

My Immortal

THE VAMPIRES OF BERLIN



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BY LEE RUDNICKI

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All of the characters and events in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Any and all references to any government, school, military units, intelligence agency or law enforcement personnel are purely fictional and for entertainment purposes only.

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For my friends and family

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

“I warn the generality of readers, that this present book will seem to them only a rather more revolting mass of wordy nonsense than the last.”

- D.H. Lawrence

Fantasia of the Unconscious (1930)

Hi there. Welcome to *My Immortal: The Vampires of Berlin*. As you will soon find out, villains and heroes come out of the most unlikely places in this story. In fact, two of the heroes are in the *Wehrmacht*. Yes, *that* German army.

The difficulty in using two German soldiers during World War II as protagonists, of course, that doing so potentially raises all sorts of moral and political issues.

Please know that as I write this, I am profoundly aware that there is nothing in the world I can tell my German and Russian friends—or anyone else for that matter—about World War II that has not already been said in thousands of well-written articles and history books.

Along those lines, *My Immortal* is not a history book — it is a supernatural adventure tale that is set during the Battle of Berlin. Conceptually, the setting is very similar to being on the *Titanic* after the ship hits the iceberg. There are no underlying political statements or moral judgments to be gleaned from these pages and there is no disrespect intended towards any government, country, person, religion, school or entity that is depicted or not depicted in this book.

The sole and exclusive exception to the foregoing rule is the Nazis. For the record, I have nothing good to say about the murderous bastards and *My Immortal* does not glorify their crimes in any way. The Nazis do, however, make the perfect villains for a supernatural adventure tale that is the role they are called upon to play here.

The acknowledgements are at the end, but I would like to use this opportunity to thank my wife Rumiko for her patience and understanding during the many hours that it took to write this novel. *Domo Arigato, Rumi*. I love you.

Now, without further adieu ...

MY IMMORTAL

THE VAMPIRES OF BERLIN



PROLOGUE

In April 1945, the Second World War was coming to a bloody end for Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

As the Red Army encircled Berlin, the Nazis broadcasted a curious radio message. They threatened that if the Russian forces were not immediately withdrawn from German soil, a secret weapon "more powerful than the sun itself" would be unleashed upon them. The message ended with an ominous warning: there will be no survivors.

Allied intelligence intercepted this message and concluded that the Nazis had a nuclear bomb. They also believed that Hitler was about to use this weapon against the Soviet 8th Guards Army, which was positioned in and around Berlin.

President Roosevelt notified the Kremlin of this analysis, but Stalin elected to continue the assault on the German capital. Meanwhile, his generals quietly braced for the possibility of casualties on an unimaginable scale.

On 30 April 1945, Adolf Hitler ordered the weapon, code-named Tristan, to be utilized against the Soviet Red Army. It is not known why these efforts failed, but shortly after giving the order, Hitler and his wife Eva Braun committed suicide.

Over the last sixty years, there has been a great deal of speculation about the miracle weapon that had Adolf Hitler so convinced he was about to win the war.

To date, every American president since Truman has precluded any legislative or judicial inquiry into Operation Tristan on the grounds of national security.

PART I

SEVEN YEARS FROM NOW

Berlin, Germany

As the sun broke through the clouds, a young mother knelt down next to a baby carriage. She pointed to the sky to show her child the sunlit cross that appeared each day on the steel bulb of the television tower. Berliners called the mysterious optical effect “the Pope’s revenge,” a tribute to the communists’ failed attempt to purge Christianity from their lands; futile efforts that included the application of various chemicals to the silver tower to try to eliminate the cross. The city had seen some very difficult days, but God had apparently not forgotten about Berlin.

Professor Gerhard L. Richter III emerged from Berlin Cathedral behind a group of giggling Italian tourists and squinted in the sunlight. Professor Richter looked every bit the part of a mad scientist—wild hair, thick glasses and an old mismatched plaid suit that didn’t quite fit. An untrimmed gray beard bristled from his face, which matched the hair that sprung from his ears. A handwritten price tag hung from the sleeve of his jacket.

