57.
DO YOU WANT TO BELIEVE?
<Frater Carfax>

Prologue

From the rocky escarpment, Karl fixed his eyes upon the valley below him. The August sun warmed his skin gently as he contemplated the difficult descent that would have been impossible earlier in the year, the snow and sub-zero temperatures rendering the surrounding lands inaccessible even to most local Tibetans. He thought to himself that even the lack of snow and ice may not make his destination any more accessible, the near-vertical valleys having next to nothing resembling pathways, and always the constant risk of landslides and rock falls.

But within, he felt the sense that he was headed in the right direction, towards something important. His precognitive flashes had served him well as an artillery officer for the Bavarian Army, and if anything, the events of the past three years had honed this sense to an instinctual skill. More than the animal sense allowing the hunter to track down his prey, this instinct had allowed him to track down his destiny.

Until recently**,** Karl Haushofer had been living in Japan, where he held a position as a liaison for the Bavarian army. For a lad who had grown up in a conservative environment, his ears filled with competing Lutheran and Catholic rhetoric of salvation and damnation, he eagerly drank at the fountain of Japanese society, learning the language, discovering Zen Buddhism, and taking his fill of a much gentler, but equally regimented, philosophy.

Being an ambitious military officer, he made a concerted effort to become proficient in the Japanese language and local customs of etiquette. Gradually, this effort developed a network of social and political connections, particularly amongst those who valued his gifts of European indulgences denied to most through the “Fortress Japan” trade policy. In due course, he found himself in a unique position for a *Gaijin* – receiving an invitation to become a member of the

exclusive *Kokuryu Kai*, the Black Dragon Society.

The society had long been a Machiavellian pillar of Japanese political machinations, its capacity for intelligence gathering and influence turning the tide in the Russo-Japanese war. And so a desire to extend their networks into Europe made the possibility of initiating a *Gaijin* who was culturally sympathetic an acceptable proposition.

However, it was Karl's ability to readily assimilate the more esoteric aspects of the Society that caught the attention of certain elders. What seemed initially to be an exercise in nationalistic political exchange for mutual benefit soon revealed itself to Karl as a secret militaristic Buddhist order of initiates, whose esoteric teachings originated beyond the islands of Japan. The esoteric training and initiations prepared him to look with new eyes, and would serve him well throughout his pilgrimages across the Asian continent, looking for that knowledge he saw as having been lost to the West.

It was in Tibet, at the feet of the enigmatic Russian mystic Gurdjieff, that his final initiations and transmissions of knowledge would occur, allowing him to fulfill his potential as an adept. He was well aware that his spiritual path would, for some reason, reach its climax in the mountains of this land. His master revealed to him during his teaching that even greater secrets were to be found amongst the mountainous wastes hidden within labyrinthine caves. Karl pressed him for further information, but Gurdjieff refused, stating that the affairs of the Masters of those secrets were of no consequence to humanity, except for those to whom they voluntarily reveal themselves.

But what of the consequence for these Masters, to whom Karl wanted to reveal himself? The pull of destiny tugged like an invisible cord upon his soul.

Inhaling the brisk air, his muscles worn with fatigue, he started the precarious descent into the valley below. It had been three days since he had encountered any of the local peasants, and he had been stretching his food out to barely above starvation level. While his training kept his mind sharp, the physical fatigue was considerable. This was only to be confirmed with a single, carelessly-placed foot.

The fall down the mountainside was agonising, the immediate sharp pain of ribs cracking and lacerations from the jutting rocks removing all awareness that the conclusion of this downwards journey would be fatal. Before the realisation had time to properly form in his mind, he was startled to suddenly experience a sensation of free falling, followed by the ice-cold shock of mountain water.

Somehow, he had landed in a deep pool. Looking up in panic, he saw landslide dirt triggered by his fall descending from a hole in the cave ceiling through which he had fallen, dim sunlight streaming through. Around him, out of the sun's reach, was darkness. He could hear the torrent of subterranean running water feeding the pool into which he had fallen.

Splashing furiously, he moved through the water until he felt his feet touching the bottom. He staggered forward, his lungs on fire as the broken bone pressed into his flesh. With great effort, he reached a rocky shore, where he collapsed onto his back in the darkness.

There he lay, with furious broken gasps, trying to ensure enough air stayed in his lungs long enough to keep him conscious. The ice-cold water added to the fatigue, as he felt his senses begin to shut down.

