goal than a national rebirth. I am ready to obey the ancient law of national solidarity!"

The officers stood up from their seats. The chief of staff walked round the table and stepped very close to the aviation officer. A bright light sparkled in his eyes as he said: "I pledge you to unconditional obedience, comrade, Captain Reimer!" The Chief of Staff gave Linz's hand a firm squeeze. The others present followed his example. Gutmann was the last to approach his comrade: "You're with us for good now, Reimer! Whatever may lie ahead of us, we will bear it together ..."

"One more official matter!" The Ia spoke dryly and matter-of-factly: "Major Gutmann and Captain Reimer, - be ready to receive precise orders for a flight to south-west Europe tomorrow. You will take off tomorrow evening! We have a mission to fulfil!" He placed both hands on Linz's shoulders with the last words, but added nothing more, then gently pushed him out of the room and beckoned Gutmann to follow his comrade ...

## THE GRALSBERG

To Fontane la Salvasche it went,  
To a hermitage lost in the rock,  
Which Trevrizent chose for his  
seat. With him Parzival now  
learns secret tidings of the Grail.  
To a cave the landlord led him

...

Wolfram v. Eschenbach

The engines of a Dosthra type E long-haul aeroplane roared to life and the aircraft taxied over the damp runway with increasing speed. As soon as it had left the ground, it pulled steeply upwards thanks to its excellent climbing ability. The figures of the ground crew left behind quickly melted into small dots. The ring mountains of the base looked like a fading magic circle before the whole thing disappeared completely from the view of the aircraft crew.

Major Küpper sat motionless at the controls in the cockpit. The monotonous grey of the polar expanse stretched out before him. To the south, the horizon showed a small brightening.

Gutmann and Reimer were Küpper's pulpit companions. All three were silent and lost in thought. Küpper scrutinised the landscape attentively, now and again

looking at the dashboard again. He had not yet looked at the maps. Sub-commanders Lechner, Bernemann, Kreß and the Norwegian Torkildsen were lying in the two hull-shaped fighting positions. These men were also silently looking around them, guarding against surprises.

Küpper now flew the same route to Greenland as Juncker and Recke had flown to Prague on their mission not so long ago. Only at this time, the initial visibility had not been as hazy as the months of June and July in the polar zone required. The fog banks over the thawing and sometimes tearing ice surfaces of the fore-zones of the pack ice area blurred the boundaries between land, ice and sea. Constantly maintaining a south-easterly direction, the closed banks gradually receded and an open drift ice landscape increasingly came to the fore.

The Dosthra crew had only learnt just before take-off that their first destination was the Pyrenees. But only the three officers knew about the purpose of a special mission. Gutmann's task was to locate a certain Belisse within a certain area in the eastern Pyrenees. This man was hiding somewhere in the Ariège valley or its surroundings due to the political confusion. As the chief of staff had emphasised before departure, Belisse was an important figure in the Cathar tradition. Once he had been found, he was to be ordered to come along to Point 103. Reimer was to help Gutmann fulfil

support this mission.

A farmer near Ax les Thermes in the department of Foix, at the foot of the eastern Pyrenees, could also provide them with valuable help.

This single hint of possible help made the task much more difficult. This farmer had to be approached and questioned with extreme caution so as not to jeopardise the whole undertaking. Another danger was the strict control of the border areas on both sides of the mountain ranges. France in particular was hot ground, as individual scattered German soldiers or groups as well as Frenchmen pursued by the Resistance were still trying to evade capture and flee to Spain. It was therefore clear to the officers in charge that the slightest carelessness would not only lead to the failure of the task, but also put their own lives in danger.

Küpper flew the aircraft between Craig-Harbour on Ellesmereland and Dundas-Harbour on Devon Island and headed for Greenland over the Baffin Sea, which was covered in drift ice. The deliberately high flight altitude prevented any animal or even human life from being taken out. On the other hand, the sky over the sea cleared up, softening the oppressive polar latitudes.

The engines sang their steady song. Wisps of vapour flashed past as the machine passed high above. Not a bird, nothing to move the eye

would offer. As the drift ice receded and the sea became more open, majestic icebergs travelling southwards crossed the flight of the giant metal bird.

Reimer was quietly introverted and gripped by an inner restlessness. How different was the flight months ago in the opposite direction, which led to the supposed magnetic pole and harboured completely different expectations. The surprises of an unsuspected event, which resembled waking dreams, had revolutionised everything that had gone before in his life and constantly presented him with new problems. There was a pensive look and at the same time determination on his face as he looked through the windows towards the approaching coast of Greenland.

Küpper did not allow radio communication with the submarine base to the south. There was also no justification for this.

They flew over the huge island, which almost resembled a small continent in its vast expanse. Without realising it, they were flying almost the same route as Juncker had done some time ago. The only difference was that fog was also rolling over Greenland at the time.

With the engines humming low, the Dosthra obeyed the guidance, the minute hands of the clocks rounded to hours and once again there was an expanse of water beneath the machine. The Atlantic. The long-haul aircraft cut through the air at increased speed. The metal sang. At Küpper's command, the men in the floor pan peered into the vast airspace, unperturbed

and the low-lying expanse of water, which shimmered grey and jade green.

Turning sharply south, the men flew over the Westfjords of Iceland at a very high altitude and then took a steady south-southeasterly course, pointing into the Bay of Biscay. The Norwegian Torkildsen was the first to spot a large ship on a south-easterly course and reported it. Küpper pulled the aircraft over it unmoved.

After a while, the Major turned to the Linzer:  
"Would you like to take charge of the machine for a short time, Captain Reimer?"

"Of course!"

The men swapped places. Somehow, Reimer felt a sense of satisfaction at being able to pilot the large combat machine on a mission. His long pensiveness vanished and his clear eyes wandered between the dashboard and the waterscape. The responsibility of his task boosted his self-confidence. Not only did he have to demonstrate the navigational skills of a transoceanic flight, he also had to ensure the anonymity of the aircraft with the utmost care. For some time now, the sky had returned to its usual European appearance. As the temperature rose with the changing latitudes, the speed of the technological age suddenly brought us out of eternal winter and into midsummer. The men of the Dosthra enjoyed the warming rays of the sun with great pleasure. With the speed they had developed, the destination was literally growing towards them and already the



The same day would prove whether the landing of the crew and thus the initiation of the mission would be successful. Only a Jules Verne with his ingenious ideas could have previously devised such an eventful flight around almost a quarter of the globe in a day. When the aircraft flew over the latitude of Brittany and had already intersected some of the busiest shipping lanes of the Atlantic, the tension of expectation grew almost unbearably. Now, despite the cessation of all combat operations in Europe, all possible air encounters had to be avoided at all times.

Major Küpper now intervened in the flight guidance to give instructions. With shrewd deliberation, he ordered the aircraft to set a direct course for San Sebastian and to climb higher in order to prevent a licence plate recognition from the ground.

The sky was clear and only a few wispy white clouds were sailing their way in the air current. They could hardly provide any visual cover for the aircraft. The Dosthra climbed even higher. After a short time, the men sighted the dark line of emerging land to the south. Coasts were also emerging in the east.

Küpper picked up the flight chart and realised with satisfaction that they had navigated perfectly. The nose of the Dosthra was heading straight for the designated Spanish harbour. At the limit of the three-mile zone, Reimer turned off on instruction and turned into the corner of the country. Passing sharply by Fuenterrabia, he flew east of the Bidassoa River into the Pyrenees and followed

in the same direction as the national border.

Cloud banks drifted over the mountain ranges or billowed around the higher peaks. The violet veils of the dawning twilight glided over the bright, snow-covered surfaces. The crew's eyes wandered over the border areas of two countries and marvelled at the wildness of the mountain scenery. The aircraft flew over the peaks of the Pic d'Ochy and the Pic de Vignemalo in turn, leaving the high Mont Perdu to the right. Shortly afterwards, the highest peak of the whole chain appeared; the Pic d'Anethou in a Spanish border tongue that abruptly pushed into France. Flying over the Maladetta chain, they passed over Andorra and then immediately turned northwards.

Below the men lay the valley of the Ariège River. They were approaching their destination. Despite the gathering darkness, the magnificent massif of Montségur loomed to the half-right like the symbol of a stone sentinel in the sky of glittering stars. A collection of lights towards the nose of the aircraft indicated the important Provençal town of Foix, surrounded by the flickering dots of the surrounding villages.

Küpper throttled back the engines and flew towards the Montségur at a speed of three metres per second, looking for the area of the historic pyre heap on the map. At the same time as the aircraft descended, the twelve-hundred-metre-high rock with its mostly vertical walls rose up clumsily into the night sky.

dark horizon. A bright spot shone in the east: the Mediterranean.

After locating the presumed landing area, it proved impossible to land in the darkness. Küpper could not risk wrecking the aircraft. No aviator would risk this experiment in the knowledge that they had a responsibility.

Küpper let the aircraft circle and turned to Gutmann and Reimer: "It's all over with a landing. Completely out of the question. - There's only one thing left to do: get ready to get out and jump!"

The two men looked at each other briefly. "Let's go!" said Gutmann.

Both quickly shed their outfits. In addition to their boots and breeches, they now wore a civilian skirt with a sporty style. Over this semi-civilian outfit they put on overalls like those worn by mechanics or motorcyclists. They stowed their pistols and sufficient ammunition in their pockets, ready to hand, as well as Swiss passports.

"Get a move on!" Küpper urged from his seat.

Both officers now picked up the parachute packs and strapped them on, making sure the straps were secure. Lechner crawled out of his bathtub and helped with the final steps. He pulled the prepared rucksacks with provisions, maps and equipment, combined them into a bundle and attached them to a parachute at Köpper's behest.

"Food will be thrown at you!" had the Major

decided briefly. Then in conclusion: "Don't forget the deck address where you can report or where you can send a message. And now let's go - break a leg ..."

"There should be no shortage of us," said Reimer hastily and confidently. Equalising the pull of the circular flight, both officers staggered to the exit. Lechner stood just behind them as they opened the hatch. Gutmann, his hand on the ripcord, waved to Küpper, then jumped in first. Just behind him, Reimer pushed off. Immediately afterwards, the NCO lifted the bundled pack and let it follow the parachutists with the parachute line pulled.

Like three long dashes, three bright call signs with dark, oscillating dots, the parachutes came loose and arrowed through the evening darkness towards the earth, suddenly billowing and, with a short jerk, turning into an oblique hover. The two bodies and the pack descended gently to the ground, dragging only slightly.

The parachutists pulled themselves up, freed themselves from the ballast of the glider, then peered around them and stumbled towards the nearby bale, buckling slightly at first. Looking up on the way, they saw no sign of the aeroplane. Even before the sound of the engine died away, the night had absorbed it into its protective darkness.

Standing in front of the pack, the men orientated themselves. In front of them lay a rising forest, above it a massive mountain outcrop with sharp-edged traces of ruins. The

Montségur - the mountain of the Holy Grail!

"The Montsalvatsch of the minstrels!" Gutmann whispered, deeply impressed.

On both sides of the valleys, the dim lights of farmsteads and small villages shone. On the side facing away from Montségur, a slope of fields and meadows sloped gently down into the valley. Towards the south and on the flanks of the mountain, the dark shapes of an imposing mountain world appeared. Inspired by strange feelings, both men stood on the ground of a strange earth and breathed in the odour deeply. A mild wind carried the scent of the nearby forest to them, the first greeting from Europe after their return from the Arctic. Again their eyes wandered up to the defiant rock.

As if Gutmann had read a silent question in his companion's eyes, he said: "Yes, it's Mont Salvatsch or Munsalväsich, which Wolfram von Eschenbach sang about. The last stronghold of the Cagots - the Cathar Goths."

Both men paused. "It may not be the right moment to say much," Gutmann continued cautiously, "but I feel compelled to explain to you that a historical destiny of little-known tragedy took place here. The last Goths of the Pyrenees died here seven centuries ago. The Goths - the good ones! - The Cathars also called themselves bonhommes - good men!"

"Gutmann!" Reimer exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, we Gutmanns are an old heretic family from

Runkel, the German centre of the Pure Ones. - And let me tell you: these good Goths were the Goths, the people of God! The pure, chosen people of the ancient Aryan tradition. Ezra and Nehemiah found this chosenness, this ethnic purity, confirmed in the ancient traditions during the Babylonian captivity and falsely transferred it into the Old Testament as the basis of a Hebrew development ..."

Reimer grabbed Gutmann's hand: "There's a light in me now!"

Gutmann just nodded. "In 1244, over two hundred people were burned to death here on the Camp des crémats, the pyre. They were descendants of the Goths! This happened on a Palm Sunday because they had refused to recognise Yahweh God, Peter's key power and Rome's dogma. However, before the castle fell, which the Popes seized through the treachery of a shepherd, the Grail was saved by four courageous men who abseiled down the vertical walls of the mountain. From the summit of Bidorta, nearby, a bonfire signalled that the Mani had been saved!"

The man from Linz could not suppress an exclamation of amazement. "The Mani? ..."

"I said it," Gutmann confirmed emphatically. "We'll come back to this in more detail later. Now let's move on!"

Before they passed through a small copse, they orientated themselves

Gutmann looks up at the towering mountain peaks. "There's the Pic du Saint Barthelmy! We have to keep to the side to reach the parallel valley of the Ariège."

In the absence of a path, both men carefully felt their way downwards, as the night was not particularly bright. Their breaths were audibly deep! Like starving people at a rare meal, they drew in the savoury forest air into their lungs, which they had missed for so long through months at the icy end of the world.

As they were about to cross the copse, they suddenly stopped. Something had moved in front of them. Reimer wanted to draw his pistol, but Gutmann stopped him. While they were still listening, a branch cracked audibly nearby. Neither man knew whether it was a man or an animal in front of them.

Branches rustled again. "Hey!" Gutmann said half aloud. Silence.

They both took a few more steps forwards. Just as their steps made a noise, a rustling sound came back in response.

There was undoubtedly a human in front of them. An animal would have fled long ago with just a few movements. He seemed to have reason to hide or he must have bad intentions. Now it was Gutmann who took the pistol out of his pocket and put the safety back on. "Attention, je tire - attention, I'll shoot!" he warned loudly.

"Je tyre aussi - me too!" came back. The speaker could barely stand ten metres in front of them.

"Bloody bloke," Reimer rumbled half aloud, also drawing his weapon.

A soft laugh became audible. Apparently the invisible man had heard the German words, which seemed to amuse him.

"Soldates allemands?"

Gutmann motioned to Reimer to remain silent. "Nous sommes touristes suisses. Swiss tourists! ..."

"Ah!" Branches rustled again and a man stepped into the field of vision of the two airmen. At first, they could only make out a silhouette, barely recognising his face. Keeping a little distance, the stranger asked in accented German: "Tourists? Merde, I don't think so! If you do - then I'm a king of the Ashanti on holiday ..." A slight chuckle followed the words.

"All right, monsieur roi d'Ashanti," Gutmann said dryly, "then we don't need to start a bang. If you are a smuggler, you have nothing to fear from us!"

"Smuggler? - qu'est-ce que cela?"

How should I explain this, Gutmann asked himself, whose knowledge of French was not too perfect. He tried: "Contrebande ... !"

"Je comprends - I understand! Pah," the man said scornfully. "There are no Fraudeurs here. Only refugees and lots of gendarmes or soldiers!" Another mocking laugh in response.



"A cosy neighbourhood," grumbled the man from Linz.

The Frenchman came a few more steps closer. He slowly put foot in front of foot and held his right arm slightly bent with a firearm. He must have had a very keen ear and heard the last words. "I'd bet I'd have German soldiers in front of me if the aeroplane hadn't first ..."

"We heard one humming in the immediate vicinity beforehand," Gutmann tried to assure us hypocritically.

"Close by ..."

"Ce n'est pas bien, what you're trying to tell me," said the stranger in a sterner tone. "I would have hoped ..."

"What," Gutmann asked quickly.

The Frenchman hesitated for a moment. Then he replied half aloud: "... to find comrades!"

Silence again. This time it was Gutmann and Reimer who thought for a moment. The former then said casually: "Is there anything we can do for you?"

"J'ai faim - I'm hungry!" the interviewee replied openheartedly. "I haven't eaten for two days."

"So refugee," Gutmann realised with relief.

"Oui, messieurs!"

Linz took off his rucksack and opened it. He grabbed the contents and pulled out a tin and a piece of bread. "Take it!"

