

A MAP OF THE WORLD

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THE SEVENTH STAFF OF GOD

5TH
EDITION



- PART I -
THE TREASURE OF THE THIRD REICH

The Seventh Staff of God

Part I

The Treasury of the Third Reich

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*To my mother Teresa, to my brother Luis, to my nephew Ignacio
to Andrea, to my friends and, especially, to my father, the shining star
that always accompanies me.*

Ramiro

*To my loves, Alejandro, Denisse, Paloma and Alma.
To my love, Marcela.*

Jorge

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Note from the authors

*The incidents described below are based on real events.
The research and information on organizations to which we refer did exist.*

Foreword

"The discovery is already ours, and in time, everything will be accomplished; now all that is missing is the spark to start the great action."

—Karl Ernest Krafft (1900-1945)
Hitler's Astrologer

Obersalzberg, Germany February 10, 1945

The shots from the M1 carbines struck the massive Romanesque-style door, splintering it almost entirely. Light filtered through the smoldering holes in the wood as a pool of blood seeped from the other side. Silence gripped the place for a few seconds before the rapid, heavy footsteps of soldiers echoed across the wooden floor. They spread out, securing positions throughout the lavish house.

The Berghof, as the Führer called it, had been his refuge since his release from prison in 1925. Perched at an altitude of twelve hundred meters in the heart of Bavaria, it was here that he wrote the second part of *Mein Kampf*. From a nearby window, the snow-covered Watzmann mountain—the second-highest peak in the German Alps—was visible. Smoke from recent RAF bombings partially obscured the view. Just five days earlier, the Allies had dropped over three thousand tons of bombs on the region.

The squadron stood by, awaiting orders. At the end of the corridor, a silhouette emerged, walking slowly—it was Sergeant Kirk. The soldiers remained silent as he approached. His empty gaze and blank expression gave him a soulless appearance. His face, deeply lined and scarred, and his small, tight mouth lent him a hardened look.

Kirk reached the base of a stone staircase near the shattered door and gestured for two men to join him. One soldier kicked the door open while the other raised his carbine. Kirk, keenly alert, stepped inside.

The room was vast, its large windows offering a breathtaking mountain view. The spring sunlight bathed the pale faces of fallen soldiers, highlighting the stark contrast between life and death. Two enemy soldiers lay lifeless near the entrance.

Kirk glanced back into the hallway. "It's clear. I want the entire squad downstairs," he ordered firmly. Then, turning to two remaining soldiers, he added, "Not you. Stay here."

He shut the door and surveyed the lifeless bodies scattered across the floor. Pacing the room thoughtfully, he murmured, "This damn house has secret passages. Stay alert; we may be watched."

Pulling a silver-plated cigarette case from his jacket pocket, he offered a cigarette to his men. Lighting his own with a lighter engraved with the U.S. Navy crest, Kirk walked over to the windows and stared out, exhaling smoke. His men watched him in silence, awaiting further instructions.

His gaze shifted to a massive desk cluttered with German military decorations and documents. He picked up some of the papers—plans and maps—and examined them carefully before stubbing out his cigarette on one of them. Then, his eyes fell upon a large portrait hanging behind the desk.

"Behind the Reich..." Kirk muttered under his breath.

The soldiers exchanged glances before moving toward the portrait—an imposing depiction of Hitler in his prime as Chancellor. They removed it with effort, revealing a large safe embedded in the wall, adorned with an iron eagle and swastika gilded in bronze.

One soldier aimed his carbine at the lock, but Kirk stopped him, pulling a key from his pants pocket. He inserted it, turned it, and retrieved two wooden boxes from inside. Kneeling, he placed them on the floor and used the same key to unlock the first box. As he lifted the lid, a strange aroma escaped—an ancient scent, as though it had been trapped for centuries. Inside was a worn leather mold in the shape of a cup. For the first time, Kirk smiled.

He opened the second box, and his smile vanished. It was empty, except for a wooden mold shaped like a blade. Examining it carefully, he discovered a hidden compartment beneath the black lining. Slowly lifting it, he held his breath. Inside lay a rusted spear tip. He ran his hand over its rough surface and exhaled in relief. Everything was as it should be.

A sudden noise shattered the silence—a thud against the floor. The soldiers spun toward the door, weapons raised. Kirk swiftly shut the box.

"Stop!" one of the soldiers shouted.

A German soldier, severely wounded but alive, was reaching for a Luger pistol from a fallen comrade's hand.

"Dirty Americans," he spat through bloodied lips.

Kirk stepped forward calmly. The wounded soldier froze, his blood-soaked face reflecting defiance. The SS insignia on his black leather uniform gleamed ominously. Their gazes locked, and an unspoken understanding passed between them.

Without hesitation, Kirk drew his Colt .45 pistol and handed it to the German soldier. Trembling, the man gripped it, placed it in his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

Blood splattered across the floor. The soldiers stood frozen. Kirk left the pistol in the dead man's hand and turned to his men.

"Give me your gun," he said to one of them.

The soldier, stout and wary, handed over his carbine. "Sergeant, it's loaded," he warned—his final words.