Numb and cold, through his desperate fight to remain awake, he starting hearing voices. Whether in his mind, or somewhere out in the darkness, he was unsure. The language seemed almost familiar, resembling Sanskrit.

With a shock, he became aware of a face hovering two inches above his as a light suddenly blazed nearby. Feeling a jolt to his throat, his last moments of consciousness recorded an image – a young man, possibly Tibetan, but with eyes that were somehow different. They were serpent's eyes.

Abwehr Regional Office, Paris, German-occupied France

The office was dank and cold. Captain Mahler sat in his chair deep in thought, leaning precariously on the two hind legs. Before him sat a sheet of paper with a mass of jumbled letters, his mind ticking over as it searched for patterns. The truth was, his mind was not as focused on the task as it should be. Instead, thoughts of nights in Berlin intruded. Paris had its Chateau Gonier, its Moulin Rouge, but the nightly indulgences at the brothels and music halls were not the same as the illegal underground cabarets and culture he longed for.

As an intelligence officer with a penchant for cryptography, the German military felt Fuchs Mahler was of more use to the Fatherland at the front line of resistance activity. While he was very good at his job, he made an effort not to shine too brightly in the eyes of his superiors outside of the immediate *Abwehr* command. He had no desire to be requisitioned into the *Geheime Staatspolizei* – sure the black uniforms, leather coats and shiny jackboots looked sexy, and they were a hit with the girls, but a job with the Gestapo came with its own concerted

ideological indoctrination that was not worth the price as far as Mahler was concerned.

"*Heil Hitler*!" exclaimed Sergeant Danica Schully as she marched into the office, saluting smartly, clipboard in hand.

"Yes, yes, *heil*, *heil*," replied Mahler nonchalantly as he limply flipped his hand in a half-hearted salute, not looking up from the encoded message on the paper.

Mildly annoyed with her superior's less than enthusiastic response, she responded tersely, "two prisoners have been brought into the central holding facility. A resistance cell was raided last night that we believe was behind the ambush of the SS staff car and murder of the officer and driver two nights ago. The cell was desperately trying to protect the two men we captured, so they must be of some importance. We believe they were due to be smuggled to England through the resistance network. An examination of documents found in their belongings indicate they were probably resident in Berlin until recently..."

"*Scheiss*...." interjected Mahler rubbing his face with his hands. "I'll wager Himmler's happy henchmen will be paying us a conjugal visit before the week is out."

"Indeed, " Schully mused, grinning wryly. "We have direct orders from the Office of Admiral Canaris to conduct a preliminary interrogation of the prisoners before the Gestapo arrive in the morning."

Mahler grinned back. The long-standing animosity between Admiral Canaris, the head of German Military Intelligence and Heinrich Himmler's *Reichssicherheitshauptamt,* Reich Security Central Office, was an open secret amongst the German intelligence community. This resulted in each agency attempting to outmanoeuvre the other at every available opportunity, a game Mahler often enjoyed by anonymously feeding false cryptic information to his black-shirted counterparts. He once managed to get the Gestapo to raid a local bordello on the premise that it was harbouring communist resistance fighters in the basement. Instead, they found a particularly senior *Schutzstaffel* officer bound and handcuffed in a compromising position with a young working girl wielding a particularly dangerous-looking courgette.

"Let's do it now then. Do the prisoners have names?" asked Mahler.

"Franz Bardon and Wilhelm Quintscher," replied Schully, looking at her clipboard.

Dungavel Castle, Manor Home of the Duke of Hamilton, Scotland

“Pardon me m'Lord, your visitors have arrived and are waiting in the library.”

Startled by his butler, Douglas-Hamilton broke out of his trance. He had not intended to drift into reverie, but he had been feeling a disturbing energy all day and was determined to uncover its etheric source. Something significant has happened, he thought, and no doubt his visitors would be the bearers of clarification.

He exited his private chapel and walked down the hallway towards the library. Waiting in the room for him was Sergio Hutin, a coordinator in the French resistance, and agent for the British Special Operations Executive, and perhaps not surprisingly given the former, Commander Ian Fleming, an officer in British Intelligence. But what made the meeting unusual was the involvement of Douglas-Hamilton. The Duke was an accomplished aviator, an officer in the Royal Air Force and had assisted British Intelligence numerous times with regards to clandestine aerial photography.