The stranger put the pistol in his coat pocket, then came right up to the airmen. With a curt bow, he said: "I believe that at the moment

Names are not important. But it is a happy hour under the stars that I let you meet. If you can really spare the snack ..."

He accepted the things offered to him. His whole demeanour and manner of speech betrayed an exemplary upbringing, which he could not deny despite his distress. No doubt it must have cost him some effort to tuck the food under his left arm with a casual gesture.

Now the three men scrutinised each other. None of them knew what to say at first. They sniffed at each other like animals in nature, trying to come to terms with feelings where reason failed.

The Frenchman was the first to ask quietly: "Your kindness, Messieurs, is proof enough for me to trust you: I am a refugee from Carcassonne and will endeavour to escape to Spain at a favourable moment. Perhaps you know that Carcassonne is not too far from here, so I know the area reasonably well. So if I can be of any help to you ..."

"Carcassonne?" Gutmann wagged his head and at first seemed not to notice the offer. "Carcassonne," he repeated again. "A city of historical importance!"

"You know the city?" asked the Frenchman.

"Only according to their historical past!" explained Gutmann.

"Ah! Oui, monsieur; the fires of Rome ate before

The town whose lord, the Viscount Raimund Roger Trencavel, went down in history and myth as Parsifal."

"So you know..."

"It's my home!" the stranger said proudly.

"Strange conversations at this moment!" rebuked Reimer.

"You're right," Gutmann admitted. "Let's stay in the present. If you, sir, would like to help us find our way?"

"Where to?"

"Ax les Thermes!"

The interviewee whistled. "Into the village?"

"Nearby!"

"I see." The Frenchman thought for a few seconds. "It's in my direction. If you can trust me, I'll take you there!"

"A stroke of luck!" Gutmann admitted with satisfaction.

"Bien!" The Frenchman nodded. Then he took a few steps towards the bushes that had previously concealed him and came back with a linen knapsack, which he casually threw over his shoulder. "Stay close behind me," he said urgently. "And above all - make little noise!"

After walking in silence for a while, they rounded a bend and reached a long valley. To the south, in the direction of their path, the mighty Pic du Saint Barthelmy lay before them, growing with sharp contours out of the darkness of the woods. The two flight officers followed their guide with the utmost attention,

not only the surroundings, which were lost in the blackness of the night, but also him. Caution was still the order of the day before more was known about the stranger.

They must have been walking for about an hour when the valley floor widened and the dark waters of an elongated little lake became visible to the left of the path, on which the reflecting stars danced like silver dots. The Druid Lake revealed itself in all its mysterious beauty. The shadowy mirror of the Pic du Saint Barthelmy lay like a dark wedge over the waters, merging into a single natural image. When Reimer paused for a moment to savour this nocturnal splendour, Gutmann puffed him on, but explained: "This Pic has been called Tabor by the locals since the time of the Albigensians and has an ancient mythical meaning. One of the many entrances to the subterranean realm of Agartha is said to be located there.

There are still ancient remains of an Iberian Belis or Abelliot temple on the summit. When the sky is clear, it is said that you can enjoy a marvellous have an overview of the Montségur."

Despite the half-loud conversation, the Frenchman's fine ears had heard some of the explanations. If it had been brighter, the two pilots would have been able to read great astonishment in his expression. This astonishment was transferred to his companions when he turned to them and concluded Gutmann's explanations: "The explanation about the

early historical temple is true! There is a centuries-old road leading up to the summit of the Tabor, which was built by the Albigensians. However," he said with a smile, "you have to be free from giddiness to walk it. Tree trunks that have been laid down form passages over crevices and deep fissures. We call this path the Cathar Route. And the valley we're walking through now is called Val de l'incant - the magic valley."

"Merci, monsieur!" thanked the man from Linz.

"It's a pleasure," the Frenchman continued in almost flawless German. "I would hardly have thought that strangers would know about this hidden corner of our country and also know the history." Turning to Gutmann, he asked. "Have you perhaps ever been to Provence?"

"No."

"Remarquable - strange ..."

The men marched along the lake and approached the road windings that led past Mount Thor on the left, when two glaring eyes appeared in the distance in front of them.

"Vite!" the Frenchman groaned and jumped into the darkness to the left.

The Germans followed without hesitation. Not a moment too soon, because the flashing eyes grew larger and larger and at the same time the whirring of an engine increased. Gutmann and Reimer huddled close to the ground in the ditch and remained motionless until the fast-approaching car came to a halt.

whizzed past.

"Uninvited night owls!" Gutmann raged as he struggled to get up. "The peace of the night seems to be over here too."

The Linzer just grumbled. Like a shadowy spectre, the Frenchman, who had previously evaded any possible control with a soldierly fixation, reappeared several metres ahead of them. Without another word and following a simultaneous intuition, they set off one after the other. With the beginning of the road windings that led past the Pic du Saint Barthelmy, increased caution was in order, as these did not allow any visibility at a distance. Marching in single file at a distance of two to three paces, they had an easier chance of jumping off the road in one leap.

The Frenchman had proved his worth in this small previous incident. It may be true that he also had no reason to be questioned by any authority. The two airmen felt increasing sympathy for the man who was leading the way.

Now they had the mighty massif of the Taborberg towering beside them. The widening of the valley with the Druid Lake was over and the abutting mountains on either side of the valley narrowed the sky. Somewhere nearby, an owl hooted. The romance of the magical valley turned into a slight sense of oppression.

The stranger marched at a fast pace. The

Unaccustomed to walking for so long, especially with luggage, the two officers had trouble following and suppressing a curse. Nevertheless, they were careful not to increase the distance between them.

In time, they also got the pic behind them and in its place a forest ridge continued, which brightened up the nocturnal valley a little. "This is the forest of Serralunga," the guide called quietly to the companions following behind.

They marched on along the road for a while, then, at the Frenchman's request, they turned left into the bushes and struggled through an ascending stony forest. Not too too soon, because immediately afterwards another car approached from the north at a rapid pace. The border area of the Pyrenees was also very restless in its more remote parts. To our exasperation, not too not too far far away a mutt behind behind the disappearing wagon. The restlessness of the night also spread to the animals in the neighbouring farmsteads. For a while they travelled through a gently rising, narrow valley, then the men had to climb up a steep slope. After crossing the forest saddle that completed the ascent, they slipped and stumbled downhill again in the darkness on the other side. The airmen, who were unaccustomed to long marches, had a hard time despite the rising morning freshness a sweaty backs and were beginning to feel tired. After a flat valley stretch along the forest, the

The Frenchman went back into the woods and then stopped. "If we were to continue along the bottom of the valley, we would immediately come across the village of Ax les Thermes. It's a health resort, but the controls are very strict at the moment!"

"How much further?" Gutmann enquired.

"About twenty minutes!"

Looking back, they saw villages that betrayed a relatively close settlement of the Sabarthé. Pointing to a large group of houses half right behind them, the guide explained: "That's where Caussou is!" The dark crags of the mountains behind them intensified the contrast between the beads of light and the darkness from which they seemed to glow brightly.

Keeping to the left, they stumbled through the undergrowth of the Bois de la Soulane, sweating and swearing quietly. By their reckoning, they must have wandered between the trees for more than half an hour when they reached the edge of the forest. From two sides, half-left and half-right, lights flashed close by. The Frenchman explained again: "The small villages of Ignaux and Sorgeat. Behind them, the larger gathering of lights, that's Ax les Thermes!"

"Well - ?" Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. The stranger had noticed the hesitation and the exchange of glances. He smiled again: "I'll take a few steps to the side so that you can speak undisturbed ... Or if you no longer need me ...?"

Gutmann approached the Frenchman and grabbed him



by the arm. "Don't be displeased if we do something

seem closed. I think we both have nothing to reproach ourselves for in this respect, because the grotesqueness of our encounter is probably explanation enough. Nevertheless, we have you to thank for the fact that we were able to reach our first destination so quickly and relatively easily. We will probably also have to cross over to Spain quickly, perhaps it would even be good if we stayed together even longer!"

The stranger nodded. "That would be very good indeed! Three men - that's a good number! - But now - where to? ..."

"We're looking for a farmer near Ax les Thermes who knows a Belisse!"

"Mon dieu! - You two are living enigmas - I don't know the man, but I know the name Belisse!"

"Ah!" Now it was the Germans' turn to be amazed.

Now it was the Frenchman who approached the officers: "From the few sentences I heard from you, I realised that you seem to know as much about this country and its history as the old-timers. I have already expressed my astonishment to you in the Val de l'incant. Do you have any connections with the circle to which Belisse belongs?" The questioner's eyes were wide and enquiring.

"I don't know exactly which circle you're aiming at. There are several possibilities. The most likely: that would be the circle of the Cathar tradition. If this Belisse is close to this tradition, then

He certainly has my personal sympathy!"

"Magnifique! - The great mystery is unravelling!" He turned his attention to the locations for a few seconds, then continued:

"I think we'll find time to talk more about these things. I will take it upon myself to track down this Belisse. If I'm not mistaken, I've already heard that he lives in a small house to the side of Sorgeat, near the village of Ascou. Let's set off to the left and then I'll go ahead a little later and ask for Belisse. Let's go right away - avant!"

They scurried cautiously along the edge of the forest until, after a while, the guide stopped. Surveying the surroundings, the stranger said:

"Stay here, camarades! If I'm not back in two hours or if there's any shooting, then get out into the forest immediately. Then I'm out of luck. Au revoir!"

"Stop!" Gutmann shouted louder than was necessary. "We can't expose them to unnecessary danger! If we have to, then at least all three of us will go."

The Frenchman turned back: "I know the Germans are good mates! I've already experienced that several times. But it's better and easier if I go alone. Three men are always suspicious in this neighbourhood now. Everything will be fine ..." He nodded briefly, then pushed back the branches of a bush and stepped into the open of the pale night sky

field. His figure moved away quickly and the grassy ground swallowed the sound of his footsteps.

"We've started a nice story. What if it goes well? ..." Reimer looked around nervously.

Gutmann puffed him. "Don't worry!" With equanimity, he pulled a blanket out of his luggage, rolled it up and sat down on it.

"We have walked long enough and bumped our snouts on the trees. Our mother Europe didn't make it too easy for us to return to her sacred realms. Take your blanket and sit down too!"

"Mother Europe - it's a crazy patch of earth!" Reimer now also pulled his blanket out of his pack and squatted down next to his comrade, disgruntled. "I had a different idea of our return. Instead of being at home, we're now squatting like secret gnomes on the border of two foreign countries, always unsure what the next day will bring!"

"Just like in war," Gutmann mocked.

Reimer looked at him. "Hm - you're actually right. It's true: according to the radio reports, only the shooting has stopped, but the war is still going on ..."

The men were now silent. Minutes passed. From somewhere inside the forest came the croaking call of an owl. Midnight had long since passed, but cones of light from moving cars still cut through the darkness. The bright wedges briefly and eerily illuminated trees and houses along the roads,

They emerged brightly from the black of the night and immediately disappeared behind them again. The sound of the vehicle engines then penetrated the peace of the night like a malicious, dangerous buzzing.

An hour had long since passed and still no one had turned up. Those waiting became restless. Slowly, they felt the cold of the night coming up.

Just as Reimer was about to get up, he and Gutmann spotted a shadowy figure in the distance of the field, revealing a man hurrying towards them. The night traveller kept to the fairly precise direction with sure steps, which must have led him infallibly to the two observers. It was the Frenchman returning from his reconnaissance.

Gutmann recognised himself by shouting softly. In just a few steps, the man was with the two Germans.

"Parbleu!" grumbled the newcomer half aloud as he stood in the sheltering darkness of the trees, "You didn't tell me the name of the farmer who is supposed to have a connection to Belisse. By chance, I met a resident of this village who was returning home from Ax les Thermes, late and in a good mood. I asked him straight away if a certain Belisse was known here. The man said yes!"

"Ah!" said Gutmann. "And...?"

"Belisse had lived here with a certain Dubois!"

"Right - that was the name of the farmer I went to

call forgot!"

The Frenchman waved him off, "There are countless Dubois in France! - Just like there are many Meier names in Germany. There may even be some namesakes here in Sorgeat."

"Good, good," Gutmann interjected. "What about Belisse now?"

"I'm sorry, but the man you're looking for has disappeared! And so has the farmer Dubois!"

"What a nice present!" cursed Reimer.

The man from Carcassonne shrugged his shoulders.

"In these troubled times, that's not unusual. Anyone who is even suspected of collaborating with the Germans is being persecuted. The lynch law of the Marquis has already claimed countless victims. And as for Belisse, I know that he was friendly to the Germans because he foresaw the chaos coming with the East."

"Belisse seems to be a valuable man," Gutmann said cautiously. "You seem to sympathise with him?"

"I've already told you that I'm a refugee myself. So I have a lot in common with the man you're looking for!"

"... and I won't find it now," Gutmann added resignedly.

"Olalá, you never know!" The Frenchman raised his palms reassuringly. "The extraordinary situation we find ourselves in here will probably allow us to put aside reservations and misgivings."

leave. If you want to tell me why you're looking for Belisse? ..."

Gutmann looked at Reimer. Despite the darkness, he saw that the man from Linz was nodding. Then he turned back to the questioner: "We're looking for the man to save him!"

"Ah - les allemands want to save Belisse? - Très remarquable! - But at the moment it seems that you, mes camarades, are in more urgent need of help!"

"You bet!" Reimer confirmed this statement. He had felt safer in the Arctic than here on his home continent.

"Camarades, you have a sense of reality! - I will try to help you. If a hunch turns out to be correct, we may find the man we're looking for in a few hours. We want to use the night to penetrate as far as the Sabarthé caves. But that has to be now, because the surrounding area will certainly be under observation during the day!"

"Miracles still happen," murmured the Linzer.

"The whole world is one big miracle that dissolves into many small miracles," laughed the Frenchman quietly.

The officers picked up their blankets and slung them over their rucksacks, which they then shouldered. "Ready, messieurs?"

"Done!"

The Carcassonner took the lead and headed north-west along the edge of the field in the shade of the tall forest trees. Passing Ignaux, they crossed a few fields to reach the edge of the Bois de Comines

to hurry on. To their left, they passed Savignac and Vaychis. The Frenchman quietly called all the places by name. As they left the wooded hill behind, the Pic Calmont, over thirteen hundred metres high, loomed up before them, with the village of Perles at its feet on the road. Along the length of the march, the men were followed by the roar of the Ariège River, which roared its waters through the valley, which was dark in places.

"Attention!" the guide suddenly warned. "We are now crossing the road that we travelled through the magic valley."

The men peered cautiously in all directions, then hurried a little above the fork into the darkness opposite. Rugged walls rose out of the black of the forest into the night. They were the steep walls that led to the plateau of the Lujatberg.

The Frenchman paused for a moment. "All around here are the caves of Sabarthès, the last refuge of the Albigenses, whose destiny was fulfilled more than seven hundred years ago. Behind us lies the magnificent Fontanet cave. A stalactite cave that stretches for kilometres into the rock. Diagonally opposite on the other side of the valley is the Lombrive cave, which we may have to visit. For now, we want to visit the Spulga of Ornolac and the two neighbouring caves a little further on this side."

Now, under the guidance of the Provençal, they climbed uphill through the overgrown undergrowth, in parts



following a narrow path that they could barely see and could only guess by the lack of obstacles.

At the beginning of the arduous climb, Reimer had asked: "What are coil gases?"

"Spulgas are fortified caves whose entrances were walled up. This is where the Albigensians successfully defended themselves against their pursuers until they later succumbed to primitive life and lack of food," explained the Frenchman. "The most famous spulgas are those of Ormolac and, on the other side behind us, those of Bouan!" The man from Carcasson raised his arm and indicated the direction.

The velvet blackness of the night slowly began to change to a pale colour. The cold increased and fine swathes of incipient ground fog appeared in the incision of the Ariège. Winding their way through the undergrowth, the men suddenly stood on a small slope in front of towering rocks. The light of the dull twinkling stars and the moon, half covered by a cloud, revealed a dark opening that seemed to have been blocked by a tangle of stones, a ruined wall.

"The Spulga of Ormolac!"

"This is where Belisse should be?" asked Reimer, somewhat incredulously.

"Hardly," the guide replied. "Of the three nearby caves, only the second closest would come into question first; Las gleyso!"

"Gleyso - a church," Gutmann explained to the Linzer.

"The cave domes of the Cathars!"