Richter’s investigation had begun two weeks prior, at a small overgrown airstrip in the Czech countryside. After examining the rusted hulk of what had once been a Nazi transport plane, he ventured into Prague, where he carefully retraced the soldier’s footsteps. The Czech Secret Service had not been amused by his attempts to access Heydrich’s secret room in Prague Castle. He didn’t get in, but they couldn’t hide it forever. He would see to that.

After Prague, the professor took the train north to Berlin, where he again walked the same path as the two men had done so many years ago. The culmination of his journey was Berlin Cathedral, where they had found the young girl, once upon a time. The crypts were exactly as they had been described in the dossier, but the entrance to the tunnel that led to the Neptune hall long since been bricked over, as he knew it would be.

Professor Richter relished the thought of seeing the faces of those university morons who labeled his writing as the work of a delusional conspiracy theorist. Those idiots and the governments they supported were about to be unveiled as fraudulent puppets.

Of course, it had been difficult for him to verify all of the information in the dossier, due to the passage of time or the fact that evidence had been destroyed or covered up after the war. But the game had changed; he finally had all of the proof that he needed. He was about to rewrite the history books, whether the governments that suppressed the information for the last seven years liked it or not.

Professor Richter glanced at his watch and donned his hat. As he walked across the *Lustgarten* with a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist, he smiled at a beautiful woman who was talking on a cellphone.

Richter didn’t realize it, but the woman had been following him for over two hours—she was reporting his every move to someone who was stationed thousands of miles away.

Ft. Meade, Maryland

Zig was nervous. He had been at the National Security Agency for six weeks. So far, it wasn't what he expected.

In hindsight, it had been unrealistic for him to go into the intelligence field with the expectations of driving a bulletproof black Audi on covert missions around Europe. Instead of a life that resembled a Jason Bourne film, Zig's German studies degree and NSA job application brought him long hours pouring over email intercepts and computer bulletin boards for signs of extremist activity in Germany. He was using his language skills and doing something good for his country, which was nice, but he simply didn't think that he was very good at it.

Zig promised himself that if he made it through the day without getting arrested, he would find a new career. Depending on how things went, he thought he might be available for that new career before lunch.

You see, Zig screwed up on that fine Wednesday morning over his daily cup of orange tea. Long story short, he stretched the accepted interpretation of international law and NSA electronic surveillance directives when his short attention span got the best of him. He didn't think it was a big deal to snoop through the laptop as Professor Richter surfed the net in a Berlin café. Zig's flawed rationale was that he wasn't really stealing anything; he just wanted to know what book was next.

He had always been a huge fan. He tracked down every book and article the professor had ever written and had even bought *Pyramids and Aliens* twice—first in hardcover and then again when the paperback came out with a blue cover. He also had copies of *The Bermuda Triangle UFO Conspiracy*, *The Secret History of KGB Astral Projection* and *Tales of Man*.

The other member of the Richter fan club was his best friend Julia, who just finished her first year at the CIA. They met back in college, in the West Chester University marching band, and they had stayed in touch ever since.

As fate would have it, Julia was in Berlin visiting her mother's family that week. When he read her email and learned that Professor Richter was going to announce his next book at Humboldt University, he couldn't believe it. He couldn't be there, of course, but he was dying to know what book was next in the series, so he could beat her to the punch when he got that inevitable gloating phone call from Berlin.

No harm no foul, Zig thought as he broke through the firewall. He chuckled as he scanned the documents folder and found what he thought was the outline for Richter's next book. There was only one problem—it wasn't the outline for the next book. Zig knew that he was in trouble the second he saw the cover page.

TOP SECRET
FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

The first thing he did was to call Julia. Unfortunately, he couldn't fully explain the situation to her, nor would she believe him even if he could. He wasn't sure what she could do to help him, anything, but he begged her to track Richter down and keep an eye on him until he could talk to someone. Julia agreed because he was already on thin ice at work—she didn't want him to get fired.

Deep inside, Zig knew the dossier was like Pandora's Box—once it was open, there was no going back. It might be sheer entertainment and fiction, like everything else the professor had written. *But then again, it might be something else.* He just hoped Julia could keep tabs on him in case the document turned out to be authentic.

Then came the hard part. The door was open, so he knocked on the doorframe. Deputy Chief of Director Christian Sheppard heard him, but he didn't look up.

So Zig knocked again. Louder.