What made the Duke different was that he was also well connected to the various fraternal and esoteric societies brutally suppressed by the Third Reich, himself being a fraternal brother of the Gold and Rose Cross. In this capacity, he served as a valuable resource for British Intelligence in their efforts to exploit the occult-oriented activities of the Reich and for those members of various occult orders who acted to undermine the Third Reich's occupation of European countries, combining a magical and militaristic strategy. Sergio Hutin was the English liaison for one such fraternity, the Mystical Order of Hermes.

“Gentlemen, apologies for keeping you waiting,” said Douglas-Hamilton as he exchanged a particular grip quite different to most handshakes with each of his guests.

“No, please, we were well entertained admiring your library,” replied Sergio. “Some unusual volumes, oui? The Goetia? Have you undertaken the work to achieve command of the denizens of this tome?”

“Sometimes to overcome the work of the enemy one requires a better control over his resources than he,” replied Douglas-Hamilton reservedly. “But come, let us sit and discuss the pressing issues at hand.”

Reclining in the library chairs, Commander Fleming took the initiative,

“Operation Frabato was a dismal failure. The extraction from Berlin failed and now Bardon and Quintscher are being held in Paris by German Military Intelligence.”

“Probably better the *Abwehr* than the Gestapo,” replied the Duke.

“I'm sure that situation will change,” added Sergio. “Our sources indicate that the SS Ancestral Heritage division discovered coded correspondence between Bardon and Quintscher regarding their covert investigations into the research activities at Himmler's castle headquarters in Wewelsburg. We suspect they obtained confirmation that the *Ahnenerbe* adepts have succeeded in the condensation of Odic life force into a more tangible form, using something like an 'Odic battery'. The crude methods previously utilised by the SS in their rites were messy, bloody sacrificial affairs - nothing more than crude carry-overs from the initial explorations by the old Thule Society into Od, or as they called it, Vril. With this new approach, they have the potential to collect Vril for use in their misguided quest for racial perfection. I suspect this will also be of benefit to their allies in Tibet.”

“How were Franz and Wilhem discovered?” queried the Duke.

Sergio sighed, “as you are probably aware, when the Nazis started suppressing all Masonic and esoteric societies, most of us went underground, some escaped to Belgium, others across the Channel.”

The Duke nodded. He himself had provided sanctuary for many of his continental brethren, Masonic and otherwise, whose fraternal philosophies were regarded as a threat to Hitler's regime.

Sergio continued, “unfortunately, there are some adepts from amongst the fraternities who sympathised with the politics of Hitler, and have found themselves favour in the sight of Himmler. A new order consisting of twelve elite *Ahnenerbe* officers under Himmler has been convened, and have received personal training by these traitors to such a level as to be regarded as high adepts in their own right. I suspect Bardon and Quintscher were probably betrayed by someone they once regarded as a brother.”

“I still don't understand, how did a fringe-folk movement like the Thule society become the underpinning for the Nazi party and SS occult activities? And how did Tibetans become tied up in this affair?” asked Commander Fleming with some confusion, obviously not in his element in discussing occult matters.

Sergio fixed his eyes squarely on Fleming's, “there is more in Tibet than snow

and yaks, Commander. There are those there who maintain a tradition older than the Buddhists, and older than the Bon, whose link to their elder gods was founded in the release of energy contained in the blood of every living being. There are certain forces in that country that see advantage in supporting the Nazi regime, because military bloodshed can divert the world's attention from a blood sacrifice of an altogether different magnitude, for a much more infernal purpose."

Abwehr Regional Office, Paris, German-occupied France

"You don't like the Gestapo do you?" asked Bardon grinning, looking across the table at Fuchs Mahler.

"You can save your stage magician mind tricks for another time!" retorted Schully, glaring at the man. She didn't like him one bit. From her observations, his casual and manipulative replies to questioning, and the very tone in his voice, had so far revealed he was obviously skilled in the art of mesmerism or similar acts of suggestion.

"Our professional relations with our colleagues are not part of the discussion. So why were the resistance so interested in getting you out of the country, Herr Bardon? We have checked into you, you are a performer and suspected Mason – but nothing that would indicate that you are of obvious military interest. That is, unless the loose tongues of drunken German officers have shifted from showgirls to stage conjurors, but I suspect that even wearing stockings and stilettos you would be no more enticing. Can you give me a reason that we should continue to hold you rather than allow our friends at the Gestapo to take over the questioning?" asked Mahler. "I guarantee their methods of interrogation are less than gentle."