The men continued on their way. They slipped a little

downwards, then they continued in the same direction along the steep rock face. The light of the stars became duller, the moon, which had emerged from the clouds, lost its glow and seemed to grow tired. The wild natural landscape, animated by the myth of a past, spoke a silent language of revelation to the seekers. Parzival had once ridden through this valley as a seeker. Wolfram von Eschenbach sang of a cave in this landscape where Parzival met the hermit Trevrizent. Trevrizent, the Cathar who accepted the viscount of Carcassonne, the young Ramon Roger Trencavel, into the Minne Church. Trencavel became the mythical Parzival, who was poisoned in a tower in Béziers at the behest of the Roman Church. The hermit Trevrizent was called Guilhabert of Castres.

Trees and undergrowth covered a myriad of caves. Caves and grottos kilometres deep. A natural troglodyte city may have existed here in ancient times. Celtic and Iberian sanctuaries were located here, ancient places of worship and Cathar ideograms, which resulted in a surprisingly similar symbolism with an early Nordic-Atlantic culture. The mythical imprint of the Sabarthé exuded a magic that awakened suspicions even in the ignorant.

The men were very tired. The physical tension also played its part. The grey of the passing night that gave birth to the morning made their progress a little easier.

Slowly fig trees, elms, even grotesque weather firs and thorny undergrowth became distinguishable.

"Las gleyosos!" Standing on a narrow path, the Provençal pointed to the opening of a huge cave. "Now we should have full lamps so we don't have to save on light. Torches will do in a pinch. We won't get far with them. And my battery is almost flat!"

"We have lamps with us," said Gutmann. "We just have to get them out of the rucksack."

"They're in the outer pockets," explained the man from Linz, who was better informed about the packing. "Why shouldn't our lamps be enough?"

"Bah," said the Carcassonner. "Do you know how deep the Gleyso is? - You could walk for hours!"

Both officers took the lamps out of their rucksack pockets. Gutmann handed his to the Frenchman and asked him to lead on. "Do you think Belisse could be found here?"

"Why not? - Las gleyosos and the nearby cave of Lombrives have a myriad of branches that provide excellent hiding places. It could very well be there or thereabouts. There is hardly any research here because it is hopeless to find out who is being chased. Unless you wait until hunger drives him out."

"I think it's more likely to be a lindworm in tails than a persecuted person," sneered Reimer.

"Hm," said the Frenchman. "Hunger can hurt ..."

"Just a moment!" said Gutmann, as the man from

Carcassonne prepared to enter the cave. He took off his rucksack and took out a bottle of cognac. "We want to warm up inside before we walk into the womb of Mother Earth." He handed the bottle to the Frenchman Irin. "Drink up, mate!"

"Oh, that's good when a German says comrade! It's like a great alliance! Cheers, mes camarades!" He took a big swig and handed the bottle back with thanks. After him, the Germans fortified themselves.

"Now, avant!" The Provençal took another look up at the sky, the edge of the horizon gradually beginning to colour with a greenish-yellow glow. The stars only blinked lazily.

The officers followed close behind their guide, who lit the way. There were traces of smoke on the walls of the rock corridor as high as a man's head, which might have been caused by torches. Possibly from a bygone era. They only penetrated a short distance inside, then the Frenchman stopped and let out a bright shout. The cry rolled on like the gobbling of a turkey and died away in the depths of the corridor. The Carcassonner repeated the cry several times, but nothing moved. Only a few bats suddenly fluttered past the flinching men.

"A satanic hole," cursed Reimer.

"Wrong," Gutmann rebuked the Linzer. "It's the stone kingdom of Lucifer, the light bearer! - From these

The pure spirit and the natural realisation of primeval times, whose symbolism can still be found in various places in these caves, will one day come to light again through these gates. And just as the pure ones, the Cathari, found the bridges that led them back to the primeval and drew them back to the stars after they had gained the strength for endura or steadfastness here, so the Light Saviour will support the called ones at the time of the Great Turning."

"When will that be - this turning point?" The Frenchman had grabbed Gutmann by the arm.

"You won't know what the connections are that I was aiming at."

The small cone of light from the torch in the guide's hand danced on the light-coloured limestone floor of the cave. The Frenchman's face remained in darkness and the two officers could not see the subtle smile. "With Lucifer, the horned one, the north rises! The ancient Cretans called the sun: Abellio! - Apollo - but Abellio was the biblical Abel, who was slain by the Semitic Cain. - The desert had killed the north. But when the sun, the eternally victorious one, rises again from the dark womb in the cosmic cycle, then that is the beginning of the turning point. And I know the time is ripe!"

At first, the two officers were so surprised by the man's words that they were unable to reply immediately. But Gutmann quickly regained his composure. "If I make this statement

in Brittany, I could still understand it. Here, I would have expected such references only from the Belisse I was looking for. So there still seems to be a strong tradition in Provence and also in the Pyrenees."

"You might have expected that, monsieur!"

"I underestimated the power of knowledge," Gutmann confessed.

"Remember, mes camarades, this was the home of the Grals!"

"We know that - that's why the Mani had to reveal itself from here!"

"Certainement! It has a force field here; the Albigensians or Cathars used to celebrate their supreme festival: the Manisola! - the feast of the Comforter. The Mani took centre stage as a symbol of the spirit; a shining gemstone that illuminates the world! It also symbolises the Buddhist law and dispels the night of error. I heard some time ago that it was Belisse who claimed that the signs in the sky would increase in about two years. Flaming discs will rise from the bosom of the earth! ..."

Reimer wanted to speak, but the Frenchman had abruptly turned away and strode past the two officers towards the exit. The men trotted back in silence. When they reached the exit, an intense red strip of horizon shone out towards them. Eos, the dawn of the new day, covered the legendary landscape with her

shining greeting. The men stood for a moment, lost in admiration. There was an unreal glow on their faces that blurred everything hard and sorrowful. The sky coloured red. Reimer leaned wearily against the rock face. Turning to the Provençal, he asked: "Do you think Belisse or anyone else would have responded to your call? - Persecuted people are suspicious!"

"You are very right, mon camarade! However, it can be assumed that no-one will penetrate unnecessarily far into the interior of the caves, as there is likely to be a lack of light. With a little attention, you can feel safe even within sight of the exit. At least not too far from it, because the dark interior has dangerous crevices and chasms."

"What now?" Gutmann urged.

"I don't think it's wise to do anything now," said the Provençal. "If you want to take our advice, then we'll take shelter somewhere here and rest during the day. Towards evening, we'll cross over to the other side of the valley and try the Lombrives cave. I have a feeling that we'll have more success with our search on the opposite side."

"A sensible suggestion!" confirmed the man from Linz.

"A good night's sleep can't hurt." He yawned heartily.

"Bien! - So go on."

Tired, somewhat frozen and scratched by branches, the hikers arrived at the Lujat plateau, which



which in places plunged vertically into the Ariège valley. Between dense bramble hedges and hawthorn bushes, there was an artificially extended vault in the mountain, which the three men found very suitable for their day's rest.

"Un moment! I want to see if there are no snakes here first." The Carcassonner scanned the alcoves before making a reassuring gesture. "Everything's fine!"

The two officers spread out the blankets and pulled out a snack, which they shared with their companion. Then they drew lots for the order of the watch. The first two hours fell to Reimer, who was not particularly pleased. Shortly afterwards Gutmann and the Frenchman were fast asleep, while the Linzer stared with burning eyes into the brilliant light of the rising sun.

By the time the light of day was fading and the first dark shadows were slipping across the landscape, the men were ready to march again and fully rested. They took advantage of the twilight of the fading day to work their way out of the tangled thicket of undergrowth. Near the slope of the plateau, the guide looked for a good descent to avoid detours in the darkness.

During the short wait until nightfall, the Provençal explained: "We came down a section of the old Cathar Way. The cave where we stopped for the day was an old resting place that was later converted into a cave."

Forgotten. Strangers find it hard to find and the locals don't care much about it."

With the twinkling of the stars, the men set off. The officers now also had a good sense of direction, as they had studied the map of the area in detail during the day. The Frenchman had explained the intended route to them.

They arrived unchallenged after the descent over the Ariège. Using narrow paths in places, they reached their destination more quickly than expected. This time it was the well-known cave of Lombrives, at the entrance to which they now stood. As they entered, they realised by the faint glow of their torches that they had entered a huge cave dome, in the vastness of which the thin cones of light were lost.

The men advanced to the second part of the branching labyrinth of caves. Via a natural stone staircase, they finally reached an abruptly plunging ravine of incalculable depth. They had now travelled along the main path without finding any trace of people. They did not venture into the ramifications of the corridors; it was also unlikely that fugitives would hide too deep. At least they had to stay close to the main corridor.

The man from Carcassonne had called out repeatedly. Even when Belisse's name was mentioned, only a muffled echo had responded. Turning round, the men's gaze fell on a large overhanging

A boulder, from which a stalactite club hung down.

"An impressive natural spectacle!" Reimer exclaimed enthusiastically.

The Provençal nodded. "The people of this region call the stone with the club the tomb of Heracles. Here, in the depths of the huge cave, there is said to be an underground palace where a king once lived a long time ago who had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Pyrene. At that time, Heracles is said to have found hospitality here, and he and Pyrene fell in love with each other. When his thirst for adventure drew him away again, her Pyrene followed in despair, as she was carrying a child under her heart and feared her father's wrath. On the way, she was attacked by wild animals. As she screamed in terror for help, Heracles heard her cries and came back to help her. However, all he found was Pyrene's body. In wild anguish, he buried his beloved in the mountain. Since then, the mountain ranges have also been called the Pyrenees. - Here in the cave, by a lake, are three stalactite rocks, which are said to be the tomb of Pyrene, the tomb of King Bebryx and his throne."

"And does Pyrene still have a mythical meaning?" asked Gutmann.

"Yes," said the man from Carcassonne. "Pyrene is said to have been the goddess Venus!"

"It was a truly fortunate coincidence that brought us together," said the Linz native. "Some knowledge is complemented by rare opportunities."

"Perhaps destiny..." An indeterminate smile played around the Frenchman's lips.

"Are you a bit fatalistic?" Reimer showed some astonishment.

"Non, monsieur! Fatalism is an inevitable acceptance. I am a supporter of shaping fate, i.e. the realisation of a destiny!"

As the two Germans remained silent and once again scanned the rocky hall, the Provençal slowly turned to retreat. Still murmuring words of admiration and amazement, the officers followed him. Then the beam of light from Reimer's lamp hit a drawing on the rock face. It depicted a charcoal-drawn ship with a sun for a sail.

"Oh - what's that?" The Linzer stopped and lured his companions back.

This time Gutmann immediately gave an explanation: "This is an old ship of the dead with the life-bringing mother of the stars. An ancient symbol from the Atlantean-Nordic culture of the megalithic age, which has survived in tradition right up to the Cagots, the Cathar Goths! And there - look - the symbol of the man-rune!" Surprised himself, he pointed to an obvious runic symbol.

The Carcassonner made a sweeping gesture: "Signs and symbols of this and similar kinds can also be found in the other caves of the Sabarthés. There are also bones and artefacts from the Albigenian period in the deeper interior."

The men moved on. When they returned to the first part of the Gleyso Cave, they had to realise that here, too, their hopes of successful exploration were in vain. The growing displeasure overshadowed the great interest in the natural beauties in the bosom of the mountain. Not least the fear of being caught by a patrol.

Despite the failure, they were glad to be able to step out of the cave into the night-time open air again. The mysterious hissing and roaring from inside stayed in their ears for a while.

"What now?" Reimer's mood hit rock bottom.

"Go on," said the Provençal briefly.

They were not far from the cave when all three men stopped walking at the same time. Not far ahead of them, a branch had cracked very audibly.

"Shh!" The Frenchman raised his arm in warning.

Again, sounds reached the ears of those listening. Leaves crunched. Not far from them, a person was making his way through the thicket. He must have been about five or six paces ahead of them when the Carcassonner suddenly exclaimed: "Stop camarade! - fuyard aussi? - Fugitive?"

It immediately became quiet. Not a sound around. Not even a leaf rustled. "I wouldn't report immediately either," Reimer remarked dryly. He didn't even speak excessively quietly, for it was quite clear that a single person could not be an executive in the night. The man in front of them must have heard the words,

probably without understanding them. Instead of an answer, a soft grinding sound was heard, indicating a cautious retreat.

The Provençal shouted a few reassuring sentences and now an answer came back. The man from the darkness asked who he was looking at. The answer he was given seemed to satisfy him, because branches cracked again, then a medium-sized man suddenly stepped out of the bushes in front of them.

He had a sack slung over his back.

Both Frenchmen spoke hurriedly in their dialect. Then the man from Carcasson turned to the two officers and told them that the man was supplying a group of refugees. He also knew the name Belisse; the man was said to still be in the area. He might be able to make a connection by the following evening!"

"Excellent!" Gutmann exclaimed. "Maintenant - one more day!"

"This period will pass quickly," Reimer interjected cheerfully.

The Carcassonner exchanged a few more sentences with his compatriot. He turned to his companions again: "The man suggests that we accompany him. He would be prepared to lead us to a small, little-known cave where we could spend the rest of the night and the next day. In the evening he would then come round and bring us a message. I think this is a very good idea

happy!"

"Agreed!"

The cave indicated was not far away. It seemed to be in the direction the man would have taken anyway, as he was so willing to lead despite his pack. He had turned down an offer from the Carcassooner to help him carry it.

Before reaching the new destination, the guide warned: "Attention, messsieurs - check for snakes before you lie down!" He said goodbye, promising once again to return the next evening. A brief rustle and the night had swallowed the man up again.

The men's new home was an excellent, secluded hiding place. As they spread out their blankets, Linz joked: "We're well on the way to becoming cave dwellers. If we carry on like this, we'll regress to Neanderthals or even amphibians ..."

The Provençal, however, pretended not to have heard and said abruptly: "We have been extraordinarily lucky. The man is from Bouan, so he's very close to here and seems to play an important intermediary role or be a link. Something like your farmer Dubois at Ignaux. If we ever have a chance of finding Belisse, this is it!"

## THE KNOWLEDGE

What you cannot touch is miles away,  
What you do not grasp, you lack  
completely;  
What you do not reckon, you believe  
is not true;  
What you do not weigh has no weight for  
you;  
What you do not coin, you think is not  
valid.

Goethe

The next day was rainy. Clouds occasionally veiled the mountain peaks and marred the landscape. The cold, damp air drew into the small cave and made the three men shiver.

It cleared up towards evening. The leaves of the trees and bushes hung heavy with drops. The forest smelled and the earth steamed. Forest birds were still awake and heralded the change from day to night with their enticing songs. Gradually, the darkening sky became dotted with shimmering stars.

The patience of those waiting was put to the test. They kept quiet so as not to miss any sounds.



It rustled once. Some kind of animal. Later, an owl called.

The brief interruptions in the lingering silence in the forest kept the men's tension high.

The togetherness and the relationship of dependence that developed between the Germans and the Frenchman gave them a mutually reassuring feeling of increased security. The two officers did not yet know the name of the man from Carcassonne, nor did he know the names of his companions. And they did not even realise the strangeness of this state of affairs.

The hands of the wristwatches moved steadily. The silver ball of the moon hung high on the night zenith. The outlines of bizarre tree branches stood out like sharp silhouettes against the illuminated velvet of the wide sky.

There - a slight creak - silence. - Then again - a crack. A rustling sound!

The three men reached for their pistols. With short grips they had realised that they had heard the noises. Again a branch snapped somewhere in front of them in the darkness.

The men's senses were tense. There was no longer any doubt that something alive was approaching. Judging by the subtle sounds, the distance to the cave must have been barely more than a dozen paces. At this moment of mutual appraisal, a soft call came: "Etes-vous ici - are you here?"

The Carcassonner half shouted back, "Who's ahead of us?"

"The man with the sack from the night before," it came

promptly in response.

"Bien - come here!"

Now the forest floor rustled and two figures emerged from the darkness. They approached quickly and stopped two steps away from the cave entrance, clearly visible. One was a tall and strong man, the other smaller. The latter was obviously the guide from the previous evening. He said: "Come out!"

Without hesitation, the three people called stepped outside. Gutmann asked without introduction: "What about Belisse?" The tall, broad-shouldered man stepped in front of the little boy.

"That's me!"

A few seconds of silence. The two Germans were surprised, the arrivals patient. Gutmann cautiously tried to check the accuracy of the man's claim. He quickly regained his composure. "Is the name Belisse branched out here?"

"No," the interviewee replied curtly.

"Are you expecting messengers, sir?"

"As the case may be." The tone sounded mocking. "Perhaps you will tell me first, messieurs, where you are from and what you want from me!"