Kirk unleashed a volley of shots, killing both men. Their bodies collapsed onto the floor, their blood mingling with that of the Germans. The crimson tide crept toward the fallen portrait of Hitler, a silent mockery of their cause.

Kirk checked his watch, discarded the carbine, and picked up the Luger from the Nazi's lifeless hand. Reloading it, he tucked it into his uniform. Grabbing the wooden boxes, he stepped into the hallway of the opulent Alpine retreat.

A Marine appeared, running toward him. "We heard gunshots and—"

The Marine's words were cut short by the crack of the Luger. A small red dot appeared on his forehead, and blood trickled down his nose in a perfect line. His wide, lifeless eyes stared as he collapsed. Smoke curled from Kirk's gun.

This wasn't part of the plan, but Kirk was always prepared for contingencies. A master strategist and meticulous planner, he had earned a reputation for accomplishing even the most difficult missions. His engineering expertise and unflinching demeanor had opened doors to powerful circles long before the war, eventually leading him to join the army's special services.

Kirk moved quickly down the corridor. No longer the predator—now the prey—his muscles tensed, his senses sharp. He recalled *The Berghof's* hidden tunnels, memorized in seconds before burning the plans. Only three people had ever accessed them.

Hearing approaching footsteps, Kirk set the boxes down, crouched, and pounded his hands against a black floor tile. A mechanical sound echoed. Slowly, a stone wall shifted, revealing a narrow passage just five feet high. Bending low, he squeezed inside, pushing forward despite the rough stone walls tearing at his uniform.

The soldiers arrived moments later, finding only bodies and broken tiles. They searched the area but found nothing.

The official U.S. forces report was clear: finding no valid leads, they classified the case as a disappearance. A red stamp marked the extensive file: "MISSING." The conclusion? The sergeant had been abducted by Nazi special forces.

Kirk's plan had worked—he had escaped.

"The German submarine fleet is proud of having built a paradise on earth, an impregnable fortress for the Führer somewhere in the southern part of our world."

—Karl Doenitz (1891–1980) Admiral and Commander of the German Armed Forces German Naval

Argentine Airspace. Antarctic Sector

May 4, 1976

The metallic box began to move from one side of the ship to the other. It was not a large box; its dimensions were approximately one meter by sixty centimeters, and it did not seem heavy either. What stood out was that the lid of the box was completely welded shut.

Two soldiers in green jackets unbuckled their safety belts and got to their feet. With effort, they managed to maintain their balance inside the plane, which was shaking and shuddering, battered by strong gusts of wind. With difficulty, they adjusted the cords and ropes that served as tensioners to immobilize the box so that it would stop sliding.

The red needle on the Lockheed SP-2H's altimeter read 6,200 feet. The other instruments flickered nervously, seeming out of control. The Lockheed P-2 "Neptune" aircraft, powered by two propeller engines, pushed through storm clouds. Ice covered much of the fuselage. Inside, the deafening whirring of the propellers filled the cabin.

It was an aircraft frequently used by the Argentine Navy. Although designed for anti-submarine warfare and maritime patrol, it was often tasked with exploration missions. Of American origin, the powerful aircraft had been in service since the 1960s. These planes were particularly robust, built to fly through challenging weather conditions.

Hector Campos sat behind the pilots. Never in his many travels had he experienced such a situation. He was extremely nervous and frightened, fastening his seat belt so tightly that it made breathing uncomfortable. Hector, a man of large physical build, sat silently, staring at the massive dashboard. Lights flickered on and off as the concentrated pilots tried to control the "air beast," as they jokingly called it. Amid the clouds, the plane's white and red colors occasionally appeared before being swallowed again by the thick fog and snow.

"Base Belgrano, do you copy?"

Hector realized something was very wrong. The pilots were nervous, repeatedly trying to contact the base they had left just fifteen minutes earlier.

"Belgrano Base... This is Eagle Neptune 2-P-103... Do you copy?"

Suddenly, a strange sound reverberated. An explosion shook the aircraft.

An alarm blared. The pilots exchanged glances, their eyes filled with unspoken questions. One of them turned to Hector.

“Calm down, Doctor. We’re fine,” the pilot said nervously. Hector didn’t believe him; he could tell the storm was winning this battle. The explosion had caught them all off guard.

The noises inside the plane grew louder and louder. Everything creaked and groaned, as if a heavy hailstorm were hammering the fuselage. Hector looked out the window and saw a dense column of smoke, with flashes of fire coming from one of the engines. The plane shook violently. A drop of water fell on Hector’s face. The fuselage seemed to be giving way, and the alarms grew more insistent. The pilots frantically manipulated buttons and knobs on the control panel.

“Doctor, we’re getting close... We’re going to...” The captain’s sentence was cut short by turbulence.

The pressure was unbearable. The plane lost altitude rapidly, as if a giant hand were pushing it down from the sky. The acceleration became overwhelming—they were in free fall.

The plane spun out of control. The two soldiers clung to their seats. The pilots continued their emergency procedures.

“Belgrano Base, Belgrano Base, this is Eagle Neptune 2-P-103... copy that... Code 5...2... requesting emergency landing permission. We are at 62°46' South latitude and 60°21'... confirm, base...” the co-pilot said into his headset. He waited for a response, but none came. He repeated the request. Still, no reply.