"I regrettably suspect, Captain, that the powers that be will not allow you to detain me in favour of the Gestapo, and in any case, little of what I might say will be of use to you, or make sense to you for that matter," replied Bardon, seemingly unconcerned.

"Captain, may I interrogate the other prisoner, see if his tongue is any looser?" questioned Sergeant Schully in frustration.

"Yes, if you believe you can succeed, go ahead," replied Mahler.

As Sergeant Schully left the room, Mahler lit two cigarettes and handed one to

Bardon, who appreciatively accepted.

“So which war are you fighting, Captain? The one against the British and her allies or the one against the Jewish conspiracy?” asked Bardon, raising an eyebrow.

“I tend to leave the latter to those with a reduced capacity for critical judgement. So, which war are you fighting, Herr Bardon?”

“The one against Himmler's use of the Black Arts, and the massacre of the Jews as a secret sacrificial offering to inhuman forces,” said Bardon, straight faced.

Mahler prided himself on being difficult to flummox and yet he was lost for words, his cigarette hanging from his bottom lip.

“As you said Captain, I wouldn't look very good in stockings and stilettos, so why would the Gestapo want me? And why would the resistance be willing to risk their lives for me?”

“I'm well aware that fantasy and conspiracy are the staples of certain circles of self-appointed intelligentsia in Berlin, Herr Bardon. However, I'm sure you probably hold some information of military importance that is better extracted by people less concerned about Article 4 of the Geneva Conventions,” replied Mahler.

“The fact is, Captain, when the Gestapo arrive to collect Wilhelm and myself, I expect another delegation will be here from Berlin to collect the body of the dead SS officer killed the other night by the resistance. A unique opportunity exists, and I doubt you will get another chance. This may very well be of interest to your Admiral Canaris. The question for you now, Captain Mahler, is do you want to believe?”

Madjanek Extermination Camp, Poland

Herschel was dressed in little more than rags. His heart hung heavy with despair, helpless against the tides of wretchedness before him.

Around the Rabbi was a cacophony of screams and hysteria. People were disintegrating from within. The soundness of people's minds, their emotions and their hope began to decay as they watched the ones they loved paraded and packed behind metal doors that were locked behind them.

Death speaks not with words. Azrael is disturbingly silent, his victims compensating for his absence of voice. Herschel would have considered it no more if it weren't for the fact that the act of extermination carried a sound that could not be heard by ears.

The sounds of souls screaming.

Damnation is not judgment and condemnation by the Lord, Herschel thought to himself, but the destruction of the very essence that binds you to Him. And every murdered soul is a small act of deicide against the Most High.

He scanned the guards and noticed that behind the perimeter fence closest to the chambers stood two SS officers watching the proceedings. His eyes narrowed as his perspective altered. Through the haze of a sight that came not through his eyes, he identified that while one was human, the other certainly was not. Serpent's eyes. And those eyes were now aware that someone could see past the illusions as it scanned the assembled.

Herschel's mind was cast back to the fireside teachings of his father of what he claimed to be hidden rabbinical teachings known only to a few. One of the stories told of the experiences of Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron:

> *"I saw Watchers in my vision, the dream-vision. Two men were fighting over me. I asked them, 'who are you, that you are thus empowered over me?' They answered me, 'we have been empowered to rule over all mankind.' They said to me, 'which of us do you choose to rule you?' I raised my eyes and looked. One of them was terrifying in his appearance, like a serpent, his cloak many-coloured yet very dark. And I looked again, and his appearance, his visage, was like a viper.*

Herschel shuffled along in the queue towards the metal chamber. As he drew closer to the perimeter fence, he took his one and only chance.

Never breaking his gaze with the officer, Herschel made a break and ran to the perimeter fence. Crying out an invocation in a dead Semitic tongue, his arms ignited into flames and his hand transformed into a claw of seraphic fire.

He thrust his arms through the barbed wire fence, inhumanly straight into the chest of the surprised officer as he bellowed, "*I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and your people wood, and it shall devour them all!!"*

The eyes of the officer widened in fear as the fire burnt into his heart like a

branding iron, stopping whatever resemblance to humanity might beat within it.

The sound of machine gun fire erupted.

Herschel convulsed and writhed as the projectiles riddled his frail physical body, leaving it strung on the barbed wire.

His last breath carried him home.

Abandoned country church on the outskirts of Paris,
German-occupied France

“Captain, I don't quite understand why we are here?” queried Sergeant Schully as she held her coat close against the cold night air.