Gutmann endeavoured to appear calm. "We've come from the Arctic to get you!"

"Parbleu!" The tall man came right up to Gutmann. "What did you just say?"

"We come from the far north!"

"Impossible - not possible!"

The Carcassonner was a step surprised at first

stepped back, now he chuckled softly and mingled:

"I didn't know that myself, but I think it's possible. Les deux allemands arrived on the Montségur just as a mysterious aeroplane was making a few rounds and then disappeared again."

"Well - I already said that I am Belisse. Who are you?"

Gutmann introduced himself and Reimer. "Here - our guide from Carcassonne -"

"Pierre Frêne," he suddenly added readily.

"Frêne?" Belisse took a closer look at the man. "I've already heard your name!"

"Why not? - They're looking for me!"

"Pourquoi - why?"

Frêne briefly asked the counter-question: "Why are you in the woods?" Belisse said nothing more. He waited until Gutmann continued his explanations. Encouragingly, he remarked: "Go ahead and speak German! I speak the language well. My companion won't understand any of it, and he's reliable."

The Carcassonner politely interjected, "Shall I take a step back?"

Both officers exchanged a glance. "Stay," Gutmann replied. With a few sentences, he then addressed his order to Belisse. A look of boundless amazement appeared on the face of the man he was looking for. With a few sentences he revealed that he knew the polar tradition, but despite his far-reaching

connections that it was given a meaning of its own, as expressed by sending messengers from a northern militant base. The hasty yet detailed conversation revealed a broadly shared knowledge of the connections between the events in the background and the forces at work.

Belisse's reticence disappeared completely. The last message he had received, to continue his work in the secure seclusion of a well-protected base, meant possibilities that were not available to him at the moment. Nevertheless, he was unable to make up his mind without thinking.

The other three men surrounded the two speakers expectantly. The two other Frenchmen realised that this nocturnal meeting had special significance and remained motionless.

Concluding the lengthy conversation, Belisse explained: "The time is fast approaching, messieurs! I suggest you stay here in the cave and I'll come back to you at dawn. We will then have a whole day to discuss things in detail. Do you agree, messieurs?"

"Your proposal is actually excellent," Gutmann confirmed approvingly.

"I'm glad you accept. So let's stick to it, I'll be back in a few hours. Until then - au revoir!" He held out his right hand to the three men

and forcefully squeezed their hands. A few seconds later, his tall, powerful figure had disappeared behind the leader in front of him into the darkness of the forest. Only the faint sound of moving undergrowth accompanied the disappearance of the night walkers.

Now the Carcassonner approached his German comrades again. "Thank you for your trust, mes camarades! Our previous conversations have already revealed many surprising points of contact, we are very close. You can count on me for as long as you need me!"

"I am extremely surprised," admitted Reimer, "that you show no particular surprise, since you are not one of the people around Belisse!"

"If not exactly that, but I'm very familiar with all the things in my immediate homeland. This also includes knowledge of certain circles ..."

"All that has already been established anyway!" Gutmann interrupted impatiently. "No offence, but it would be better not to turn night into day now." And he jokingly ordered: "March into the cave and get a good night's sleep!"

Reimer and Frêne reluctantly followed the request. So all three men stumbled back into the cave and rolled under the blankets. As a precaution, they didn't decide to keep watch; besides, one of them always had to wait for Belisse at dawn as agreed.

It was Gutmann who was the first to lean against the entrance and stare at the flickering stars. The surprising nature of the previous encounter had excited him more than he wanted to admit. So he was even grateful for an hour of reflection.

It was already broad daylight when a nearby call signalled the arrival of the expected figure. The leaves on the ground rustled again and the tall figure of the night walker emerged from the undergrowth. The man crossed the small, gentle slope. The shadow of large overhanging branches of old giant trees did not prevent Belisse from being easily recognised as he approached.

The Goths in this country must once have looked like him. A fine, aristocratic head sat atop his massive body; steel-blue eyes flashed out from under bushy brows, his nose resembled a sharp beak and his prominent, prominent chin showed a great deal of energy. His ice-grey hair was the only visible sign of his advanced age. His springy steps, however, were those of a young man.

When the three men approached him, he paused briefly to scrutinise them too.

"Bon jour, messieurs! I hope you spent the second half of the night well?" There was a broad smile on his face, a strange contrast to his otherwise stern features. He entered the small cave informally and unceremoniously and sat down on a small boulder. Stretching his legs out and then bending them again, he pretended without fuss to be

he would have been a member of the small community for a long time.

Reimer put together a small breakfast from the scant provisions, which Belisse eagerly partook of. He asked the two Germans a series of general questions, the answers to which filled him with obvious satisfaction. In the course of less than an hour, the bond between the men was fully established. The whim of fate had turned them all into the hunted and forced them into the close-knit community that always arises in times of need.

Belisse was amused as he listened to the description of the search for him. He thought the Carcassonne's behaviour was quite logical, but he pointed out that under the circumstances, without sufficient provisions and permanent lamps, hiding in the deep giant caves would not be advisable. He would therefore have preferred to do exactly what one would hardly expect in this area; he stayed in the open. He told his attentive listeners that he had already left his home in the days after the German capitulation, as his personal safety no longer allowed him to stay. He had already been subjected to harassment months before. It was enough, he reported, to know that he was one of the men in the district who clung to traditions and had a different field of vision and thinking than was desirable at the time. There was only an absolutism of the opinions now prevailing. To



to avoid imminent arrest and thus an uncertain fate, he had to abandon everything.

Gutmann wanted to know what mau was accusing him of in particular.

"The acquaintance with a German who was a keen speleologist some time ago and had a lot of knowledge," Belisse replied.

"And that alone is enough?"

Belisse smiled enigmatically. "It's not that alone. It's just a tangible occasion!"

Frêne made a disdainful gesture. "Hand-grabbing occasions? - Pah, - before I made my way here, hundreds were arrested in our neighbourhood for no particular reason and some were even killed. Politics is often just a cloak for crime!"

"I have shown many friends across the Pyrenees," the giant continued in his story. "I myself stayed behind because I still had tasks to fulfil."

"Which I hope will be largely fulfilled?" Gutmann asked eagerly.

"Not in any way," the interviewee replied. "Above all, I'm waiting for the signs!"

"And which are these?"

"The Manisolas!"

There was silence for a moment. Then Frêne whispered: "The Mani is coming because the time is being fulfilled!"

"That's the way it is! We have a part to play," emphasised

Belisse. Reimer jumped up from his seat. He didn't even try to hide his partial ignorance, his curiosity got the upper hand. "And what is - the Manisola?"

Belisse looked at him fixedly, then his gaze slowly wandered to Gutmann. When the latter remained silent and thoughtfully drew figures on the floor with a wooden chip, the giant said: "The manisolas are energetic circles of light in the first stage process, which are caused as emanations from the mani, the 'stone', through circular communications. The second structural form of this biomachina is the process of gradual hardening to a crystalline, metallic form with a high zirconium content. As a biomachina, it is feminine here, i.e. material, think of the Great Mother, with an indifferently contained masculine-energetic element. In the third stage of the process, the excretion of the male element begins, which in the highest effect formation gives rise to the central phallus, the archetypal dwarf, the zvirgo!

This is followed by the fourth structure of the complete equilibrium of the generative forces, i.e. a hermaphroditic state. The climax, as archetype monad!

Once this structural culmination point has been exceeded, regeneration begins. The bioenergy corresponds to a state of pregnancy. The sixth process is the splitting, as a result of which the spent male torso, which has been harboured in the womb of the feminine element, falls away and retains the material, female womb form

a maturing, embryonic core."

Here the Linzer interrupted: "Mr Belisse, you're talking about something alive!"

"I'm talking about a biomachina! - Think about the word and you will have the answer yourself! - But continue: The regenerated part is repelled by the remaining mother core as a new energetic circle of light, which corresponds to a birth process. This new circle also enters the same seven developments, while the repelling mother element clusters into a sphere that subsequently detonates. The remaining metallic residue contains copper particles. The visual impressions of these manisolas described so far by eyewitnesses are essentially quite uniform. During the daytime they show a golden or silver, very bright glow, occasionally also pink traces of smoke, which then often dissolve into grey-white condensation trails. At night, the discs glow partly incandescent, partly in glowing shades of colour, occasionally long flames and red and blue sparks appear at the edges, which can intensify into whole sheaves of fire. Remarkable is the ability to react to pursuers, which corresponds to a thinking creature and far surpasses any possible electronic self-control and radio remote control."

As Belisse stopped speaking, the man from Linz turned to Gutmann: "So that would be the luminous disc that gave us the Eskimo magic at the pole?"

"Certainly," Gutmann confirmed. "As you can now see, the effects described and those seen are completely consistent!"

Now it was Belisse again who, for his part, curiously asked about the Arctic incident. Gutmann therefore gave him a detailed account of the experience.

The giant listened with great interest. When Gutmann had finished, Belisse said: "My knowledge and thinking are being confirmed very quickly! - I am firmly convinced that in the next few years the Manisolas will occupy the minds of the whole world. The discs will appear everywhere, but very few people will know what to do with them. Perhaps even an H. G. Wells psychosis of the Battle of the Worlds will emerge first. There will also be much confusion in distinguishing between the biomachina and the constructed discs, especially if the latter create similar optical effects."

"And what could be the driving force?" asked Reimer, still curious.

"Très simple," Belisse said lightly, "it is the azoth bound to the ether, the vril of the ancient Atlanteans, which has the property of a gas, lighter than air. The aether gives it a repulsive effect which, if strong enough, gives it a rapid propulsion, either rotating or in any orbit, depending on the distribution of the force components."

"Yet it is a metaphysical problem?"

"Certainment - absolutely! - There was also a mystery of the Cathar Manisolas here in Sabarthès. The torturers of the Inquisition did not succeed in wresting the knowledge of the Supreme Minne from the Cathars. The secret died for the world at that time with the last Albigensians in the caves of Ormolac."

"And what is the connection to the Grail?" Reimer's head poked forward with extreme excitement, while Frêne showed no particular surprise.

"A direct one," Gutmann interjected, explaining. "According to tradition, Mani herself was an emerald, in which the Cathars also saw the Paraclete, a kind of Paredra of God, a female principle, the mother of the Logos."

"The great mother of the Eskimo and the other primitive peoples," added Reimer, shrewdly grasping the primordial ground.

Gutmann continued: "The Grail of all myths, the Romanesque Mani, was therefore a material object that not only symbolised the physical, physiological and spiritual potencies, but had to possess them due to its special composition. In Provence and Languedoc, the discs of the mani were signatures of the highest minnes. The minstrels and troubadours, the trobadores - the seekers - sang and wrote poetry in the service of this Minne, and thousands died at the stake of the Inquisition."

"Two hundred thousand lansquenets and twenty thousand knights were organised by the Pope and the Archabbot of Cîteaux against our prosperous and happy

country," Frêne suddenly interjected bitterly. "In my home town, Carcassonne, four hundred people who had been left behind, old and sick, were burnt to death. In neighbouring Béziers, a desperate crowd gathered in front of the victors. When a knight asked the archabbot how it would be possible to separate the believers from the heretics, he scornfully replied that they should all be killed, God would find out who was his!"

"It is the dualism of all things, the bipolarity of all being," said Belisse. "Where there is love, you find hate, and where there is goodness, you don't have to look too far for wickedness. The blood of the slaughtered smouldered next to pure minstrelsy." Belisse suddenly raised his voice, almost carelessly loud, and continued: "After Saladin's death, this Innocent the Third wanted to recruit Richard the Lionheart for a new crusade through his envoy Foulques ..."

"These crusades have all sapped Eurofi's biological strength and constantly weakened the dam against the eastern tide," Reimer remarked bitterly in between.

"When Lionheart refused, Foulques became abusive and ordered the king to marry off his three daughters as quickly as possible if he wanted to avoid disaster. The king called him a liar because he had no daughters. Foulques, however, called them by their names: arrogance, greed and fornication. Lionheart was furious at this and replied recklessly: "Well, I'll give the Knights Templar the arrogance, the Cistercians the covetousness and the fornication.

and the prelates the life of pleasure! - As a result, the Pope excommunicated the British king."

Again there was a brief silence. Belisse had become somewhat agitated, which otherwise did not match his superior demeanour. Frêne said: "The old tales tell us that the last Albigenses disappeared in the caves of the Ariège mountains."

"They disappeared to live on in the myth." Gutmann jutted out his chin defiantly. "Whatever the tales may tell and whatever people may believe, the Albigenses are now safe from persecution and have taken the purity of their will with them into the spheres of eternity. This victory is also the triumph over the filthy hatred of the spider with the fish mark."

"With this saying by the troubadour of the time, Peire Cardinal, the Albigensians or the Cathar Goths, as we also call them, demonstrated their Nordic pride and faithfulness," Belisse added. "There are still enough Cagots living in the Pyrenees and they are all proud people. Taciturn and introverted. From time to time, they pay homage to old customs and no one knows how to interpret them when they are unexpectedly joined. Any curiosity bounces off the stubborn silence of the interviewees."

"They don't say that Germanic is heretical for nothing," Reimer interjected.

Frêne added: "This may also have something to do with the fact that old Basque farmhouses are located on the outskirts of the city."

The Swastika sign is still attached to their doorposts as a religious symbol of protection. There are still many traces of ancient traditions. The old Celtic-Iberian Dispater is the Dyaus Pitar mentioned in the old Sanskrit writings, whom the Greeks called Zeus Pater. The Latins, however, called him Jupiter in a distorted form. This ancient Dispater is none other than Ahriman from the tradition of the archaic Aryans."

"You could learn to love this wild country here," said Reimer pensively. "It's a tough country and can give away the impulses of the north."

"That's why I'm staying here," said Belisse firmly.

"My mission is to take you with me at all costs," Gutmann repeated his original introduction to the conversation."

"And my mission is to stay here!" Belisse looked at Gutmann full on.

"What if I force you to come with me?"

Belisse furrowed his brows. "Godfather," he said dismissively. "It's not that simple. Do you have such an order?"

"The order is to find you at all costs and bring you to our base!"

"That's still not violence," laughed Belisse, clearly amused. Then, becoming serious again, he continued: "And what other mission do you have to fulfil here?"

Gutmann sighed. "This order is difficult and impossible enough. That's enough for us. One more order,



that would be too much ..."

"Don't take it tragically," the giant replied. "It's a superstition that forces me to stay."

"And this is - ?"

Belisse hesitated. But then he murmured slowly: "It's my name."

"I don't understand that," Gutmann said open-heartedly and challengingly at the same time.

The giant folded his hands in front of his legs and bent his torso forward. "The god of light Apollo, the Beel - Belenus, is the ancient Celtic Belis."

"Belis - Belisse!" Gutmann called out in surprise.

"Just a coincidence," said the giant. "Yet I am associated with it. A very unfortunate coincidence that binds me here now. There are rumours about many things in Sabarthè and it could be that I die somewhere in a foreign land. Then I would unintentionally take the power of a name from this landscape and that must not happen. As long as the Countess Esclarmonde of Montsegùr and the old traditions of the Cathar Goths are spoken of here, the Atlantean-Nordic imprint will remain. These traditions form a chain that stretches back twenty thousand years. If this stony wilderness could speak, it would fill one of the most exciting books on earth. I am so deeply connected to this mountain world that nothing can take me away from here. No matter what might come."

"I can understand that very well," admitted Reimer.

"My heart and my senses are also attached to my homeland. Nevertheless, I'm travelling everywhere at the moment because I can't go back!" The man from Linz pressed his lips together. "Once, yes. I know it!"

Belisse looked fixedly over the high treetops. "You will see the homeland, but the homeland will not see you ..."

"What does that mean?" Great astonishment and incomprehension painted themselves on Reimer's features. The other men also looked at the giant. Belisse, however, remained stubbornly silent. Frêne stood up and stretched his legs. He had been sitting badly and had developed a slight cramp. He said sullenly into the silence of the men: "The air is thick here, mes amis - we should soon come to an agreement on what to do next. There is really no time and no reason to marvel at the ancient rock paintings in the many caves. We should endeavour to get away from here as soon as possible."

"Very sensibly spoken," agreed Reimer.

"Where do you want to go first from here?" Belisse enquired, giving up his senses.

"Somewhere across the border." Gutmann pointed south with his hand.

"That's too imprecise. You must have a temporary destination, right?"

"Certainly. Our main station is called Toledo!"

"A beautiful journey. It's not easy travelling in Spain at the moment. The Guardia Civil is hard behind the

Foreigners sneaking around the country. But at least when you're on the train, it's not too bad."