The aircraft spiraled downward. Hector closed his eyes and clutched his chair tightly. The propellers’ wailing reached a terrifying crescendo, an intense and distressing noise. The engines gave their final cries of defiance before metallic crackles erupted.

The pilots screamed. The alarms went silent. The storm’s wind dominated everything now. Hector kept his eyes tightly shut, lost in a storm of sensations. The plane spun violently. He heard the sound of shattering glass and felt the icy air sting his face. He was paralyzed, a shiver running through his body. Time seemed to stretch, the sounds fading away. Slowly, his ears ceased to register noise. His muscles went numb. Only a soft, deep humming sound penetrated his consciousness. Distant and distorted, time warped around him.

The dashboard and lights went out. Total darkness enveloped the corners of the plane.

A powerful jolt shook Hector Campos’ body. His eyes opened briefly—everything was black. A rare sense of freedom, of peace, washed over him. He fell into something soft and cold. He tried to open his eyes again but felt his eyelids sticking together—it was the snow. The snow seemed to turn everything it touched into white marble statues. And now it was touching him.

His breathing slowed. He could barely feel his body. Hector fell asleep and drifted into a dream world. Scenes of his life played out as if on a movie screen—warm, happy moments.

He was at peace, remembering his wife and his son, Martin—a beautiful baby who looked at him with wide eyes. He gently took the child out of his crib and hugged him. As these memories played, a shy smile appeared on his face, gradually covered by the falling snow.

Suddenly, a flash of blinding light enveloped him. He felt his body floating, transported to a higher plane. From above, he could see his garden bathed in sunset light. He saw himself playing with Martin, watching as his son took his first steps. Hector relived the warmth of the sun, the sound of Martin's laughter, his parents' kisses, the aroma of his grandmother's ravioli, and the gaze of his first girlfriend.

Ironically, Hector had never been a believer. He mocked God, scoffed at self-help books, and dismissed near-death experiences. Yet now, he found himself living one of those very experiences. He was watching fragments of his life as though they were a movie. Not as a judgment, but as a collection of the most pleasant moments. Reflecting on this, he realized he clung to these memories as a way of staying alive—a way to avoid leaving his son, his wife, and his life behind. He wanted to live.

The cold returned, filling his lungs. The comforting warmth vanished. Everything felt heavy. He opened his eyes, which ached from the effort. A curtain of black smoke surrounded him. A few meters away, he spotted the metallic box embedded in the frozen ground.

A burning sensation crept up his legs. He tried to move but couldn't. His eyes closed again. The roar of the wind filled his ears. Snowflakes floated down, covering the remnants of the plane's fuselage.

Suddenly, a bright white beam of light illuminated his face. "Again," he thought. He couldn't tell if seconds or weeks had passed. Warmth touched his skin. He heard muffled sounds that gradually became voices speaking a strange language.

Hector tried to open his eyes wider. Through the haze, he made out strange white figures with large heads and big black eyes. One of them grabbed his wrists, another his ankles. They lifted him off the snow-covered ground.

"All knowledge begins with feelings."

—Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Painter, sculptor, inventor, philosopher, scientist, writer, etc.

Recoleta. City of Buenos Aires

December 8, 1989

It has always been a popular tourist destination, with an increasing number of foreign visitors each year. Despite being renowned for its historic cemetery, Recoleta distinguished itself as one of Buenos Aires' most affluent neighborhoods. Its elegant houses, luxury brand stores, and wealthy residents gave it a unique profile.

Few people knew that, in ancient times, the area was called "El Pilar," a name derived from the parish church that stands adjacent to the famous cemetery. The neighborhood was originally developed along the banks of the Río de la Plata. Early settlers constructed homes on the cliffs overlooking the river and the stream known as "El Manso," which now flows beneath Pueyrredon Avenue under the name Arroyo Tercero del Norte.

By the late 19th century, cholera and yellow fever epidemics drove Buenos Aires' wealthiest families to settle in Recoleta, as its elevated location helped reduce the presence of disease-carrying insects.

Over the years, the neighborhood evolved, adopting a gray yet warm aesthetic. Recoleta became a vibrant area with both day and nightlife, known for its artistic connection, which was evident in its two museums and its cemetery, celebrated worldwide for its stunning funerary architecture.

Recoleta owes its current name to the Franciscan monastery, "Los Recoletos," which once stood next to the Pilar church. Today, a modern cultural center and interior design stores occupy the area where the monastery once thrived.

On weekends, tourists meandered with their cameras, visiting the Plaza Francia handicrafts fair and shopping for unique souvenirs. It was during one such weekend walk that an event occurred—an ending that marked the beginning of something far greater.

The air was heavy, almost suffocating. It felt as if his body were submerged in the depths of the sea, the pressure crushing his lungs, and the ringing in his ears relentless. He was reminded of a day long ago at a Cuban beach when he hit his head on a boat while swimming and became disoriented, nearly drowning.

That day, his brother had saved him. He had been walking along the shore with his friend Che Guevara when he noticed him struggling in the water. Leaving Guevara behind, his brother dove in swiftly, rescuing him from the waves.