"I don't have a meeting right now," Sheppard grumbled. "Talk to Cabrini and schedule one."

Zig knocked again. And again and again.

Finally, Sheppard got annoyed just enough to look up from his report on the Israeli subs in the Gulf of Oman. "What do you want? Better yet—who the hell are you?"

Zig was nervous; his palms dripped with sweat. "Good morning, sir. I'm Michael Zigmund. I'm an analyst in the Germany group, downstairs. I need to talk to you. It's kind of important."

Sheppard looked back down at his report. "Did you speak to your supervisor about this?"

"No, sir."

"Then go back and take it up the proper channels. If it's important enough, I'll see it."

"We don't have time."

That simple declarative sentence got Sheppard to look up. In fact, Zig suddenly had his full and undivided attention. "Does this concern an immediate threat to the national security of the United States?"

"Yessir," Zig replied anxiously.

"What is it?" Sheppard's expression was deadly serious. He had one hand on a red phone.

Zig gulped hard. "The incident in question happened in 1945. During the Battle of Berlin."

Sheppard stared at him in disbelief. "The Battle of Berlin? As in ... World War II?" he asked just to make sure he wasn't hallucinating.

"Yes, sir. The Nazis called it Tristan. It was a supernatural weapon of some sort. Ring a bell?"

Sheppard took off his glasses, brushed his dyed auburn hair back and sighed loudly. He was annoyed as hell. “No, that doesn’t ring a bell,” he grumbled. “In fact, the NSA and CIA both stopped worrying about witchcraft, ghosts, astrology, psychic submarine tracking and all of the other supernatural crap a long time ago. You’re wasting your time. More importantly, you’re wasting my time.”

“Well, how about—”

Sheppard cut him off. “Look, kid. I’ve never heard of Tristan. Whatever it was, it happened far too long ago to affect our mission in the here and now, which is to protect the United States of America. Put the *Harry Potter* books down and get back to work.”

“With all due respect, sir, maybe you aren’t high enough up the chain of command to know about Operation Tristan,” Zig said rather innocently. “May I talk to the President?”

“The president of what?” The conversation was growing tense and strange. He contemplated calling security.

“The United States. He was just sworn in.”

“I know who he is, asshole,” Sheppard shot back. The rogue analyst no longer seemed dangerous, just incredibly stupid with no social skills whatsoever. He wondered if someone put him up to it. *Are we on Candid Camera? Punk’d?*

Zig held up the dossier. “Sir, can you please look at this? It’ll only take a minute.”

Sheppard didn’t look at it. Point of fact, he would rather carve his eye out with a spoon than be badgered into doing something by an analyst. “Mr. Zigmund, how long have you worked here at the NSA?”

“Six weeks.”

“Six whole weeks?”

“Yep.”

Suddenly, the stupid questions made sense. The guy was a newbie—a computer nerd run amok. Sheppard decided to screw with him. “Maybe you were absent that day, but you should have gotten the memo that we typically don’t grant first-year analysts an emergency meeting with the President to discuss World War II. And even if he had time to meet with you, there’s nothing you can tell President Duarte about World War II that he doesn’t already know—I gave him *The World at War* DVD set for Christmas, which is narrated by Laurence Olivier. And let me tell you something else.”

“Sir?”

“That son-of-a-bitch was the best narrator in the history of human civilization—and probably a couple of other ones too. Including the chimps. Don’t let anyone tell you any differently.”

Zig was stunned silly. The conversation wasn't going as he had imagined. Technically, he was being openly mocked. Nevertheless, he pressed on. "Sir, this is really serious. I think I found something important."

"Fantastic. Now, go write a report about it. Use Times New Roman, double-space everything and use lots of goddamn commas—you can never have enough goddamn commas. But just don't bother me again, I have work to do."

"But the President..."

"Is that coffee?" Sheppard asked, pointing to the red ceramic cup in Zig's hand.

"Orange tea, actually."

"Whatever. Drink your drink and get the fuck out."

"But-but-but ..."

"Drink your drink and get the fuck out."

"I don't understand—"

Sheppard talked over him. "That's what this bouncer used to say at the *Chapeau Rouge* in Prague. Today, I'm giving you the same advice that they dish out at the best bar on Earth when it's time to go home. Drink your drink—"

"I got it ... I got it ... thank you."