"Let's take a look at the maps," Frêne suggested.

"Not necessary for now," Belisse cut him off. "I'll take you across the border myself without you getting into trouble. Rest well now, messieurs, we can leave with the setting sun!"

A large bird flew past low in front of the cave entrance and cast a darting shadow on the small floor area. Somewhere an animal rustled in the undergrowth. In the greenish glow of the horizon, the sun hung like a golden ball and shimmered through the towering treetops of the mighty trees. Dark purple clouds with sparkling orange edges sailed through the velvety blue dome of the sky in a slow, steady procession. Isolated rays of the departing sun flashed across the colourful firmament like golden arrows. Everything breathed the magic of creation.

The man who had accompanied Belisse had left at midday with an assignment. So now the giant and the Carcassonner sat with the two Germans and ate their evening meal together. Despite limited supplies, Gutmann had handed out large enough rations. According to Belisse, they had quite a strenuous march ahead of them.

... from here on something is missing ...

"No," Gutmann replied briefly. "His satchel is still here."

After about ten minutes, the Carcassonner came back.

"If we take Belisse in - there's a small cave not far from here! - We could bury him there ..."

"Then let's go!" Gutmann said resolutely. As the three men stood around the dead man, their expressions were stony. Their jaw muscles were taut as they lifted the body and took it in the direction the Carcassonner was pointing. They stumbled over a stone-strewn narrow passage. Dry branches cracked under their footsteps. The low clouds of a stormy sky and the gusts of wind seemed like a prelude to the Last Judgement. Heavy drops were already falling sporadically. "Quickly!" Gutmann pressed out between his teeth. Reimer left the group and hurried back to catch up with the luggage. Gutmann and Frêne hurried on with the dead man and reached their destination. As soon as they reached the cave found by the Carcassonne man, a storm broke out. A white-grey flash of lightning illuminated the rock cavern and blinded the men.

The Linzer emerged gasping out of the roaring rain and loaded his luggage onto the dry rocky ground. A thin layer of humus absorbed the water as it beaded down. The curls of his hair were sticking to his forehead and his shoulders were wet and shiny.

were jet black from the wet. Nevertheless, he had got off lightly, because after he entered the cave, the rain thickened into a thunderous veil of water. As far as could still be recognised, the narrow channel resembled a wild torrent. In between, lightning flashed in rapid succession and the rolling thunder made the earth tremble. With an almost dramatic furioso, the nature of the Pyrenees greeted its fallen giant, who had returned to the bosom of his homeland.

After almost an hour, the storm was over. With the last fading rumble, the men got up to do their sad work. They took their luggage back outside and then set about collecting stones. Frêne placed the body of his compatriot in a semi-upright position, so that his closed eyes were turned towards the north. After a short time, the men were able to start piling the collected stones in front of the cave entrance. This work took more time than they had previously estimated. When they had finished, their eyes were presented with the image of a natural-looking landslide. Belisse had a found a grave worthy of him.

The sky cleared up a little at midday. The three men were on the march southwards again. This time it was Frêne who led the way.

Without the knowledgeable Belisse, they now had double the

Attention needed. This necessity distracted them somewhat from their oppression. They were already several kilometres away from the giant's cave tomb, which they would always remember as a figure from the past. The last clues that Belisse had painstakingly interpreted for them in the morning made the route much easier with the help of the map. On the other hand, they lacked knowledge of the critical crossing points on the border.

Frêne had a rough idea of where they could hope to have the best chance of crossing, according to the giant. This did not significantly reduce the dangers, but it saved a lot of time and that was already a big gain in every respect. The restlessness drove the men to take only very short breaks in order to get through the Pyrenees as quickly as possible. Once on Spanish soil, everything else was relatively easy.

They pushed through during the night. As if they were on a scouting expedition, they took every precaution and used every safety precaution. At dawn they looked for a resting place in a dense grove of trees.

While Reimer and the Carcassonner rolled up their blankets, Gutmann looked at the map again and noted the location they had reached. He then pointed the way to Lérida and explained the next distant destination to his companions. Among the instructions received was an address for the town mentioned, where Gutmann hoped to find further instructions. On

The men refrained from keeping watch after they had camouflaged themselves well in the thicket against outside view. They were now on foreign soil, but no longer in enemy territory.

The Spanish sun, rising from behind the slopes of the sierras, was kind enough to shine its warming rays through the copse in which the three men were slumbering, heavy with lead.

## SHADOW GAME

The nightly mists flood ever wilder,  
Flashed through with flashes of light  
because' on because';

It flee suddenly all the  
silhouettes,

And victorious looks the Sun's  
source of light.

Friedrich Nietzsche

It was around midday when a train pulled into the Estación del Ferrocarril in Toledo. Gutmann, Reimer and Frêne were among the crowd leaving the station. They had shouldered their luggage and squeezed past the peasants standing around, most of whom were carrying sacks and packs and obstructing the free flow of traffic. They realised with satisfaction that, despite their somewhat different appearances, they didn't really stand out here. Once out of the extended border area, they no longer needed to be overly cautious. Apparent indifference and composure were the best passport to the interior of the country. The journey to Toledo was under a good star.

The men stepped out onto the Paseo de la Rosa and turned towards the nearby Alcantara Bridge, which spanned the Tagus. The river ran in a semicircle around the city,



whose old houses on the steeply rising plateau offered a romantic picture.

Past the Castillo de San Servando, the men crossed the bridge and passed the Gobierno Militar, behind whose walls stood the proud remains of the famous Alcázar. They contented themselves with a quick glance and asked in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento for the address that Gutmann had recorded. A resident in a dark beret showed them the way in great detail.

The street scene they encountered on the way was very lively. Farmers drove their loaded mulas in front of them, Camións sped around the street corners at an alarming pace, men sat in front of a tavern chatting eagerly and the uniforms of the Spanish military kept emerging from the hustle and bustle. Every stranger had to recognise at first glance that the head of state, General Franco, had taken the world situation into account and had brought the Wehrmacht up to a good standard.

The three new arrivals had long since become accustomed to the throaty yet melodious pronunciation of Spanish, and Frêne, as a native of southern France, spoke the language very fluently. Gutmann was also able to make himself understood to some extent. Reimer, who hadn't understood a word at first, proved to be very eager and docile. *Vino* was the first word that the *bon vivant* from Linz promptly remembered. Frêne had laughingly warned him not to do too much of a good thing. The cheap price of the excellent Spanish wine was an easy temptation.

The proverbial brittleness of Spanish girls did not seem to be a rule. Reimer, who nodded mischievously at a young Spanish girl out of exuberance, received a friendly smile that almost sent him over the edge. "My God," he whined as his mates pulled him away, "you don't even know how to behave towards a girl any more ..."

"Very demure and completely restrained," Gutmann explained in a hypocritically serious manner.

"Hm," said the man from Linz, looking at his companions askance.

Following the information they had received earlier, the men turned into a side street off Calle del Pozo Amargo and, after a short, effortless search, stopped in front of an old, unremarkable house. An old man was leaning in front of the entrance, his hands buried in his pockets and squinting into the sun. Gutmann turned to him and asked for Señor Bastia.

"Señor Bastia está en Hospital!"

"In the hospital? - Where?"

"Hospital de San Juan Bautista."

The three men looked at each other, perplexed. The man from Carcasson asked the old man: "Where is the hospital?"

"Next to the Paseo del Madrid," he explained cheerfully. He raised his hand and pointed the way.

Gutmann said casually: "Do you know what's wrong with him?"

"Quien sabé?" muttered the man. "I think it was

an accident." With a jerk, he abandoned his casual demeanour and shuffled inside the house. Apparently he was uncomfortable with superfluous questions,

"A hospital is still better than a cemetery," explained Frêne when he saw Gutmann's perplexed expression.

"That's true," he remarked, "but the two are sometimes very close!"

"Bien, that's right. Then it will probably be best if we go straight to the hospital with the nice-sounding name. At least all doubts and uncertainties will be resolved shortly!"

"We have no other choice anyway. So let's go!"

They suppressed their haste and impatience and strolled in the direction they were shown. The typical Spanish street life delighted them and they couldn't resist buying some of the appetising and cheap fruit on the way, which was delicious. For the two flight officers, the whole thing was a long-lasting picture of profound peace. They were certainly aware of the great excitement of world events from the newspapers and were followed everywhere by the glances of the locals, who were not used to any noticeable tourist traffic, but their behaviour did not arouse suspicion anywhere and they were not bothered by any of the authorities.

They crossed Calle San Juan Dios and came across the green area of the designated Paseo del Madrid. Immediately behind it, they discovered a large old building, which turned out to be the object they were looking for.

This time, the man from Carcasson took it upon himself to ask the hospital porter for Bastia. His French accent made him less conspicuous.

"Señor Bastia? - No se - I don't know! - Ask at the office!"

Frêne waved his mates aside and suggested that Reimer wait at the edge of the park with his luggage. It would look better than three loaded foreigners turning up at the house. It was also easier to avoid unnecessary questions. Both officers immediately agreed to the proposal and Gutmann praised the Frenchman's prudence. While Linz guarded the deposited luggage a little way from the building, the companions passed through the entrance and went into the office. A corpulent and elderly clerical sister was on duty. "Bastia?" she repeated in response to Carcassonne's question. "Bastia - I think that's the man who was brought in here a few days ago. He was mugged, wasn't he?"

The two men looked at each other briefly. "I don't know," said Frêne, slightly embarrassed. "I hope it's not bad with the patient?"

"Would you like to speak to the doctor, senores?"

Frêne looked at Gutmann before continuing. "Hmm - that's unlikely to make much difference to the patient's condition. If it's not particularly bad, we'd like to visit the man!"

"It's not visiting hours now, but I see you're a foreigner. I'll speak to the doctor on duty

to see if the patient can have visitors!" She nodded kindly to her words and looked up the patient's room and bed in a large ledger. Then she picked up the telephone and asked the relevant department for information.

A voice from the other end of the wire rattled from the membrane of the receiver. A short pause. Visibly, the person being questioned obtained some information, then after a final dialogue, the nurse said: "You can speak to the patient for ten minutes. I'll take you to him myself!"

The hospital was an old building and looked more like a convent inside. The nurses hurrying around the corridors with their strange starched head coverings would easily have led to such an assumption had it not been for the pervasive odour of disinfectant. They had to climb a flight of stairs and then walk along a long corridor before the pulpit nurse stopped: "One moment, señores!"

She disappeared behind a door and left the visitors behind. After a few minutes, she came out again accompanied by a doctor and directed him to the visitors. With a friendly greeting, she left.

The doctor made a curt bow. His mumbled name sounded indistinct and his eyes were fixed enquiringly on those standing in front of him. "You are acquainted with Señor Bastia, señores?"

"Whatever you say," Frêne said lightly. "Such a

Casual acquaintance, so to speak." The Carcas sonner showed his white teeth and shone with his southern French temperament. "Señor Bastia is a lovely man and I think he will not only remember me well, but will certainly be pleased to meet me. We met in Geneva at the time. Do you know the city, Doctor? Oh, it's marvellously beautiful there. The climate, the landscape ... We spent some lovely hours together there. I'm very sorry to hear that Señor Bastia is in hospital. Vraiment! - Of course he's in good hands with you, Doctor!"

The doctor didn't answer straight away. He seemed to think for a moment. "Where did you find out that Señor Bastia was here?"

"Oh," replied Frêne, "just imagine, Doctor, we arrive here in Toledo unsuspecting, wanting to surprise Bastia and an old man tells us this unfortunate news at the entrance to the house. Of course we came here immediately. Did he fall, was it a road accident, is it his appendix ... ?"

"The nurse told me that she had already informed you that Señor Bastia was the victim of an assault!"

"Oh lala!" Frêne rolled her eyes theatrically. "I thought it was a stupid joke ...!"

"There are no jokes like that in a hospital!" the doctor reprimanded sternly.

"Perdone me, we didn't want to believe it. You must understand, Doctor ... !"

"What's your name? - Do you both want to go to Bastia?"

The man from Carcasson gave his real name, as did Gutmann, whose name was the same as his Swiss passport. "We'd like to audition together!"

"Señor Bastia has suffered a serious head injury. In view of his condition, I can only allow you a few minutes!"

"Of course we would like to thank you for your responsible approach. You show consideration for both parties!"

The doctor was much more reserved than the Spaniards usually are. He dispensed with the usual polite phrases and only said briefly in advance:

"Entremos, señores!"

Gutmann and Frêne followed at his heels. They entered a large room with two rows of beds. The doctor crossed the room and stopped in front of a small door, which he opened. Only now did he allow the visitors to go ahead.

The second room was small. A single window provided light. Two beds stood against the opposite long walls. Both were occupied. One of the patients had a large head bandage. Of course, this could only be Bastia.

The doctor stopped in the room. Gutmann stepped to the bedside of the bandaged man and gazed into dark eyes that stared at him wide. Frêne positioned himself slightly behind his companion to block the doctor's field of vision. In this way, Gutmann was able to briefly and unobtrusively touch a finger to

his lips. Nevertheless, Bastia made no sign that he had understood.

The moment was somewhat critical. Gutmann took the patient's right hand, which was lying limply on the bedspread, and squeezed it gently. "I am heartbroken to find you here ill, dear friend?" he said as best he could in Spanish. The doctor would have understood French anyway and German was not advisable so as not to arouse suspicion. We still knew nothing about the situation and the doctor's behaviour was strange enough.

At first, Bastia remained silent in response. Then he said in a clear, melodious voice: "I'm very pleased about the unexpected visit?"

Both visitors breathed a sigh of relief. Nevertheless, the sentence was short and didn't say too much. Bastia seemed to be an extremely cautious man who was also quick on the uptake. He had immediately guessed the visitors' silent wish and yet he did not commit himself to anything with his words.

Nevertheless, the greeting was a little strange. The doctor came closer and stood at the head of the bed.

Gutmann put all his eggs in one basket to bring about a quick understanding. "Mr Küpper from Zurich has sent me special greetings for you. You remember his lovely villa by the lake, I think at number one hundred and three! ..."

Bastia moved his head slightly as a sign of affirmation and that he had understood.



"We called him Eos back then. You know ...!"

Eos was the key word that Küpper had given the officers as a watchword. Bastia immediately moved his hand and waved it slightly. "Oh, my friends, I know! - It's a pity you didn't come a few days earlier. Before I had my little accident." At the word accident, he bared his teeth slightly like a tame animal. His teeth had a yellow gleam and his unshaven chin, left bare by the bandage, tightened slightly.

"We regret that very much," Frêne assured him sincerely. He felt that circumstances had prompted him to join in the conversation. The doctor eyed him like a policeman and urged extreme caution.

"I suppose you'll be staying in Toledo for a few days?" Bastia asked.

"Absolutely," Gutmann replied. "We only arrived today!"

"You'll have to be patient for a few days until I'm discharged from hospital. I hope you have some time at your disposal?"

"You underestimate the severity of your injury, Señor Bastia!" the doctor objected. "You'll have to stay with us for a while yet."

The patient was silent again.

"That's enough for today, senores!" said the doctor.

"Un momento!" said Bastia. He turned his

bandaged head with a slight turn towards the visitors. "I assume you have already been to my flat, where you will have been told of my misfortune."

"Surely we were sent here from there?" Gutschmann confirmed.

"Who told you about my misfortune?"

"Oh, some old sky-gazer was standing by the gate."

"Hm - that was Alvaro! - Go back again and tell him to give you the address of Señorita Juana. Juana will take care of your accommodation if you let her know that I have sent you to her. And if you want to visit me again tomorrow

..."

"That goes without saying. Gladly!" Gutschmann and Frêne gently shook hands with the man lying down. "Au revoir! ..." Bastia squinted one eye and then turned his head back. "Hasta luego, amigos!"

The doctor closed the row of departing patients and quietly pulled the door shut behind him. The men walked through the large room and the Spaniard stopped in the corridor. "You've made good use of the few minutes I've allowed you. The high house number and the joking name of the man from Zurich quickly refreshed Señor Bastia's memory."

Gutschmann looked sharply at the doctor. His voice had had a strange sound. Somehow there was hidden irony in it. The officer immediately parried: "What's so strange about that?"

The doctor's smile, intended to be engaging, looked like a grimace. "I didn't mean to offend you with my remark, señores! As a foreigner, you undoubtedly have different feelings to us Spaniards. You were so sober and precise with your few sentences, as only the English or Germans usually are!"