This time, the feeling was eerily similar. As he walked, the glances he received from passersby conveyed fear and disgust. Some crossed the street to avoid him, their expressions reflecting unease.

A trail of small red droplets stretched along the sidewalk of General Las Heras Avenue, originating near the intersection with Callao Avenue. The trail led to an old, three-story white building. He paused in front of its façade and looked up at the blue-and-white flag waving above the entrance. Time had worn it down; the fabric was frayed and slightly soiled. Beneath it hung a rusty shield, precariously held by a single screw on the verge of giving way.

"Symbols of decadence," his brother used to say, puffing on his Cuban cigar. He would nod silently in agreement.

He climbed the three marble steps, worn smooth by countless footsteps, following the trail of blood that continued to drip from his hand. Finally, he entered the Federal Police's 17th Precinct.

The old reception desk was spotless, its surface devoid of paperwork, save for an Olivetti typewriter at one corner. He placed his bloodied hand on the counter and set down a black Colt .45. The officers behind the desk stared at him, frozen. Tears streamed down his face, mingling with a broad, unsettling grin.

He raised his hands in surrender and, still smiling, turned to the officers.

"I have killed a sorcerer," he declared, "and I am very happy."

These words were typed innumerable times across thousands of pages in the file. They became one of the great enigmas that no one could solve, turning the case into another topic of public speculation, with people weaving together various hypotheses—some logical, others entirely absurd. Yet, this time, all the theories were far from the truth.

The stark white of his shirt accentuated the fiery red of the blood, blood that undoubtedly did not belong to him.

One of the officers finally reacted, raising his standard-issue pistol and aiming it at the man. Within seconds, four officers had pinned him down, their weapons drawn, reducing him to the floor of the station.

"Who did you say you killed?" the officer in charge demanded.

The officer wasn't entirely convinced the man had done anything wrong. It was rare for a murderer to turn themselves in immediately. Not that it never happened, but usually, days would pass before guilt gnawed away at them enough to bring them in, worn and broken. Alternatively, there were those who gloried in their crimes, proudly recounting

their atrocities with such detailed descriptions that they often surpassed even the most chilling detective novels. They were the neighborhood mythomaniacs.

Still, the blood and the gun—albeit devoid of bullets—suggested a violent act. Perhaps the officers' instincts were failing them, as this man did not fit the typical profile of a thief or a criminal.

“We need to know who the victim is,” said the officer in charge.

The man stared at him, wide-eyed and struggling for breath. Then, almost inaudibly, he muttered, “I am the victim.”

The officer was startled. “Tell us who you killed!” he shouted.

“No one... really. I simply released him...” the man replied, laughing.

The officers exchanged baffled looks, unable to make sense of his words.

“Speak up!”

But he wouldn't. Instead, he erupted into raucous laughter—loud, grating guffaws that were both unsettling and irritating. He never resisted as they arrested him. Following standard procedure, the officer read him his rights, though the words seemed to fall on deaf ears.

The man continued to laugh, now completely at ease. The officer's words sounded distorted and distant, as if coming from another dimension. His vision blurred, barely registering the uniformed figure, and then—pressured against the black-and-white tiled floor—the sole of a policeman's shoe pressed heavily against his cheek. Despite the rough treatment, the man's smile remained unwavering.

At first, they assumed he was injured, drunk, or under the influence of drugs. But no, the man was entirely lucid and conscious, his demeanor inexplicably relaxed.

The officers quickly pulled him to his feet, rifling through his possessions with mechanical efficiency. Among the items they confiscated were a gold Rolex watch, a set of keys, a Swiss utility knife in its case, five ten-thousand Australes bills, a slightly crushed Biznike chocolate bar, and his identification documents. Inside, they also found several blood-stained photographs of a natural landscape featuring rolling hills. In one of the photos, he was smiling alongside another man.

The ID photo was faded and worn, making it difficult to confirm the man's identity. Only his thick, bushy eyebrows stood out, a distinctive and recognizable feature.

The youngest officer, smoking a Benson cigarette, glanced at the name on the document. Startled, he choked on the smoke, coughing violently. His fellow officers chuckled, seizing the opportunity to mock him.

“Expensive but the best,” they repeated the cigarette's slogan, before amending it to: “Expensive because it makes you cough.”

Amid their laughter, the ID was passed from hand to hand until it finally reached the commissioner. Silence fell over the room.

“Shit!” the commissioner exclaimed, his voice heavy with disbelief.

He scrutinized the man’s face. It was so nondescript that he might pass him on the street or stand beside him in an elevator without a second thought. Yet now, with the name on the ID in front of him, everything changed.

The commissioner sighed, knowing full well the problems this man would bring.

The name on the document read: **Ruben Antonio Squen.**

Looking at his subordinates, the commissioner realized there was no need to explain further. They all knew who this was—**the brother of Jorge Antun Squen, better known as Jorge Antonio.**

“He’s lucky to be who he is,” one officer muttered under his breath.

“But not us,” the commissioner replied grimly.