Sheppard pointed to the door.

At least I tried, Zig thought as he walked out. His consolation prize from that debacle of a meeting was that he didn't have time to confess to stealing the dossier from Richter's computer. Which meant that he could keep his job for a few more weeks while he sent out resumes.

Then, the strange and chaotic Wednesday took an unexpected left turn. Zig literally did a double take when he saw the stars in front of the elevator—they were on the shoulders of General John Hastings, the Director of the NSA. *This is no coincidence*, Zig thought. *This is fate. God Bless America.*

His approach immediately caught the attention of the two Secret Service agents who were constantly at the general's side, a precaution that former President Obama had implemented after the abduction and murder of two British intelligence officers in Brussels a few years ago.

"General Hastings, can I please talk to you for a minute?" Zig asked.

Hastings ignored him. He looked at his watch.

Secret Service agent Michael Jones stepped in front of Zig and eyed his badge. "You don't have the credentials to speak to the general without an invitation," he said. "In fact, you're not"

even supposed to be on this floor. Scram.”

Zig disregarded the attempt to shut him down. “General Hastings, can I talk to you? Please.”

Sensing that Zig had no intention of leaving, Agent Jones grabbed his arm. “Sir, even though you’re a NSA employee, I have to ask you to leave now or you will be subject to arrest.”

“But I need to talk to the general,” he said loudly. “I have something to show him.”

Agent Jones tightened his grip on his arm and called for backup. Zig pushed him away. The papers flying into the air marked the exact moment when the situation had officially passed the point of no return.

The Secret Service moved fast. Zig shouted as the agents wrestled him to the floor. “General Hastings! I need to talk to you! Please! This is important!”

General Hastings stood to the side and silently watched the raucous wrestling match. When Zig was finally in handcuffs, he stepped right over him and into the elevator.

Zig desperately called out to the general one last time as the doors closed. “Operation Tristan!”

Berlin, Germany

Professor Richter enjoyed his stroll down the *Unter Den Linden*, the grass pedestrian mall named for the linden trees that have stood there since the 1600s.

Despite its long and proud history, many of the buildings along the *Unter Den Linden* are relatively new. In Berlin, it is said that you can tell if a building was around during the Second World War by whether or not it has bullet holes. If it doesn't have bullet holes, it wasn't there.

On the day that Professor Richter walked down the former path to the palace of the Prussian kings, however, bullets were not flying through the streets of Berlin. Germany had the blood of freedom pouring through its veins and the *Unter Den Linden* was beautiful again.

The professor decided to make the biggest announcement of his career at Humboldt University for two reasons. First, the school was a legend in academic circles all over the world; it had been home to some of Germany's finest minds of the past 200 years, including his hero Albert Einstein and more than twenty-five Nobel Prize winners.

The second reason was more personal to Richter, as a writer. The campus is infamous for the night that the Nazis burned 20,000 books authored by Jews and other so-called degenerates in the nearby *Bebelplatz*. That horrible evening featured a speech by Joseph Goebbels and showed the world what was in store for it with Nazi ideology. Richter felt that if he had been a writer back in the 1930s, his books would have been on that burning pile. If not himself.

Richter stood above the small hidden memorial that marked the spot where the Nazis burned the books and said a silent prayer. Just below ground level, bookcases with shelf space for 20,000 books lined an all-white room. There was not a book to be found on the shelves, but a plaque bore the famous Heinrich Heine epigraph: "*Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Mencken*" ("That was only a prelude; where they burn books, they ultimately burn people").

The Nazis had always fascinated Richter, especially their well-documented interest in the occult. But he didn't admire them. Instead, he wondered what could have driven an entire country off the deep end like that. He didn't think it was because the German economy was in free fall, nor the fact that Hitler had been a charismatic leader who was at the right place at the right time. Instead, Richter was convinced that true evil had been responsible for Hitler's messianic rise to power—perhaps the manifestation of Satan himself. *If only the world had known how truly close Hitler had taken us to the brink*, he thought.