"Mon dieu!" rumbled Frêne, "that's all we need, to be categorised in a foreign nation! Do we look that Germanic?"

The tone of the question was intended to lead past a fact and tempt the interviewee to give in. However, the psychological shot missed the mark. The doctor said briefly: "You certainly look like it!"

"Parbleu - that's the first time I've heard that!" Frêne acted offended.

"You want to come back tomorrow, don't you?" asked the doctor, now distracted.

"We would be very grateful for your permission in this regard!"

"Pues, hasta mañana - Tomorrow, then! - Buenos dias, señores!"

"Mil gracias, doctor!"

For a moment it seemed as if the doctor wanted to say something else, but suddenly he made a sharp U-turn and went back into the ward that they had left together earlier.

Gutmann and the man from Carcasson looked at each other. "A strange chap," said the Frenchman.

"I think we've been pretty clumsy

I was very daunted," Gutmann replied. "But I saw no other way of making the necessary contact. Bastia had to be put in a position to see clearly so that he could help us." As he walked, he said: "Perhaps trained agents would have behaved differently. Something like that is devilishly difficult. And even more so when you have the feeling that there's a catch with Bastia."

"Perhaps Señorita Juana will give us some clarification," Frêne interjected.

"Maybe," Gutmann said monosyllabically.

They left the hospital and hurried to get to Reimer. The man from Linz stood in front of the luggage with his hands clasped backwards, looking bored. No foreign tourist could have looked more snobbish in this pose than Reimer. He was excellent at adapting to a situation. "Everything all right?" asked the Linzer.

Gutmann and Frêne picked up their luggage and while the men headed back, the former informed his comrade of what had happened.

"The main thing is that Bastia is helping us!" said Reimer hopefully. He paid little attention to Gutmann's report on the doctor's strange behaviour. "I'm terribly curious about the Spanish woman!"

When they arrived in front of Bastia's house, Frêne again took it upon himself to find old Alvaro and ask for the

to eat the girls. After a few minutes, he came out of the house with the old man, who pointed them in the direction of Calle de Capuchinos. After some rather detailed explanations, the man shuffled back into the house.

"Come on then!" said Frêne. "This Juana lives in a side alley of the street I mentioned earlier. We'll find her easily."

Reimer grumbled again: "If this goes on, we'll get to know the whole of Toledo like our pocket today. Just keep walking around diligently ..."

It wasn't as bad as Linz had feared. In about ten minutes they had found the designated address. They walked a few steps further and discussed the matter. They came to the conclusion that it would be best if Frêne, as an innocuous Frenchman, went to the señorita first to sound her out.

It wasn't long before Frêne came out of the house. His face had a vague expression. Nevertheless, he showed cheerfulness as he reported:

"Messieurs, despite all the difficulties, we are lucky! - The lady opened the door in person after I rang the bell. Comrade Reimer, you will be very interested to know that the señorita is a Spanish beauty! - And the main thing at the moment is that she will help us with everything until Bastia is able to do it herself! - She sent me down to fetch you."

"All's well that ends well!" said the Linzer cheerfully.

"Let's hope so!" Frêne stopped briefly in the hallway:

"Nevertheless - however we are received, I advise

to be careful!"

"Why?" Gutmann grabbed his companion by the arm.

"I don't really know - maybe it's just a stupid feeling of mine - Oh, - let's go on! ..."

They climbed a flight of stairs. Despite being strangers, they all had great expectations that this would be the place to rest for the coming days. The peaceful life in Toledo had softened their moods and fuelled their desire for true relaxation. Nevertheless, even without words, they felt together t h a t letting go would mean the end of their journey. The Carcassonner stopped in front of a dark, high door, ringing the bell again.

Despite the seemingly massive door, light footsteps could be heard. Then it was opened.

"Oh - Señores! - Mucho gusto de conocer à Usted! - I'm very pleased ..." A slender and strikingly pretty Spanish woman stood in the doorway, her first words and gestures revealing her great worldliness. The two Germans stared at her in surprise.

The way the girlish young woman stood before them was exactly how the officers had imagined the Spanish Carment type to look. An ivory-coloured, groomed complexion gave the gem-like face a refined nuance. Large dark eyes literally shone at her and bewildered her. The mouth smiled and looked like an open dark red blossom. There was a delicate scent of cologne in the air.

"Come in, señores!"

The three men spoke a few phrases of politeness. Reimer only mumbled. His ignorance of the language made him doubly embarrassed.

The señorita went ahead and escorted her guests into a parlour, where she offered them seats. "You come from Señor Bastia? - No doubt you are a stranger here. What can I do for you?"

Gutmann took it upon himself to speak. "If we could ask you for advice: where can we stay without making a fuss and at a reasonable price?"

Juana let out a pearly laugh. "You are certainly guests of Señor Bastia by right. He very rarely has visitors. But when he does, he goes to a lot of trouble." She scrutinised the three men with undisguised curiosity. "I don't know how far..." She looked a little helpless.

Gutmann understood immediately. "Unfortunately, Señor Bastia's condition did not allow him to recommend us in writing or in any other way. However, we can assume that it is already a matter of trust that he referred us to you." He had used the word "matter of trust" on purpose. He didn't want to be any clearer.

"But of course, I realise that. Don't take offence at my uncertainty, señores!" She paused for a moment in thought. Her eyes travelled from one visitor to the other. Then she said hesitantly:

"I have a guest room on the top floor of the house. But there's only room for two!"

The men had nothing to say in reply.

"Don't misunderstand, senores, I have room here in the flat, but a Spanish woman has to be very careful about her reputation. It's stricter in our country than anywhere else in Europe!"

"Oh, I suppose it's like that everywhere where decency is important," Gutmann explained, emphasising her apology. "It's very unpleasant for us that you've broken your head because of us!"

"It's not meant like that. Señor Bastia's guests are also my guests. If you don't mind, I could provide sleeping accommodation in the same room if necessary. But you might find it a little uncomfortable. There's a nice guesthouse nearby ..."

"If there is a possibility that we could stay together, we would prefer that!" Gutmann admitted openly. "Of course, we're not making any demands. We are used to great modesty!"

She asked the guests to follow her to the last floor. The men picked up her luggage and climbed the stairs with her.

Once upstairs, she unlocked a door. "Here, senores!"

The men entered. The room was large and bright, with two windows offering a beautiful view over the roofs of the neighbouring houses. Two large beds tempted the men, who had suffered enough hardship recently. It was easy to get into



create a third sleeping option in this spacious room.

"I don't think we could find better accommodation in the whole of Toledo than here!" exclaimed Reimer enthusiastically. He really liked it here.

"If you would allow me, señorita, all three of us would have enough space!"

Juana nodded kindly. "Make yourself comfortable, señores! - I'll send a snack up to you in an hour. I hope you'll have settled in by then."

When she had gone, Gutmann went to a window and once again surveyed the view of Toledo with its scenic background. Frêne stood next to him and asked after a while: "What now, monsieur?"

"Wait and see! - We'll probably see more clearly in a day or two."

"That's not what I meant by the question. I have accompanied you this far and now you have found the connection you were looking for. You no longer need me. On the other hand, I have a lot to thank you for, because without provisions I would hardly have got across the Pyrenees so easily. Anyway ..."

Gutmann interrupted: "We have you to thank, Frêne! - Together, we made this dangerous part of our journey easier."

The Frenchman nodded slightly. "It was great camaraderie! It's good to have Germans as friends

has. You are reliable. I appreciate you very much, mes camarades!"

"The feeling is mutual, comrade Frêne! - But why are you talking about these things now? Do you want to leave us?"

"Absolutely! - You now have another destination. I, on the other hand, will try to get to Portugal. Maybe Tangier ..."

"Don't you have a fixed end point?"

"Actually - no, Comrade Gutmann!"

"Then why are you so keen to think about separating now? - We stayed together after crossing the border. And we're not all safe yet!"

The Carcassonner raised his chin and remained silent. His eyes wandered into the distance; they seemed to be dreaming.

"What reason do you have, Frêne?"

"Reason? - Truly, I have no reason! - But I said before: you have a new path ahead of you here. New tasks now that you've come out of France in one piece ..."

"We don't know anything yet. Maybe tomorrow we'll be as aimless as you are today! - That's no reason to leave right now. Why don't you stay with us, Frêne? - Stay if you value German comradeship! We'll take you with us. You have helped us a great deal from Montségur; you played a part in our finding Belisse. There are still a number of

Things you don't need to talk about. If we find help and thus safety again, then you should be part of it. We have become comrades - haven't we?"

"Certainement! - But I told you..." His voice sounded stubborn.

Gutmann put his right hand on his companion's shoulder. "I'm beginning to understand what you mean! - You don't want to stand in our way. Isn't that so?"

"That's what I wanted to say. Up to this point, I've been able to help you; now I'm just ballast for you!"

"Nothing there!" Gutmann's tone was forceful. "You're staying! - You can still leave us at a later date if you see any particular opportunities for you to progress. At the moment, we're all still playing a game of blind man's buff!"

The Carcassonner pulled up one shoulder. It was a gesture of his embarrassment. "What would your friends say if you brought a Frenchman ..."

"A Frenchman? - Heaven forfend, arse and twine! - Since when do you have complexes about our nationality? - Don't you remember what brought us together and united us?" Gutmann got really angry: "That's silly stuff you're saying. Watch out, Frêne: if Reimer and I bring a French comrade with us, our other comrades will be delighted. Yes - rejoice! - Haven't we already had Frenchmen with us in this war?"

Germans fought for Europe? - You make me really angry! Be careful, Frêne: if we are to come out of our adventure in one piece, it will only be with the help of a powerful organisation. We realise that, don't we? - I will take it upon myself to bring you into a community of all the persecuted, if you are willing to keep quiet and remain true to your principles. You are a patriot - just like us; that is why we are all persecuted. You heard Belisse and me speak and showed no particular surprise. You confirmed that you know many things that only a few know at the moment. We do not need to legitimise ourselves. That was not necessary from the very beginning. We understand together and therefore understand each other! - Is that right?"

"Yes!" said Frêne firmly. His eyes had a warm lustre as he looked at the German. "Yes, that's right. We understand each other! ..."

"Then - it's a deal. You stay, Frêne!"

"If you want - with pleasure!"

"Come on, let's sit down! - I'll tell you in a few words how we got to Montségur ..."

The two men sat together in quiet conversation for some time. The man from Carcasson had always shown himself to be a master of restraint, but Gutmann's partial openings brought a look of great astonishment to his face. Now he found his speculations and other previously known clues

confirmed: there was a hidden power. He did not know its location, but he suspected many things. He understood Gutmann's caution, which was also based on a sense of duty. He had once been a soldier himself ...

"Then everything is fine now," said Reimer in his usual soldierly manner. "I firmly believe that we will all complement each other well in the time to come." With a slight sigh, he added: "May the Norns promise us good things! - At the moment, everything is rosy red; but who knows what lies ahead ..."

"Fight!" Gutmann said harshly.

It was quite late the next morning when the men woke up. The first was Frêne, whose nose was constantly buzzed by a large fly until he opened his eyes and let out a loud "merde".

His exclamation woke his sleeping companions, who both blinked uncomprehendingly at first before finding the real sense of being awake.

"God bless his own!" Reimer belted out as a morning greeting. He laughed heartily at the sleepy faces of his companions and lolled up comfortably.

"Gosh, such a fine bed! I feel like the Emperor of China ..."

"Pah," said Frêne. "I feel like the good Lord!"

"There is no more than the good Lord," said

Gutmann dryly. "So I feel modestly soldierly: really good!"

"So everyone's happy!" concluded Reimer.

"A very nice holiday in civilian life. The last few days haven't exactly been pleasant. And no bird will tell us what's to come!"

The men jumped out of bed and slipped into their clothes. Thoroughly refreshed after a cold morning wash, they were now hungry for breakfast. Reimer agreed to go on a reconnaissance mission, as he mischievously put it. Making his way downstairs, he stopped on the first floor in front of the hostess's front door and pressed the doorbell lightly. At the same moment, however, he heard a melodious laugh behind him.

"Buenos días, señor! - Cómo está usted - how are you?"

Juana Colón took the last flight of stairs up and stood next to Reimer, taking keys out of her handbag. "You'll have to excuse me, señor, if you had to wait a little. I had an urgent errand for a few minutes!"

She unlocked the front door and asked Linz to come with her. "We just wanted to check in with you as we're going out," said Reimer sheepishly. He wasn't even thinking about breakfast at the moment.

However, Juana knew only too well what she owed her guests. "You'll have to have breakfast with me for the time being. You

and your companions!" She paused thoughtfully for a moment. "You're visiting Bastia again today, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course, señorita!"

"If it's all right with you, you can take me with you!

Maybe Bastia has some wishes ..."

"Oh, with pleasure, señorita!"

"You must fetch your companions now! But wait another two minutes; if you really want to go out before midday, you have very little time left. If you have any errands, I can send old Rosalia!"

"We just wanted to take a stroll," said Reimer. This is our first time in Toledo."

"First time ever in Spain?"

"Yes, we already said that yesterday."

"Oh, men are always so terribly sober when it comes to business. You don't know what and you don't know how. It's the same with Bastia. You will know what business Bastia has! ..."

"Yes and no," Reimer evaded. Juana had stepped very close to him. Her glittering gaze confused him. "I don't really understand. But if you need my help here in Toledo ..." She took a step forwards and suddenly buckled with an exclamation. "My foot!" she complained.

Reimer immediately took her by the arm and asked anxiously: "What's happened, señorita?"

She grimaced slightly. "Oh, I've hurt my foot

represent. It's not bad, just a bit painful!" She tried to take a limping step and leant against Reimer. "It'll be fine in a minute, señor!"

Reimer felt the warmth of her body flowing over him like a tingling current and the fine scent of her hair made him breathe heavily. Juana Colón must have noticed his incipient arousal, because she looked at him enquiringly out of the corner of her eye as if she was expecting something.

Quite against his intention, more in obedience to an impulse, the man from Linz pressed Juana closer to him. She gave in for a moment, then released herself with downcast eyes. "Oh, señor!" she whispered.

Reimer tried to apologise, but Juana smiled forgivingly at him. She played a joke on him: "Oh - I thought the Alemanes were as cold as the ice on their mountains!"

The change in her feelings and behaviour made Reimer more insecure than before. Juana Colón seemed puzzling to him. He forced himself to adopt a more indifferent expression and replied: "Don't we northerners have hearts, señorita? We also admire beautiful women."

"Oh, admiration doesn't always have to be the language of the heart," Juana said lightly. "It's usually desire that attracts men!"

"You have a bad opinion, señorita! Desire is based on animality and primitiveness. Do you believe..."



She cut off Reimer's sentence. "Are you saying that you always let your heart do the talking?"

The man from Linz showed his white teeth. "What do you mean always? There's often a long way between admiration and love."

"Naturalmente," she said in an almost provocative tone. She looked at him askance.

"Señorita!"

"Well?" She **s t e p p e d** close to him again. Her painted mouth shone like a red hibiscus flower. Reimer felt drawn to her as if under compulsion. But before he could kiss her, she pulled away again. In a somewhat darkly modulated voice, she said: "You mustn't keep your companions waiting any longer. We can find time to chat later. Now you must have breakfast with me first. Then we'll have lunch not too late and go and visit Bastia. Bueno?"

"Yes," Reimer replied. "And if you are angry, señorita ..."

"Why, señor? They could be just as bad. They are dangerous, señor! ..."

"Oh no," parried the Linzer. "I'm only subject to worship!"

"You speak like a caballero from my country. But leave now, otherwise we'll miss lunchtime!" She turned round with a graceful flourish and hurried towards the kitchen. The Linzer had no choice but to close the door behind him with his eyebrows raised.

close the door and inform your comrades.

It was still early in the afternoon when the three men led by Juana Colón entered the Hospital de San Juan Bautista. The porter took no notice of the visitors and let them pass without being asked.

In a short time, they were standing in front of the ward that formed the anteroom to Bastia's room. The three men had hoped to find a different doctor on duty due to the usual rotation in hospitals, but were disappointed. It was the same doctor who had behaved rather strangely the day before. He had just come down from an upper floor, as if he had been aware of the visitors' presence.

When he saw Juana Colón, his face was a little friendlier than the day before. "You've come to see Señor Bastia?"

The new arrivals replied in the affirmative. Juana asked: "I hope the patient is all right, Doctor"

"You have to be satisfied," the doctor obviously evaded. "There are no more complications to worry about ..."

"We've brought the patient some fruit. You do give permission, don't you?"