He had arrived in the country with his family group from Yebdene, a remote Syrian village. The migration officer responsible for registering their entry had modified their surname, finding it too difficult to pronounce. Jorge Antonio spent his early childhood in La Boca and later worked as a truck driver for the family business. By 1942, he was a nurse at the Military College, and just four years later, he was appointed coordinator of the First Five-Year Plan.

In 1951, he became the president of Mercedes Benz Argentina, a position that solidified his ties to major German industries such as Deutz, Thyssen, Siemens, and Krupp. Some intelligence reports speculated that Jorge Antonio’s rise to prominence stemmed from his role as a liaison between Juan Domingo Peron and German industrial leaders. No one could quite explain how he had managed to establish such significant connections so quickly with a nation that had shifted from near-world domination to one of the most humbling defeats in history.

After the military coup of the Liberating Revolution in 1955, Jorge Antonio was imprisoned. He escaped from the notorious Ushuaia prison alongside John William Cooke, Jose Espejo, and Guillermo Patricio Kelly. According to rumors, the weapons used in their escape had been smuggled in piece by piece by his wife, hidden under her clothing over the course of several weeks.

Exiled to Spain, Jorge Antonio maintained his connections. In 1959, he met Ernesto "Che" Guevara during one of his trips to Cuba, and some even claimed that he had witnessed the kidnapping of Formula One champion Juan Manuel Fangio.

It was also said that he and his first wife, Esmeralda Rubin, had four biological children and adopted seven more. When Esmeralda passed away, his relationship with Ines Schneider came to light, and she would soon become his second wife.

Upon his return to Argentina, Jorge Antonio received \$80 million in compensation for the confiscation of his assets during the Liberating Revolution. A close friend of Carlos Saul Menem, Jorge had introduced him to the Puerta de la Plata de Hierro during their years in exile. He also maintained strong ties with officials from the General Onganía government and the last military dictatorship during the Process.

The commissioner snapped out of his thoughts about these reports and focused on the present. At the station, rumors were spreading fast. Some speculated that the brother of this influential businessman had committed a political crime. Others believed he was a deranged serial killer, perhaps even someone who had slaughtered his entire family or had gone mad and begun shooting random people in the streets of Buenos Aires' suburbs, only to turn himself in to make a statement. All these theories were extraordinary, but none even grazed the truth.

The phone on the commissioner's desk rang repeatedly. He had been anticipating this call for over two hours, ever since he had contacted the chief of the Argentine Federal Police.

"Don't do anything. Don't say anything. Just wait," was the order he had received.

He picked up the receiver and immediately recognized the voice on the other end.

"Commissioner, how are you?" It was the youthful and casual tone of Interior Minister Eduardo Bauza.

Before waiting for a response, the minister continued, "I understand you have a visitor in your dungeon who is causing you some concern. Rest assured, you should proceed as you usually would. I've spoken with the brother of the individual you have in custody. He's currently in Spain and told me to convey the following: He hasn't seen his brother in a long time and regrets being unable to help him. He hopes the investigation proceeds and, if Ruben is found guilty, that he pays for his crime. However, he has asked for one favor: Please avoid bringing his name—Jorge Antonio—into the public eye. He doesn't want to return to the media spotlight."

The commissioner listened attentively to the minister's carefully chosen words, which unmistakably laid out a course of action. It was clear he was to steer attention away from any ties to Peron's former advisor, even if such clues emerged during the investigation.

"Understood, Mr. Minister," the commissioner replied, "but we still don't know if he committed a crime. Everything seems to suggest he did, but the greatest mystery remains—who, exactly, did he kill?"

The Commissioner carefully measured his words. He had no desire to end up in a forgotten precinct in the middle of nowhere. After so many years in the force, he knew exactly how politicians operated.

"Minister," he began cautiously, "during that conversation, were you able to ask him anything more about Ruben's friends? The truth is, we don't even know his current address. His ID only indicates that he moved many years ago without specifying where or how. Imagine the situation—we didn't want to draw too much attention," he added, his tone marked by the calculated prudence of a seasoned investigator.

Minister Bauza replied swiftly, almost as though he had been anticipating the question. This quick response caught the Commissioner's attention. He realized this was the question he should have asked earlier. The Minister's eagerness suggested he had been prepared to provide an answer.

"Angel Acoglanis," Bauza said, almost too quickly. "That's the name Jorge gave me. He mentioned that Ruben was very close to this man several years ago. He doesn't know if they were business partners or anything more. That's all he could tell me."

"Perfect," the Commissioner responded, feigning enthusiasm. "At least we have a name to start with. That's more than we had before. Let's get to work."

"Very well, Commissioner," the Minister replied. "I've already informed the President. I'm not sure if you're aware, but Carlos and Jorge have a long-standing friendship that dates back to their time in exile."

"No, I didn't know that," the Commissioner lied. "Well, sir, I thank you for your call. Rest assured, I'll keep you updated."

The Minister ended the call. A few small beads of sweat rolled down the Commissioner's face, lingering at the corners of his lips. He believed he had handled the conversation well, which provided him with some reassurance.

Turning his focus back to the case, the Commissioner wasted no time. He ordered the murder weapon to be brought to him for review.