Just outside the university gates, Richter stopped at a row of tables from which the school sold reprints of the books that the Nazis burned in the *Bebelplatz*. As he browsed, a student asked him to sign a copy of *Pyramids and Aliens*. He scribbled his name on the inside cover and sent the kid on his way. He drew comfort from the fact that *Pyramids and Aliens* was still generating interest. His research had not been the best, perhaps, but his fans loved the book. The 70,000 copies that had sold over the last few months got him onto a few talk shows and paid the bills; not a bad

thing. There were even rumors of a movie deal, but that hadn't quite panned out yet.

Richter enjoyed the fame and benefits that came with a best seller, but his perspective changed when the mysterious dossier arrived in his mailbox. At first, he thought the document was a job offer or perhaps an anonymous work penned in tribute to his own books. But, his life changed when he went to Prague and began to retrace the journey of the two German soldiers—that's where Richter found himself in possession of the scoop of the century. And with the person who sent him the top-secret dossier unwilling or unable to disclose their identity, the story was all his.

Professor Richter looked around at his surroundings one last time before he went into the school. He knew that the world would be a far different place when he emerged.

Julia panicked when she saw him walk towards the front door. She didn't have a plan, but she tried to buy Zig some time. "Professor Richter! Professor Richter!"

Richter heard her call out, but he had no intention of stopping. He signed one book, but he couldn't sign them all—the press was waiting.

He went inside. When Julia tried to follow him, a security guard in a blue blazer stepped in front of her. "Student ID, please."

Julia reeled backwards, not sure what to say. "I don't have student ID, sir. I'm just here for the lecture."

The guard looked at his clipboard. "Name, please."

"Julia Heckmann. I'm not on the list, but I've traveled a long way to hear Professor Richter speak. Please, you've got to let me in."

"You're not on the list."

"I know that I'm not on the list. I just told you that. I'm a huge fan of *Pyramids and Aliens*. Have you read it?"

The security guard shook his head. By his irritable demeanor, she instantly knew there was no point in appealing to his literary tastes.

"Can I please come in for the lecture? I cancelled plans with my family to be here. I'll behave and I'll leave right after it's over. I promise."

The security guard shook his head.

Julia sighed and walked away. A few steps later, she gathered her courage, blended into the group of students and tried to sneak past the guard again.

When the irate guard blocked her way for the second time, he pushed his sport jacket aside to reveal a small silver pistol in a shoulder holster.

"You're *not* on the list."

Ft. Meade, Maryland

The elevator door opened and General Hastings towered over Zig. He had been absolute convinced that the kid was a lunatic. That certainty disappeared as the elevator doors closed. “What the hell did you just say?” he bellowed.

“Ook,” Zig responded. Agent Jones had his face pushed down into the carpet.

“What?”

“Ananrannaggupuppyzzrzoozananannnnawhhhhoppkknsssssssoyyeaawwookkookkkkieezzzz Uruururu.”

“Get him up. I can’t understand a goddamn word he’s saying. Take the cuffs off,” Hastings ordered.

Agent Jones pulled him to his feet and took the handcuffs off. Zig cringed when Hastings grabbed him by the collar and looked him in the eye.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Michael Zigmund, sir.”

“Are you going to tell me what all of this nonsense is about?”

Zig glanced nervously at the Secret Service and other people in the hallway who had been attracted by the commotion. Sheppard stood outside of his office with his arms crossed, looking like a math teacher who just caught some kid cheating on the final.

“This is highly confidential. Can we talk in private, sir? Please?” Zig asked.

General Hastings sighed. Then he turned to his security detail. “Did you search him for weapons?”

Agent Jones nodded.

“Shep, can we use your office?”

Sheppard stepped aside, but he wasn’t happy about it. Zig picked his papers up, winked as he passed Sheppard and went into the office. Hastings followed him in and shut the door.

“Okay Mr. Zigmund, I’ll play. What kind of goddamn, low-rent, turkey raffle bullshit is this? What is so important to risk your career and personal liberty over?”

Zig held up a copy of *Pyramids and Aliens*.

The general knew the book; his wife Maureen wouldn't stop talking about it. "I hope you're not about to tell me that the theories in that book are real," he warned. "Because if you do, I'm going to kick your ass right here, right now. Step two will be your arrest on federal charges for assaulting a Secret Service agent."