"Fruit - of course! On the other hand, I must ask very much that not all three of you go along. So many visitors - you understand ..."

"What should we do?" Juana Colón looked at her companions.

"Are you coming with me, Señor Reimer?"

"I'm going with you, señorita!" Gutmann said between them.

"Please," said the Spanish woman. Turning to the doctor, she asked: "How long can we stay, doctor?"

"No longer than ten minutes," he explained briefly.

Gutmann scrutinised the doctor sharply, but he looked past him as if he didn't notice anything. As he opened the door to the ward and offered Juana the right of way, the doctor pushed his way between the two patients. For a moment, it seemed to Gutmann as if he had murmured a few words behind Juana. Reimer and Frene had stayed behind in the corridor. When they entered the sickroom where Bastia was lying, the patient looked wide-eyed at his visitors. Despite the whiteness of the bandage on his head, they could see that his face was very pale. He raised his right hand slightly, which was lying on the blanket.

Juana leant over him and ran a gentle hand over both of his hands, which were twitching restlessly.

"You poor thing! - How do you feel?" She sat down slowly and carefully on the edge of the bed, ignoring the doctor's disapproving looks. "Your friends are my guests and Señor Gutmann has come in with me."

"I'm pleased," Bastia said, turning his eyes to the visitor. "I'm very sorry that the accident happened to me, just at the time of the unexpected visit. But I don't think my friends will be better housed and looked after anywhere than at Juana's." He

looked at the Spaniard and tried to smile. "Will you be staying in Toledo for a few more days? I hope I'll be allowed to leave the hospital soon."

"Don't get impatient!" warned the doctor, who had positioned himself at the head of the bed as he had done the day before. He stood there like a guard protecting prisoners.

Bastia looked at his visitor in an answering manner, ignoring the doctor's words. Gutmann found it difficult to answer because it essentially depended on Bastia himself. After a moment's thought, he said: "A few days is probably not enough. However, our travel programme is limited in terms of time and we would still like to go south!" With the last words, he looked at Bastia urgently.

Bastia slowly closed her eyes and opened them again. Nobody would have been able to tell whether this was a reaction to the message or a sign of slight tiredness. He said slowly: "If you come south, you can visit a business friend of mine. He's in Algeciras. Is that on your route?"

Gutmann nodded. "That's where we want to go. That's a marvellous coincidence that won't cause any trouble. When we come back tomorrow, we want to discuss this matter right away."

Bastia was silent for a while. Suddenly he said: "Can I have a piece of paper and a pencil?"

The doctor pulled up. "I can't allow that, Señor Bastia. You're trying too hard!"

"Oh no," Gutmann replied mildly. "Pencils are not traverses and a sheet of paper is not a lead sheet. The pressure of a thumb and forefinger required to hold a pencil ..."

The doctor turned red. "I resent your criticism, señor!"

Unmoved, Gutmann handed Bastia what he had asked for, while replying: "Señor Doctor, I had a different idea of Spanish politeness!"

The doctor looked at his wristwatch with a demonstrative gesture. "You have two minutes left, señor!"

Juana Colón had made no attempt to mediate in any way. When she saw that Bastia was trying to write a few words on the paper he had been given, she slipped him her flat handbag as a writing pad. He thanked her quietly and scribbled a few words in a somewhat whimsical script on the sheet, which he suddenly crumpled up and handed to Gutmann in his fist.

Gutmann quickly grabbed it, closed his fingers around the note like a fist and sank his hand into his skirt pocket, not letting go of the paper. He was quicker than the Spanish woman, who also wanted to grab it. She was openly offended by her rebuffed willingness to help.

"Enough now!" the doctor trumped categorically. "The time has long since passed."

Juana took Bastia's hand and stroked it. "We'll be back tomorrow. Enjoy the fruit

and don't think too much. Hasta luego!"

Gutmann looked at Bastia. "All the best, señor! See you tomorrow."

"Si, mañana - tomorrow!" The patient closed his eyes again and slowly turned his head towards the wall.

When Bastia's visitors stepped into the corridor, Gutmann and the doctor stood face to face. The Spaniard's gaze was threatening and cold. Gutmann showed only a hint of a mocking smile. This irritated the doctor. He was about to say something to give vent to his heart. But just at that moment, the Spanish woman stood between the two men. She distracted them with a few calm words and politely thanked the doctor for his endeavours on behalf of the patient. She shook his hand and the men just bowed their heads as he turned to leave.

While Juana Colón reported to Reimer and Frêne on Bastia's condition and walked down the stairs with the men at her side, Gutmann stayed a few steps behind and took the note out of his pocket to read it. There was nothing more on it than a name and an address in Cádiz. Surely the next post in a network of trusted people. Bastia felt unable to take action at the moment and directed the group onwards. This was also the most important thing Gutmann expected. It should be easier for him to find a message from Küpper in the south. He memorised the name and address, then put the note back in his pocket. At the next available opportunity, he wanted to

destroy.

Frêne suddenly stopped in the courtyard. "Why don't you wait for me for a moment? I have something to enquire about in the prison office." Before his companions could ask any further questions, the Carcassonner hurried back into the main building with long strides.

"Shall we wait right here?" asked Juana.

Reimer fought back. "Better not, señorita! - Hospital air is not very inviting. Let's go out onto the paseo instead."

As the two men stepped out of the portal with the Spanish woman, three civilians stood in front of it. A few steps to the side was a closed car.

One of the civilians lifted his hat slightly. "Dispense me, señores, may I ask for your identity cards!"

Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. Nothing could be done here. They probably had their passports with them, but a check must have revealed that the entry stamp was missing.

When Juana began to rummage around in her handbag, the speaker waved her off. "Only the señores!"

Gutmann and the man from Linz presented their passports. While one of them leafed through them and looked at the entries, the other two men came very close. They held both hands in their coat pockets, their hats pulled down low on their foreheads.

"Why are you stopping us?" Gutmann asked.

"Policia!" said the speaker briefly. "Control of foreigners."

"And how do you know that we, of all people, are foreigners?"

The man looked up puzzled for a moment. "You can see that," he then said.

"Strange," Gutmann criticised. "In front of a hospital of all places! It would be more logical in front of a railway station."

The man had finished checking his passport and he pocketed both documents. "Señores, I'm sorry, but you have to come with me!"

One of the other men approached the speaker and whispered something to him.

"Alto ahí!" he stopped. "Where is the third man?"

"The third man? I see," Gutmann said, stretching. "Are you already that well informed?"

The Spaniard bit his lips. "Three of you were seen coming in here," he said. "What about him?"

"He had already left earlier," Reimer interjected. If they were unlucky, at least Frêne should get away with it, thought the Linzer. He silently hoped that the Frenchman wouldn't show himself too soon.

"Imposiblemente - impossible!"

"Why?" Reimer acted offended.

"Then we would have seen him come out!"

"Couldn't he have chosen a different outcome?" Biting irony underlined this sentence.

The Spaniards tried to overlook the inner courtyard of the hospital, but apart from two spiritual sisters



No one was there. Only Reimer had the impression for a moment that he caught a glimpse of Frêne's face behind a window pane, who immediately withdrew again. If the Linzer was not mistaken, then the Frenchman seemed to have been warned.

"Do you know anything, señorita?" One of the Spaniards tried to question her.

Juana Colón just shrugged her shoulders. Gutmann thought for a second that she wanted to say something, but when she felt the eyes of her companions on her, she apparently gave up.

"Please, señores!" The Spaniards were always polite. With a wave of their hand, they pointed to the car.

The two Germans turned to Juana to say goodbye. Reimer was a little pale, Gutmann said: "The whole thing is a formality, señorita. Don't worry about it. We hope to be back soon."

The young woman smiled encouragingly. "I'll try to find your friend in the city. I'm sure everything will work out."

One of the civilians ripped open the flap. The spokesman sat down in the centre of the back seats and had the supposed Swiss sit on either side of him. The other Spaniards sat in the front.

The driver stepped on the accelerator and the car started up. However, if the detainees had thought that they would be taken to the police station by the shortest route, they were surprised to find that they were wrong. The car turned sharply to the left and through Calle de las

carreteras, he roared past the low rows of houses at quite a speed.

After the end of the road, the driver turned half-left into the Paseo del Safont. The town soon came to an end and rows of fields and trees appeared on both sides of the country road.

"Where is the journey going, senores?" Gutmann asked anxiously,

"We will soon reach our destination," the spokesperson evaded.

"Outside Toledo?"

"Not quite."

"Do the police work in vineyards?" mocked Reimer. The surprising twist in their fate had initially depressed him greatly, but now vigour and gallows humour had regained the upper hand. The Spaniard just grinned. It was not clear whether it was at the question itself or at the awkward way of expressing it in Spanish. Gutmann's mind was working feverishly. There was something wrong about the whole incident. The journey out of Toledo could never lead to an office. He turned to the speaker:

"Señor, you have our passports! - May I also ask you for your identity card?"

The interviewee remained silent and looked rather impassively out of the car window. Gutmann repeated his request a little more insistently: "All over the world, police officers are obliged to show their identity cards on request in case of action!"

"Bueno!" said the Spaniard curtly. "Sancho, show the

Señores our identity card!"

The man next to the driver turned round and made a grimace of derision. He held a black burnished pistol in his right hand. "Nuestro testimonio - our identity card!"

The German officers realised immediately that they were not in the hands of policemen. They had fallen into a clumsy trap that had no claim to even modest originality. No doubt the story was connected with the Bastia case.

"You could bite your arse," growled Reimer angrily. They had no weapons with them. They had kept the pistols in their luggage and, besides, resistance would have been futile at the moment.

Gutmann's forehead was wrinkled, his mouth was narrow. He wasn't paying attention to Reimer's emotional outburst, but was looking for connections. For the moment, he was resigned to not being able to do anything about the men. An involuntary movement almost made him realise that there was a crumpled note in his pocket that he didn't want anyone to find.

Individual Spanish country houses whizzed past. A team of oxen passed, now and again a few people. Suddenly the carriage turned into a side lane and stopped in front of a small, inconspicuous house half hidden behind bushes.

"We're getting out," said the spokesperson.

"Gladly," the Linzer grumbled ironically and squeezed himself

out of the car.

"Veo, que es usted una persona razonable! - You are very sensible!" the Spaniard replied.

Gutmann followed, and by now the men from the front seats were also outside. They had their hands in their pockets and it was easy to see that they each had an index finger on the trigger of a pistol,

"Vamos!" The speaker signalled to the officers to follow him.

The men walked through a small garden gate, took twenty steps along a bumpy, narrow path and stopped in front of a simple wooden door. The spokesman for the Spaniards knocked three times at short intervals, while the two other men positioned themselves behind the men they had taken with them to prevent them from escaping.

A voice was heard from inside the house. The Germans did not understand the words, but their leader answered briefly. The door opened and a cross-eyed man stepped aside to let them in. His face was expressionless and showed no surprise.

When the door closed behind the entrants, it was quite dark. Gutmann used this moment in a flash to pull the note out of his coat pocket with one hand, crumple it up again and put it in his mouth. As he did so, he made a small half-sided movement and staggered

in front of him. His movement was therefore not particularly noticeable in the semi-darkness.

He felt himself being pushed forwards and almost fell over a wooden staircase that started abruptly and led downwards. The Linzer in front of him had also found reason to curse half aloud.

"Atención!" warned the guide, rather belatedly.

Now Gutmann began to retch. As he slowly stumbled down the stairs, sweat beaded on his forehead. Never in his life had he imagined that swallowing a ball of paper could be so disgusting. He was certain that this paper would have caused him a great deal of trouble and would also have put his confidant in extraordinary danger. The strange case of Bastia was the link to all combinations.

Another dark corridor with only the meagre source of light from above. The Spaniard in front knocked again on a door that looked like nothing more than a dark spot on the gloomy wall. A caw came in reply.

Then a bright light suddenly shone in the men's eyes. The door had been pushed open, revealing a large room that was well furnished beyond all expectations. The first thing they saw were high bookshelves that reached up to the ceiling, crammed with volumes, and in the centre of the room a huge desk, behind which sat a strange figure.

You would have thought you were looking at a model of Ahasuerus. The man facing the entrants was tall and gaunt, and two dark eyes glowed like coals from deep sockets in a face criss-crossed by countless wrinkles. The whole head had something ascetic about it. Strongly defined lips were half concealed by a grey beard, hair of the same colour hung down the sides almost to the man's shoulders, and a semicircular cap sat on his head. A fleshy and curved nose completed the image of a pure Israelite.

The Spaniard who had taken the passports approached the desk and placed the documents on the plate. "Los papeles de los extranjeros!"

The old man took the passports and opened the one on top. Then Gutmann stepped forward; Reimer stood beside him and watched.

"Un momento, señor! - What do you care about our passports? - You are not an authority. And anyway ..."

"Lento - slowly!" A lean and bony hand commanded silence. The man's gesture was so compelling and impressive that Gutmann broke off the sentence. The old man continued: "You are understandably surprised, senores. But in these times, the strangest things are closer to the commonplace than the outlandish. Don't protest and accept the facts! People are interested in you and it could even be a great advantage for you!"

"What's the old eagle owl talking about?" Reimer asked his companion half aloud. With his poor knowledge of Spanish, he hadn't been able to make out the last few sentences clearly.

The old man pursed his lips and pulled the corners of his mouth apart. A very strange kind of silent laughter. The tips of his moustache trembled slightly. Then he said abruptly: "We can speak German!"

Reimer was in no way embarrassed. It was only right that the man in front of him should know the mood of the unwilling guests. "That will make it much easier to clarify this mysterious invitation," he said.

The old man nodded. The Adam's apple in his scrawny neck bounced up and down. Then he hooted: "Your passports, senores, are good. Whether they are correct is another question." He leafed through both documents more carefully. Then he squinted one eye briefly and asked: "What's a Mielchmaucherli?"

Gutmann and Reimer looked at each other. The old man in front of them was more than he seemed. But while Gutmann furrowed his brows in annoyance, Reimer guessed at random: "A cup of milk, señor!"

"No, dear confederates for Papiers' sake. Not a cup, but a bucket!" He leaned back in his high-backed chair and let out a restrained chuckle. With a lack of knowledge of the country, the best passports were worthless. But no one could guess what was going on behind his forehead with the sunken temples.

Gutmann pushed forward: "Your examination is in honour, señor, but it is completely inappropriate! Despite your introduction, it is up to us to ask questions; you mentioned earlier that we are of great interest. Who is this 'one'? And why this violent kind of so-called invitation? Wouldn't it have been easier in the form of an announcement and discussion in a public place in the city?"

"I am Rabbi Eli and I very rarely come into the city. And I very much doubt whether you would have accepted an invitation on a ticket. And as for your first question: they are interested - they were sent! So two parallel cases. So there's no need to say more!"

"Is that so?" Gutmann's voice sounded stretched. "What do you think we are?"

"They are couriers of your organisation!" The old man's head jerked forwards like a bird of prey, his eyes taking on a basilisk look. Gutmann's face remained unmoved as he asked: "Do you want to continue your measures and have us searched?"

"No, gentlemen. I don't think your organisation is so stupid as to assume that courier bags will be hung around your necks. Senior Bastia doesn't have an archive either." A grumble accompanied the last words.

"So everything is connected to Bastia?" Gutmann found his thoughts confirmed more quickly than expected. The old man beckoned to a Spaniard. "Move two chairs for the señores to my desk. Stay in the



I'll have you available in a moment. The rest of you can go upstairs for the time being!" At another hint from the rabbi, the officers sat down.

"Our time is a little short," Gutmann tried to coax the old man out of his stupor. "Can't we get straight to the heart of the matter?"

Silence. The rabbi slumped down a little and pondered. The old man's bluntness astounded the officers. The next few words had to clarify things and decide their fate.

The old man's eyelids, which were pulled halfway over his eyes, opened again and his gaze swept over the men in front of him. "The sand runs and measures the time until the man with the hipper stops the measure. Yet time and sand are eternal. We are all puppets of a short life, but thoughts and events work in space and remain. He who professes power and serves power gains value in life more easily!" His eyelids twitched as he broke off again.

"What is power?" Gutmann retorted. "The highest thing about power is value. But in the reversal of values, power has been degraded to a means. Power now means domination per se. Domination over everything and by all means. Any philosophical definition is now just an embarrassment."

"That's why I said: whoever serves her wins!"

"And which is the right power to serve?"

"The strongest!"

"That requires a cosmopolitan attitude."

"Why not?"

"And which is the strongest power?" The old man took a deep breath. "The power that reaches from the temple of Jerusalem to midnight!"