“Like I said, a possible resistance meeting place,” Mahler lied. Actually, his curiosity had got the better of him. Taking up the offer, Bardon told him that the truth behind his seemingly outlandish claims would be discovered that evening if he were willing to spy on his colleagues. Mahler felt that spying on the activities of the SS and Gestapo was frankly reward in itself if it meant he got one over them. At worst, if the man's claims proved to be an overactive imagination, then there would still be the issue of how he knew the movements of SS officers in Paris. There appeared little to lose in investigating Bardon's claims.

Since the preliminary interrogation, the Gestapo had arrived to question Bardon and Quintscher further. The Gestapo were clearly unhappy that the *Abwehr* had had the opportunity to question the two men. Mahler feigned ignorance of anything that the prisoners may have known, implying their interrogations had proved unable to reveal anything.

From a safe place behind the hedgerow, they had been observing movement in the shadows around the old church for the last hour. Finally the movement stopped, with all the figures bar one inside the church, now softly illuminated by candlelight.

“Come on Schully, time for a closer look,” whispered Mahler, dragging Schully, who resisted his enthusiasm with a scowl.

They shuffled along the hedgerow to the back of the church, away from the sentry at the front door of the church, who would occasionally make a sweep of

the immediate area with a torch. There, at the back of the church, they peered through holes in the broken stained-glass window, the smoke-stained, tinted glass obscuring Schully and Mahler's presence.

The old church was cleared of pews and furnishings other than the altar and a low table in the centre of the room resting on a giant red star painted on the floor. The altar was adorned with implements, flowers and brightly burning red candles. They could see a circle of men and a few women, dressed in black tunics with belts, all wearing simple red masks reminiscent of expressionless Venetian Carnival masks. Heavy medallions with the distinctive runic design of the *Schutzstaffel* hung from their necks revealing their affiliations. On the central table lay a coffin adorned with a flag of the Reich.

Mahler was pondering whether this was some form of memorial service when an aromatic smell hit his olfactory nerves, sickly sweet. A gong broke the silence, each beat resonating into the still night.

“Fraters and Sorors of the Reich. Are you ready to celebrate the ritual of the pentalpha of fire with pure heart and pure intent?**”** questioned a masked man in a highly elaborate robe.

“That we are, Most Mystical Master,” replied the assembled.

“Brother Custodian, what is your first obligation?”

“To ensure we are all Knights of the Order, Most Mystical Master,” answered the one identifying himself as the Custodian.

“You will examine the Fraters and Sorors that they carry grip and password of a Knight of the Order.”

The Custodian circumambulated in turn around those gathered, receiving an obscure handgrip while a word was whispered into his ear.

“Freemasons?” queried Schully, quite mystified by the performance.

“No,” replied Mahler squinting, “not Masons. I've got a hunch about what, or rather who, is in that coffin though.”

Completing the circuit, the Custodian faced the head ceremonialist and replied, “Most Mystical Master, those present have proved themselves to be Knights of the Order. To order, Fraters and Sorors, and speak the vow of your duty and allegiance!”

In unison the assembled raised their right arms in salute as they spoke. “We swear upon the holy laws of the pentalpha to live and act to the glory of the Reich. We will guard and retain those secrets held only for the worthy. To those who would transgress the vow of a Knight – we invoke death upon the traitors and curse their spirit! Blessed is the true cup of the light, whose strength will lead us to Victory!”

The Mystical Master raised his arms as he stared at the coffin before them and intoned, “in the name of our ancestors, and through our blood, I call upon the fire that flows in my hands, my heart and my mind! I call upon the strength to revive the essence and spirit of our fallen comrade and Frater, to be reborn as a magickal child, to be part of the evolution of our Aryan people into perfection!”

With this he approached the altar and held aloft an ornate grail. Replacing it upon the altar, he unsheathed an ornate dagger adorned with the runic SS motif, which he used to slice his forearm, the blood pouring forth down his arm as a stream of crimson liquid into the cup of wine. After a few moments, he withdrew his arm and wrapped a red silken cloth around the wound to stem the flow of blood.

Mahler noticed that he now held aloft an object, oriental in design. Before its closure, early in the war, Mahler had made a visit with a friend to the popular *Buddhistischen Haus* in Berlin. During the rituals performed there he had seen double terminated *vajra* being used, which is what this resembled. However, this object contained balls within its clawed terminals, possibly made of crystal, with a luminescent glow.