Zig smiled. "No, sir. *Pyramids and Aliens* is complete tabloid bullshit. Well-written entertainment fiction. Fun to read. It might even make a great movie. But nothing in that book is real. Nothing at all."

General Hastings breathed a sigh of relief. The kid at least had half of a brain. "Get to the point."

"A friend of mine heard that Professor Richter is going to speak at Humboldt University today, in Berlin. She thinks he's going to announce his next book."

"So what."

"He isn't going to announce his next book. He's going to announce something much, much bigger than that. And if what he shows people in that presentation is real, there could be trouble. A lot of trouble."

"Why are you so interested in that guy's kooky theories? He claims to have proof that the Pyramids of Giza were built by Martians. How the hell do you know he's not cooking up another publicity stunt to sell more books?"

"I hacked into his laptop." Then Zig showed him the dossier. "It's all here—I printed it out."

General Hastings was stunned speechless. He had just spent the morning testifying to an antagonized Congressional subcommittee about the NSA's new warrantless electronic surveillance guidelines. The incident that Zig just admitted to was a textbook case of what Congress and the civil liberties groups were up in arms about. He wondered if his next day on the Hill would be spent explaining and apologizing for this crap. On C-SPAN.

"Who told you to do that? Who authorized you to scan his laptop?" Hastings asked.

Zig just stood there.

"Did anyone at all approve it? Anybody at all?"

"Nope."

Hastings hit the roof. "How goddamn stupid can you be? Don't you know how big this issue is right now? If the press gets wind of this, they will eat us alive—so will Congress!"

"I understand, sir." Zig put his head down in shame. He wondered if they were going to let him clean out his desk. Then he wondered if he could get a new job with a felony on his record.

As Zig turned to leave, General Hastings grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute, son."

“Sir?”

“Let me see what’s in that file.”

Langley, Virginia

Patrick Waldon leaned back in his chair and pushed his breakfast across his desk, away from him. In his six years as Director of the CIA, the secret had come close to being revealed twice. Both times he had successfully dealt with the situation. It wasn't pleasant, but he did what he had to do. The stakes were too high to play by the rules.

Waldon knew the secret would probably get out someday, but he vowed that it wouldn't happen on his watch. In fact, one of his principal jobs at the agency—besides killing off the remnants of Al Qaeda and its various splinter groups—was to ensure that the secret didn't get out. Under a classified Presidential directive, he was authorized to take any steps deemed necessary to prevent that from happening, including the use of deadly force in any jurisdiction.

When he heard that the topic of the meeting was Operation Tristan, he got worried. Worried enough to have CIA chief counsel Charles Corgan in the office with him. “Are you ready?” he asked.

Corgan nodded and pulled out a yellow legal pad as a three-dimensional hologram of General Hastings appeared in front of them. The lawyer was amazed by the latest and greatest toys that Waldon constantly got his hands on, but the new 3D technology was just a little too realistic and creepy for him.

Waldon got right to the point. “How bad is it?”

“Someone stumbled onto Tristan again,” General Hastings replied.

“Who?”

“Gerhard L. Richter III, a semi-celebrity and very strange writer from Vienna. They call him ‘the professor,’ but he doesn't teach anywhere, he just writes shitty occult books. In fact, we can't find any evidence that he even has a college degree. We're not sure who gave him the information about Operation Tristan, but it appears to have been a significant security breach. He's been visiting the locations described in the dossier.”

“How certain are you that he has good intel?”

“100%. One of our analysts hacked into his goddamn laptop.”

Waldon still didn't panic. They had contingency plans to deal with anyone who got too close. They also had a heavily armed Delta Team on standby in London, 24/7. “Why did you authorize this surveillance in the first place?”

“I didn't authorize squat,” Hastings replied. “In fact, I didn't even really know anything about this Richter character until this morning. Our analyst, Michael Zigmund, is a big fan of his books. So is my wife.”

“Did he have a search warrant?” Corgan asked. He didn’t fully understand the situation yet but he was running the usual legal scenarios through his mind.

“No one authorized Mr. Zigmund to do anything,” General Hastings replied. “He’s an overly curious and hyperactive nerd, just out of college. He couldn’t wait for Richter’s next book to come out. He *had* to know what was next. Lucky for us.”