"And what about the power that reaches from midnight to Jerusalem?"

The old man covered when he heard these words. Slowly, he replied: "This power has a soul, but no body."

"You don't know that," Gutmann replied. "And besides - a soul lives forever, a body dies."

"Today the blue flag flies in New York with the map of midnight and around it is the laurel of victory."

"Just as if the North were flying a flag with the moon in it." Reimer interjected fiercely.

"There is no so-called North," the rabbi told him. "The North is the USA and its rival, the Soviets!"

"And where would the soul of the north be then?" Gutmann picked up the thread of the conversation again.

"The Nordic soul is the new Ahasuerus. But the chosen people return to their old homeland!"

"And when the room is filled with the wandering soul of the north?"

"The magic of the Ark of the Covenant will prevent that!" The old man stretched **up and his eyes grew wide.**

"The time has been fulfilled." Gutmann replied. "The

The charging of the Ark of the Covenant as an accumulator of astral power has lost its magical power with the advance of the Tyr Circle. It is still effective, but its end is in sight!"

"The end?" The rabbi grumbled. "Who's talking about an end? Everything is just beginning!" His eyes fixed piercingly on Gutmann. "You know a lot, sir from Switzerland!"

"Why not?" said Gutmann, seemingly equally valid.

"I was not mistaken," said the old man. "When I heard that Señor Bastia had been visited by three men, I knew immediately that they must be people in the know. Where and who is the third man?"

"It's best if you ask him yourself."

The rabbi ignored the irony. He did not return to his question, as a forced answer seemed worthless to him. It could be true or not. Suddenly he asked: "Would you enter the service of victory?"

"Victory?" Gutmann asked slowly. "We only have chaos in this world. Not a trace of victory. At most, nihilism ..."

"This is just a failed experiment. The flag of the UN flies above all this. Is it not victory when the covenant of nations is established and equality before Sinai becomes the law of the world? Equality in service for the building of the world?"

"We would be serving an imagination if we served your

would fulfil the request. There are neither winners nor losers in today's chaos. There are only the superior and the inferior. There are terms against each other, but only the bayonets have decided!"

"Would you rather see a sparkling bayonet point before your eyes than have one yourself?"

"You speak very openly! So we are supposed to submit to the apparent power?"

"Yes, because it is the real power! It is not apparent, because it already rules the world!"

"The Western world, you say, Rabbi! The East has become insubordinate to this concept. Moreover, this world building is a sober organisational construction for a higher end. To stay with our previous statement: a body without a soul! A world can only be given a new face and a new form if it is given a new ethos. And this ethos can only come from midnight, as it always has!"

"The world has the Christian ethos and the commandments of Moses." The rabbi's voice had a dark tone.

"In doing so, we have made our contribution to shaping the world."

"That was a bad contribution for the peoples of the West," Reimer interrupted the old man, "because they all more or less lost their national consciousness and helped to prepare the levelling chaos of the present day. And all because all values were denied, the earth and life itself and the people only more

reach for the ladder to heaven. That's what's killing the West!"

The old man shook his head. He clung to the back of his chair with his hands as he continued. "This development was premeditated. It was the only way to take away the arrogance of the peoples and make them willing to renounce the rights granted to them by nature."

"What rights do you mean?" Gutmann asked.

"The arrogant right to defy Yahweh's will!"

"You want to bind the power of the north for this reason?"

The old man raised both hands imploringly. His lower lip twitched before he found a new approach to continue. "You have to make this power subservient to all humanity ..."

"Subjugate?" Gutmann asked, stretching.

Like a turtle, the rabbi's head jerked back between his hunched shoulders.

"We can also create the world together that Moses promised us. Nothing would be more natural than that. For centuries, Central Europe became the second homeland of the Jewish people and our clans still bear their German names in all parts of the world. Despite all the contrasts par excellence, there is a bond here. We are the antipodes between the peoples who face each other and yet need each other. When the heart of the West is united with the Holy Land of humanity to form a great

synthesis can be brought together, then the building would stand forever!"

Gutmann made a very thoughtful face. "That's a fallacy, Rabbi! Antipodes cannot merge unless the laws of eipolarity and dualism cancel each other out. You are right about one thing: Aryans and Hebrews are antipodes and both are decisive factors. The question is therefore: not synthesis, which would be impossible, but equalisation and demarcation."

"We would be the losers," the rabbi panted.

"To each his own," said Gutmann.

"This would create a peaceful equilibrium from opposing force fields and security for your people. That would be a task in the history of mankind; the Hebrews would no longer be a ferment of decomposition among the other peoples, as Mommsen put it, but a people that would find itself anew."

The old man tried to straighten up, but fell back into his seat, agitated. "You want to send my people back into the desert?"

"You should never turn back history. It repeats itself all too often anyway. All peoples need peace and the harmony of living side by side. Therefore, let no nation reach for the North unless it comes from the North itself. Then everything will be able to follow the path of destiny!"

"The path of destiny only leads over the high seat of humanity," the rabbi murmured thoughtfully.

"Where the ravens are guessers."

"Hugin and Munin," whispered Reimer. "Think and remember! Now the ravens are at work, doing what the eagles failed to do. And the ravens murmur what they have heard from the Ur."

"We all have ears to hear!" The old man's voice rose again. "The whispering from the Ur will benefit us when the ravens fly."

Gutmann did not give Reimer an answer. "They're already flying and whispering. But you have not heard the raters. The runes murmur through the black messengers from the Ur, the Ur-da. And it is the language of our blood circle and therefore only audible to us!"

The rabbi closed his eyes briefly. "And what do you hear that I don't?"

"That a new time is dawning! Just as the German-Dutch scholar Herman Wirth discovered the Holy Urschrift of mankind and thus closed the ring of a mighty retrospective, just as Rudolf John Gorsleben unveiled the last secrets of the runes and revealed the deepest meaning of all the signs and traditions scattered around the world, so Aryan people will always find their way back to the roots of their existence and draw from them the destiny and obligation for a future. And the ravens will help!"

Now it seemed as if the old man was asleep. Barely noticeable

his lips moved. After a short while, he said: "You disappoint me greatly, senores. I had hoped to convince you of the reality of the situation. It would have been to your advantage. Unfortunately, you know a lot! You are dangerous."

"You have no reason to be disappointed. We've spared you a cat-and-mouse game and taken a clear **s t a n c e** ! It's absurd to assume anything more about us. We don't have the importance of the people you're looking for!"

"Then what did you want with Señor Bastia?"

"We can say that openly: we need his support!"

The rabbi screwed up his ascetic face in disbelief.

"I know that Bastia has been waiting for a message for some time. A modest enquiry with him was unfortunately unsuccessful. He had a little accident ..."

"Will we be able to do the same?" There was a subtle irony to Gutmann's question.

"I don't think so," the old man replied frankly, as the sentence left all possibilities open. "Do you want to answer a question for me?"

"That depends."

"Report on your flying discs!"

"Ahhh - ! What do you know about it?"

"Little."

"Even a little is already too much! I refuse to say anything about that. I know nothing ..."



"Yes - I'm sure you know a thing or two!"

"We saw the luminous discs in the sky, which are signs. If you mean these? ..."

"We all still know nothing about these flying discs! Nobody can say when we will succeed in unveiling this secret. They could just as easily come from an esoteric centre as they could be messengers from outer space."

The Linzer was unable to overcome his astonishment.

"Messengers from outer space?"

The rabbi swayed his head. "There are still many mysteries. But the German flying discs are not a mystery: they are just somewhere and few people saw them. This mystery could easily be revealed."

"All in good time," Gutmann interrupted him. "It's the same with this thing as with the Manisolas!"

"The Manisolas?" The old man's eyes widened.

"What you call Manisolas are the tables of Solomon!"

"That is your interpretation. Solomon's table was among the treasure of the Goths and later fell into the hands of the Moors. Some time later, Beidhawi mentioned this sacred device in the commentary to the Koran on the fifth sura as a motif of a table coming from heaven. That's all!" Gutmann concluded briefly.

"Aih, aih," Eli egged, "that's not all! - The tables are there - not one, but many! They encircle the earth and promise a new temple."

"I repeat: you are wrong, Rabbi! The Manisolas - I

do not speak of the flying spinning tops - manifest the White Power. Their increasing number indicates the significance of the dawning Aquarian Age. They illuminate the world, they are the salvation of Helios, the Aryan-Greek sun. The brightest, the whitest. May mankind make a true peace. - When the blue flag, the colour of the Nordic Atlantis, with the circumpolar symbol in white, the colour of the north and of salvation, is placed in the hands of the called ones from the midnight circle, banishment and terror will give way. Not before, Rabbi, for the current bearers of our symbols reach for the North for the sake of power, not for the sake of contemplation. And there is no responsibility without reflection. Even childbearing, the new childbirth, will still bring humanity many torments, because it denies high breeding and pays homage to fornication. And all this because the Chosen One has been banished for a mission from the homeland of the primordial white race to the desert of Asia Minor. Whatever else may happen, the signs in the sky are the beginning of an unstoppable development. Whether we want to serve or not, what is destined to happen will happen. And to your other opinion, about the messengers from outer space, this can only testify to our connection with the cosmos. But we know nothing about it. We can only speculate. There could be a third reality to two realities ..."

The old man curled up again, as if he was frightened.

"You know more than is good to know! You know the  
power,

that still stands against us and you are of it. You spoke of the peace of humanity; only those who have power can bring peace. And didn't I say that we were ready to synthesise and unite our peoples?"

"Can you mix the North Sea with the sand of a desert?" asked Reimer.

"Aih," the rabbi said, "that's it; the sea is stronger than the sand. But Yahweh is even stronger!"

The Linzer narrowed his eyes. "Yahweh is a vengeful god who can never promise peace. He is El Shaddai, the Sheitan; the Satan, the shadow, the harm, who wants to devour all nations because he is a jealous God. But God, the true God, cannot be jealous because he has no gods beside him. - Only when El Shaddai is overthrown, like the Golden Calf once was ..."

"No, no!" screeched Eli. "That's enough! You blaspheme the God who has preserved my people. And he will also bend your pride, because you are rejecting the hand that can lead you out of chaos!"

"You're wrong again, Rabbi!" Reimer continued: "You offer your hand because you want to secure power. But we, we take the hand that secures peace. Therein lies a difference. In addition to power, this also requires the good will of all those who have come to their senses. They do not yet have a god, but an idol! Who would bring the perfection for a new ethos that humanity so urgently needs? You put the world on two

Pillars of the cult to rule them like a house. We do not build, but subordinate ourselves to the harmonious laws of the cosmos and yet we are still masters in the process. But what is called building per se is the act of a vocation."

"We all think we are called!" The rabbi swayed his upper body jerkily, as if he were following the magical rhythm of a prayer in front of the wall of a prayer house. The protruding veins in his bony hands pulsed strongly. "We all have our own faith, which, I confess, can hardly be manoeuvred any further ..."

"That would be even more waste. You shouldn't allow this with people either. For racial levelling is the forerunner of general levelling. However, levelling is the destruction of the upper values and the elevation of the lower ones. This is the beginning of the descent of the human race. As mentioned a while ago: destruction of high breeding, confession of fornication, an arrogance against the light-giving God, the Enlightener!"

The old man sat quietly again, but his breath rattled. He was silent for a few minutes, his eyes half closed again. "Your German language has a saying: Every man is the architect of his own fortune. You have chosen a part that will cause you hardship and perhaps futile endeavour. Here in Toledo you have already felt a power against which you are powerless. I said before: You know a lot! I would have

but your knowledge makes you superior! I almost want to believe that you would be able to take the blue flag out of our hands. And what you have confessed could possibly mean death. For even chaos eats those who fall into its arms and are not on their guard." His hands reached for the passports in front of him. "I want to let you go, but I must be careful for my own safety. When you came, I expected otherwise. My expectations have been proven wrong, my assumptions were wrong. What shall I do with you now, Servores?"

"If you just want to let us go, everything is uncomplicated!" said Reimer. "We will say: it was even a pleasure, señor!"

The rabbi smiled thinly. "I don't want to get into trouble with the authorities. After all, you didn't come to me entirely voluntarily ..."

"We are not interested in an authority," Gutmann assured with a convincing tone.

"I want to believe you. But that's no guarantee!"

"Those who create complications must also be able to solve them!"

"When do you want to leave Toledo?" The rabbi's gaze was tense.

"As quickly as possible. Maybe tomorrow, maybe in three days. We don't know for sure at the moment."

The old man handed them the passports. "Here, take them!"

I believe that it would be in your interest to leave the country as soon as possible. You don't have visas and anyway: if you come into conflict with the authorities, even for reasons of circumstance, it is always unpleasant and can even cause unexpected difficulties. If you take intelligence and logic into account, then you could refrain from drawing more complicated conclusions ..."

"You can do that," Gutmann supported the old man's considerations.

"And you reject irrevocably?" Eli asked  
Eli asked again.

"Irrevocable!"

"That's a great pity." The old man shook his head regretfully. "There should be no hatred between us."

"There is no hatred between the recognisers of our peoples. We all obey only the destiny of our blood and are subject to a development that is causally determined. Everything is resolved in the realisation of measure and reason. The chaos of the world means that all people have to follow a path of purification. Your people will also have to search for new laws if they are not to remain aloof. And where there are seekers, there is no hatred."

"Our laws have stood the test of time for thousands of years," said Eli. "They have made my people tough and invincible."

"Hasn't it always involved heavy sacrifices

have to? Your people will always have a sword point in their necks as long as they act according to the old laws. He who climbs higher than he deserves always falls low."

The old man let out a chuckling laugh. "That's right. That's why the power of the north room has collapsed."

"You are wrong again! You are only counting on external success, which is changeable and fleeting. We have already spoken of this before: You are symbolically and actually reaching for the north because you have not overcome its power and wish to banish it. You have triumphed over one generation and will be threatened again by the next. Is that what you call victory? The wheel of history rolls and it brings destruction when it is driven by unreason."

The old man's slender fingers gripped the back of his chair tightly. The wood creaked. His face looked tired and his lips twitched slightly. "Go, Servores, go! We can't settle this. We decide nothing. We all serve a faith and a trust and cannot leave the fate-shaping law. Here - take your passports, go and be silent!"

Gutmann reached for both documents and took them. "We will leave Toledo immediately and travel to Barcelona. And we'll keep quiet - as long as we're in Spain!"

"That will be good for your safety," Eli said dryly. "And one more thing: I ask you, señores, to

to have my men drive you back a little way towards the city centre. The car will be ready in half an hour."

"We are dependent on your offer," Gutmann replied.

"Muy bien - we get on really well!" Eli waved to the Spaniard squatting in the corner. "Take the señores up to the little parlour, Pepe! You and the driver take the señores back to the paseo. In half an hour, because it will be dark enough outside by then. In the meantime, treat the señores to a glass of wine in the parlour!"

The Spaniard looked somewhat astonished. He had not understood the conversation, which had been conducted in German, but the turn of events seemed strange to him. A little more politely than some time ago, he asked the strangers: "Will you follow me, señores!"

Gutmann and Reimer stood up. The former said: "We've let you down, Rabbi! But to be honest, the mistake was yours. Adios!"

Reimer also gave a curt greeting. The old man looked after the departing men. When the door had closed behind the men, he stared at the top of the desk in front of him. Inaudible to anyone else's ear, he groaned: "Waih, my eyes! I see fog everywhere. And the future is as dark as the long night of Babylon. The barbarians know much and do not all dance around the Golden Calla. Ayh, ayh. Who will be master of the spirit? Ardonai or Lucibel?" He laid both hands on the table and buried his head between them. "I



am tired. Unspeakably tired. There should be peace ..."

## 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 militar. 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. "Aquí, 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 suged 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 ginning, 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 Iskandarîya, 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 Djinnns 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 Sharīa el malika Nazli, past the Egyptian Museum, turning left into Sharīa Marîette Pasha to Maîdân 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 looked 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 Rumi 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 Raïf'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!" Frène now returned as spokesperson.

The driver picked his nose thoughtfully. After a while, he casually named a price that made Frène 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 Ingiliz. 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 hill 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 Yazidis 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, JamiI 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 Buschîhr quite late.

Three Europeans went ashore in Bender Buschîhr, 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 kâstû 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 - kâfî - 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. Inglistân declared war on Germanistân 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 naukhar 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 naukhar 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 dvîpa, 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 Brihadâraryaka 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 Ingliz 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 Gelüing, 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?" Junker'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 chêla 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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