The team had finished writing and filling out the complaint, which mirrored Ruben's testimony. The only missing piece was the identity of the victim. Meanwhile, Ruben sat silently, still smiling. Though he had stopped crying, he offered no answers to any of the officers' questions. Instead, he muttered a single phrase, repeating it about six times—a phrase overheard by one of the corporals guarding him.

"Now it has an owner... Now it has an owner..."

He repeated the words until he fell asleep, sitting upright in his cell. What had initially seemed like a minor concern now loomed large in the Commissioner's mind. The more he replayed the conversation with the Minister, the more certain he became that the name Angel Acoglanis was key to the entire situation.

Later that night, a plain-clothed prosecutor carrying a briefcase arrived at the precinct. He approached the Commissioner's office door and knocked gently. After a moment, a voice invited him in.

The office was dimly lit by a floor lamp with a tulip-shaped shade, its surface dotted with small holes that cast scattered light. Behind the desk hung an old reproduction of General San Martin. A window with wooden shutters faced the desk, reflecting the glow of a flickering neon sign outside. Each time the sign lit up, it momentarily illuminated the Commissioner, who was standing beside the desk, visibly tense.

The prosecutor walked toward him. They greeted each other with perfunctory handshakes before the Commissioner motioned for him to sit. Both men took their seats. It was clear that the prosecutor already knew the delicate nature of the situation, which explained the awkward silence that followed.

Finally, the prosecutor broke the silence.

“We have the victim,” he said.

The Commissioner leaned forward, his attention fully focused.

“Who is it?”

“Dr. Angel Cristo Acoglanis,” the prosecutor revealed.

He was Ruben Antonio’s spiritual partner and master of ceremonies. The killer’s brother, Jorge Antonio, had suggested the right contact to find out what had happened.

"The Sacred Book and the Stone of Wisdom are hidden in a mountain range in a distant and silent territory located at the southern tip of the Southern Hemisphere."

—Roger Bacon (1214–1294), English Philosopher

Puerto Madero. City of Buenos Aires

July 16, 2010

The light of dawn blanketed the sprawling city. The sun began to rise, casting its glow through the American shutters of the window on the twenty-third floor of the south tower. It was Alex's newly purchased apartment in Puerto Madero. For many inhabitants, Puerto Madero was considered the "new porteño neighborhood," though its origins dated back to the late 19th century. Faced with the need to establish a port to connect Buenos Aires with Europe, engineer Eduardo Madero had presented his ambitious project. The plan involved constructing four enclosed docks interconnected by bridges and two additional docks, one to the north and one to the south. This proposal was approved by then-President Julio Argentino Roca at the end of 1884.

The port was developed in an uninhabited and wild area. Between 1900 and 1905, sixteen reddish brick docks were constructed, serving as clear examples of English utilitarian architecture. These docks, standing three to four stories tall with basements, were warehouses intended to store grain and other export goods, a reflection of Argentina's agro-export economic model that prevailed for decades. However, the construction of Dock Sud and Puerto Nuevo diminished its importance, leading to its gradual abandonment. In 1989, a decree from the National Executive Power transformed this stevedoring hub into a burgeoning neighborhood featuring towering skyscrapers, cultural centers, and residential spaces. This redevelopment, however, was not free from widespread suspicions of corruption, a topic that dominated newspapers and real estate circles at the time.

Alex slept soundly in one of the most striking buildings in the area. His bedroom was spacious, minimalist, and immaculate, dominated by a wide King-sized bed. In the corner of the main room, a large antique world map held a prominent position. The walls were adorned with portraits of Alex in various iconic landscapes—posing happily next to the Louvre pyramid, the Eiffel Tower, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the Roman Colosseum. Visitors to his apartment often found themselves intrigued by the collection of framed antique maps displayed throughout the space.

Among them, one stood out: a rudimentary depiction of Europe, Asia, and Africa's coastlines, labeled in Greek. Beneath it, a small bronze plaque read: "*Anaximander 610-546 B.C. First World Map.*" Another map, identified by its plaque as the work of Al-Idrisi in 1154, was one of the most accurate world maps of its time, though it defied convention by positioning the North Pole at the bottom. Finally, between these two maps was another

incomplete one, showing parts of Europe, North Africa, the Brazilian coast, and additional details. Its plaque read: "*Piri Reis, 16th Century.*"

Above them all, hanging high on the wall, was a framed diploma from the Military Geographic Institute, bearing the name: *Alex Ferro, Cartographer.*

On the bed, fully clothed and strewn among magazines and books, lay Alex, sleeping diagonally across the mattress, face down. One of his arms dangled over the edge, his hand brushing the floor. His snores filled the room, creating a discordant symphony.

On the bedside table, the digital clock read 5:59 a.m. As the minutes rolled forward, it switched to 6:00. A sharp alarm sounded from his cell phone, lying on the floor near his outstretched hand. Startled, Alex shifted slightly, still groggy. He reached down to pick up the phone, squinting at the glowing screen. The caller ID read: *No ID.*

Without hesitation, he ended the call without answering. It was probably a mistake—who would call at such an ungodly hour? Surely, his friends were still asleep, recovering from last night's dinner at *Apasionatto* in Palermo. For over four years, they had upheld their Wednesday tradition of pasta dinners accompanied by generous amounts of Malbec red wine, as Alex had always preferred it to Cabernet.