Corgan thought the solution was simple. “No problem. We’ll get the German courts to issue an emergency restraining order to prevent him from going public.”

“That will buy us some time,” Waldon said.

“Agreed,” Corgan replied. “Germany’s laws are much more restrictive than ours when it comes to Nazi bullshit. In fact, if you give the Hitler salute, you can go to jail.”

“I hate to veto the CIA’s mutual admiration society, but you don’t understand what’s going on here,” Hastings interrupted. “Richter conned his way into a classroom at Humboldt University; his lecture starts in a few minutes. Because of the success of his latest idiotic book, the press might actually show up to hear what he has to say.”

Waldon remained unconvinced. “No one will believe him anyway. With a little covert and malicious PR, we can discredit him so bad that he won’t get an invitation to speak at a middle school science fair for the next forty years. If that fails, we’ll drug him and get photos of him *flagrante delicto*. There’s a tabloid website in Los Angeles that will be all over it.”

General Hastings sighed. There was no way around it—he had to tell them. “Listen to me, gentlemen. Professor Richter is *not* some run of the mill moron who will be deterred by risky photos. The document that Zig lifted from his laptop is *not* a collection of half-assed UFO theories. We don’t know how he got it yet, but it’s Dossier #6561—the same top-secret dossier that was prepared for President Truman after the war; the same dossier that no member of Congress has ever seen. Get the picture?”

Corgan put his legal pad down and closed his eyes. The atmosphere in the office went ice cold.

It finally happened. Goddamn it, Waldon thought. His heart and his mind raced. The United States government suddenly faced its most serious crisis since the Second Korean War. “Did you notify the Chancellor?”

“She was in a closed-door session mediating the latest skirmish between Greece and Turkey. She didn’t get the message fast enough or didn’t appreciate its significance. Either way, there was a catastrophic failure in communication and we didn’t reach her until a few minutes ago. The German feds and FBI are on the way to Humboldt University, but they won’t get there in time. We can worry about who screwed up later, but we need to fix this. We have seven minutes. Ready, go.”

Waldon threw his breakfast against the wall and screamed. “Fuck!” It had been three years since he had thrown food, but a little food throwing during a national crisis was good for the soul. *That danish was stale anyway,* he thought. *I hate lemon danish. Fuck lemon danish.*

The lawyer got him to snap out of it. “Are there any other food groups that you want to attack before we decide on a course of action?” Corgan asked.

Waldon didn’t answer—he was already running solutions to the crisis through his mind. “We’ve gotta take him out,” he muttered. Then he punched a button on the speakerphone. “Gilman!”

“Sir?” came the voice on the other end.

“Get the German Chancellor on the line.”

“Yes, sir!” came the reply.

“Not so fast,” Corgan interrupted. “We have to contact the President for approval first.”

“No time.”

“But under the law...”

“Under the law, I have the emergency power to take these actions without Presidential approval. I don’t care if we have to launch a fucking tomahawk cruise missile into that building. We will *not* allow that lecture to proceed.”

Corgan remained unmoved. “Sir, you are obligated under federal law to get the President’s approval prior to conducting targeted assassinations in NATO countries. There is a procedure. A protocol.”

“Screw protocol and screw the three years that you spent in law school. We’re in deep shit right now. Duarte has been the leader of the free world for less than a week—we don’t have time for him to get over the sticker shock.”

Waldon turned back towards the hologram. “General, who do we have on the ground?”

“Only one agent is close enough,” Hastings replied. “Julia Heckmann. Fortunately, she’s been following Richter.”

Waldon breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank God. Give her the green light. Terminate him.”

“She’s a librarian.”

Waldon was stupefied. “A librarian? You sent a goddamn *librarian* on a covert mission?”

“We didn’t send anybody. *Your* CIA librarian just happens to be in Berlin on vacation—I trust that she has had the standard weapons training. In any case, we are lucky that *our* NSA analyst was smart enough to ask *your* CIA librarian to follow Richter around, just in case *your* CIA agents need to move fast. Which they do.”

Waldon punched a button on the phone. “Gilman—get Julia Heckmann on a secure line. I want the Delta Team mobilized and agents sent to Gerhard L. Richter’s home in Vienna. Go.”

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