It couldn't have been one of his students either—Alex had a strict rule of never giving out his cell phone number. This had to be a mistake. As he came to this conclusion, he drifted back into drowsiness.

The phone rang again, this time displaying a visible number. Half awake, Alex answered. "Hello?"

"Mr. Alex Ferro, please?" a sweet female voice asked on the other end of the line.

"Yes?" Alex replied groggily.

The woman's voice was clear and alert, a stark contrast to his still half-asleep state. He closed his eyes as he listened.

"My name is Ana, an Interpol agent..."

That last word jolted him awake. It alarmed him. His mind raced through the events of the past few days. Since childhood, Alex had a peculiar reaction when accused of something he hadn't done. Instead of denying it outright, he would lower his eyes, staying silent as he reviewed the accusation, verifying it was false. To those accusing him, his demeanor often appeared as an admission of guilt.

This trait had caused him problems, particularly during his teenage years. He'd been labeled a "nerd" by his high school peers, a term that didn't fit him at all. He rarely studied after school. Instead, he would head to the La Boca neighborhood to play T.E.G. at his cousin Irene's house. Sometimes, he would take the 159 bus, getting off before reaching the Almirante Brown Bridge. From there, he would walk to the highest point of the bridge, carrying a pad of drawing sheets.

Perched above, he would sketch the view: the polluted Riachuelo River flowing below, with its noxious smell wafting upward. Looking back, he could see the river's source, narrowing until it vanished on the horizon. Alex often fantasized about exploring the Riachuelo by boat, tracing its path to uncover its mysteries. He knew it emptied into the Río de la Plata but had no idea where it began. The industrial landscape fascinated him. With precision, he would draw the riverbanks, the tanks of the distilleries, and the constant fire of the Dock Sud chimneys—an elusive flame that never extinguished.

“Are you there?” the woman asked, bringing him back to the present.

“Yes, yes. Sorry, it's early, and I'm still waking up. But... I don't understand the purpose of this call.”

“I got your number from the director of the Geographic Institute,” she explained.

Alex detected a subtle foreign accent in her voice. He felt irritated by the interruption, especially at such an hour, but curiosity crept in. What was so important that she'd woken him up at six in the morning?

“I don't understand...” he mumbled.

“We need you to look at something and provide your feedback,” she said.

“What is this about?” Alex's words were sluggish, still battling sleep.

“I know this call must seem strange to you, but it's important. Your help is crucial. I can't provide details over the phone. Can we meet today?”

Alex hesitated. The urgency baffled him—a call at dawn to schedule a same-day meeting? It felt inconvenient and unusual.

“Today?” he asked, his voice laden with sleep.

“Yes, I'm about to board my flight to Buenos Aires. It leaves in twenty minutes. I'll arrive this afternoon. Is 6 p.m. okay?”

Alex's thoughts scrambled. Interpol. The Geographic Institute. Something potentially of great importance to him. And to top it off, the caller was phoning him from an airplane. It was all too bizarre to decline.

“Uh, yes... 6 p.m. works,” he replied hesitantly.

“Great. I'll meet you at the Irish bar on the corner of Reconquista and Marcelo T. de Alvear. My number is the one displayed on your phone.”

“...Okay.”

“Perfect. Thank you so much.”

The call ended. Alex stared at the number glowing on the blue screen of his phone. He sat there for a moment, his mind churning. He glanced at the window where sunlight was beginning to creep in, then at the alarm clock. Muttering a curse under his breath, he tossed the phone onto the table and collapsed back onto the bed.

Why had he agreed? What kind of trouble had he just invited into his life? Restless, Alex sat up again. There was no point in trying to go back to sleep now.

*"If we eliminate the impossible, whatever remains,
no matter how improbable, must be the truth."*

—Sherlock Holmes
Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930)
Scottish Writer

Obersalzberg Forest. Germany
April 10, 1945

It was a dark, cold room in the cabin, nestled in the middle of a frozen forest. This abandoned dwelling had been intended as a shelter for Allied military commanders. Fifty meters away, artillery camps and mechanized troops with light tanks were stationed.

The sound of bombs echoed like thunder announcing the arrival of a storm. Each detonation shook the window panes. The air was heavy with the sharp, acrid scent of gunpowder.

On a neatly made bed lay a U.S. military helmet, marked with a yellow circle on one side. Next to it rested leather gloves and a black case. Inside the case was a silver brooch bearing the figure of a skull and two crossed bones—the unmistakable insignia of the elite Waffen-SS combat group. Alongside it were a folded map and an old key.

The soldier picked up the key and slipped it into the pocket of his pants. He then stashed the black case inside his leather boots, their long laces still untied. After adjusting his vest, stocked with M1 rifle magazines and hand grenades, he retrieved a small bag from a rustic piece of furniture, its bark-textured logs still intact. He pulled out several documents and tossed them onto the bed.

The documents included U.S. passports and military IDs. He opened one: Lieutenant "Kirk Phelps," of Battalion A, an elite squad formed by the best soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Battalion and the 7th Army.

The existence of Sergeant Kirk was real, and his disappearance was a documented fact. The Nazi death squads had dealt with him in complete secrecy.

Now, he had become Sergeant Kirk—a new identity, his final baptism under which he would be recognized for the duration of his mission. He placed the documentation into the inner pockets of his uniform, took a few steps toward a small bathroom, and looked at himself in an old mirror. There was no doubt—he now appeared to be an American soldier. The transformation was flawless.

The German intelligence services had worked meticulously to infiltrate him into the Allied ranks. His mission was to take command of the elite Allied team during their secret operation at "The Berghof," Adolf Hitler's residence. Success now rested entirely on his actions.

This operation was the most intricate of all and had been planned down to the millimeter months earlier at Wewelsburg Castle in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Wewelsburg Castle was a Renaissance structure with a long and storied history. Over the centuries, it had passed through the hands of approximately thirty owners, including counts, dukes, clergymen, artists, and powerful financiers.

By the time Kirk arrived at Wewelsburg, he had already assumed several different identities, so many that he no longer remembered his original name—and he no longer cared. The castle, with its ominous past, had become a sacred place of worship for the leaders and zealots of the Third Reich.

Legends of the castle told of its use as a prison for thousands of women accused of witchcraft during the 17th century. Hundreds were tortured and executed within its walls. During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), its cellars served as military prisons and dungeons.

The triangular-shaped castle had an inner courtyard. At one of its angles stood a large circular tower. Inside, the corridors led directly to the heart of the tower, which housed the central nave of the building. This was a round hall surrounded by columns and windows that offered views of the small town nestled in the Alme River valley.

The area was often buffeted by strong winds, and most of the windows were sealed tightly, serving only to admit daylight. On the white marble floor of the hall, a massive sun emblem with twelve rays, each shaped like an S, was etched into the surface.

For many members of the Nazi Party, as well as the Thule and Vril societies, this point marked the "Zentrum der neuen Welt"—the center of the new world. It was said to be the focus of power for the envisioned new order.

That room was not the only one with a circular shape. In another of its angles, there was a smaller but more significant room, reserved exclusively for the leaders. In the center of the room stood a heavy oak table, a replica of King Arthur's round table. The space was surrounded by ten towering columns that supported a gilded dome, symbolizing the Sun. From its center hung a large crystal chandelier, suspended by a silver chain adorned with intricate details.

The floor gleamed, different from the rest of the castle, as it was made of green marble from the Alps. Between each column, long red banners bearing the swastika fell heavily, adding a somber grandeur to the place. The room had only one door—an imposing, heavy, white wooden door. Few were privileged enough to enter, and Kirk was among them. His presence there was justified by many reasons, but above all, it was tied to the "Blutfahne," the infamous Nazi flag stained with blood during the 1923 incident.

On that particular day, within the opulent castle, Kirk attended a meeting with three officers and Interior Minister Heinrich Himmler. The orders were explicit and unwavering. Himmler's words did not merely resonate within the room; they lingered in Kirk's mind like a relentless echo.

"You," Himmler said, his piercing gaze fixed on the three soldiers connected to Hermann Göring, "will follow the Führer's escape plan in Berlin. And you," he added, pointing at Kirk, "will ensure the sacred treasures of the Third Reich are secured in the chosen land, alongside the sacred stone."

Himmler's voice carried a palpable tension, his nervousness impossible to conceal.

"The treasures must be removed from the Berghof immediately. The Allied forces are advancing, and the house will soon be surrounded," he added gravely.

The treasures Himmler referred to were no ordinary artifacts. They were esoteric relics unearthed during military expeditions led by archaeologist Otto Rahn. With the Allies closing in, the Berghof—Hitler's mountain retreat—was no longer a safe haven for such prized possessions.

Kirk felt a surge of pride in being entrusted with such a critical mission. That pride bolstered his resolve as he prepared for the task.

Now, just five kilometers from the target, he could see the Berghof through the dense black smoke rising in the distance.

The cabin around him had finally stopped trembling from the bombings. Kirk pulled a small map from his case and carefully unfolded it on the bed. The document bore the eagle-and-swastika seal and contained geographic references to the house. The map detailed corridors, staircases, and rooms—essential knowledge for the operation. Kirk studied it intently, committing every detail to memory.

Once finished, he folded the map, took out a U.S. Navy lighter, and set it ablaze. The flames consumed the map quickly, leaving no trace behind.

Fully prepared, Kirk stepped out of the cabin, leaving the door ajar. The biting cold stung his face, and the icy air made his teeth ache.

He treaded carefully through the mud, his boots crunching in the frozen ground as he maintained his balance. A U.S. Army Jeep pulled up a few meters away, its tires skidding slightly on the icy terrain before coming to a halt. A soldier in the driver's seat saluted him with a sharp nod.

Kirk climbed into the vehicle, which roared back to life and sped off along a dirt path carved out by the tracks of light tanks. The markings were still fresh, guiding them toward their objective.

The Führer's house loomed closer with every moment, and Kirk was poised to rob it of its treasures.

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