With a twist of the object the crystals cracked, pouring a viscous substance into the chalice of blood and wine. “The vril of a dying race, belonging to a dying god, shall be transformed through my sacrament to make us like Gods!” the Mystical Master declared.

The gong was once again struck as incense was heaped upon burning coals. Schully looked at Mahler with a sense of disbelief at the proceedings. With a rising fear of being caught, she tried to softly mouth objections to any continued surveillance, which were either unseen or ignored by Mahler, his eyes transfixed upon what was unfolding.

One of the robed women now approached the Mystical Master and knelt, upon which he spoke, “stand - brilliant daughter of the Dawn! Do you recognise me?”

“I recognise you, Most Mystical Master.”

Pulling the lower portion of his robe aside revealing his flaccid member, he continued, “Soror of the five-flamed star, do you feel me?”

Reaching forward and gripping him she replied “Frater, I feel you.”

The assembled began to chant in a slow rhythm, “awaken, awaken, Gate of the Sun, awaken, awaken, Gate of the Sun.”

“Soror, prove to me your recognition,” said the Mystical Master as he took a step back, pulling back from any arousal by her gentle grip.

The woman reached up, pulled back the hood of her robe and removed her mask, letting her blonde hair tumble around her neck. “Do you recognise me, Most Mystical Master?”

“Soror, I do not recognise you yet,” he replied.

Unbuttoning the top of her robe she let it fall off her shoulders, the robes being held around her hips by a fastened belt. With the distinctive SS medallion hanging between her bare breasts, she stood there in the flickering red candle light, arms raised as she asked, “do you recognise me, Most Mystical Master?”

“Soror, I do not recognise you yet,” he replied.

With a swift hand she undid the belt around her robe, allowing the garment to completely fall to her feet as she bathed her naked splendour in the night air. Her voice took on a more resonant quality, deeper and more confident as she spoke, “do you recognise me now Most Mystical Master? For thy phallus is like Osiris risen!”

She moved forward and caressed his now fully erect member. The Mystical Master undid his belt and cast aside his robe easily as she led him by his priapic manifestation towards the coffin. Shuffling back onto the edge of the casket, she lay on her back spreading her legs wide, the dew of anticipation rapidly forming between her thighs. Standing at the edge of the coffin, the Mystical Master grabbed her legs and pulled as he thrust deeply within her. His manhood, hardened in fortitude, met no resistance as she receptively gripped upon him from within, her muscles contracting and relaxing in a rhythm developed through years of training. Moaning in an ecstatic trance, she fed off his energy as he fed off hers, her sacred essences flowing around him that would combine with his to produce the alchemical elixir for conception.

Allowing the energy to rise between them, his pace started to increase, as the assembled circled around them repeatedly chanting, “Ho Ophis! Ho Archajos!”

One of the assembled brought forth the chalice. The Mystical Master took it with one hand, and consumed a mouthful, never letting the rhythm of their union stop. Intermingled blood, vril and wine ran down his lips and throat in rivulets. He then almost completely withdrew from the Soror, as he kissed her deeply transferring the elixir between their mouths, an unusual glow revealing this liquid sacrament was now something more potent.

With a final series of thrusts he bellowed, simultaneously releasing his seed deep within the Soror, “*the Sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown!”*

“Mahler, we have got to go and report this now!” whispered Schully forcefully, tugging at Mahler's sleeve. She continued, slightly stammering, “I....I don't believe what I just saw....”

“Sergeant, I don't know what I believe any more...” trailed Mahler, as he contemplated how he would explain this to his superiors, and what personal risks he might be taking by doing so.

Abwehr Regional Office – holding cells, Paris,
German-occupied France

Bardon and Quintscher sat together in the cell, leaning with their backs against the wall, neither saying a word. With eyes half open, they passed the hours in a deep meditative state as the guard outside the cell regarded them with contempt.

“Wake up. Time for food,” barked the guard as he stood and walked over to the barred door. Under the bars he passed a tray containing a cup, bread, an apple and some local cured meats.

“Do we get some water as well?” questioned Wilhelm.

The guard passed through a jug of water to Bardon who took it with both hands. As he poured the water into the cup, he started whispering quietly to himself, staring intently into the jug, gently rubbing one hand over its outer surface of fired clay.

“Come on, one glass only. Hand it back,” snapped the guard. Taking back the jug he poured himself a glass and swallowed it. Bardon smiled to himself.

“Could we exchange the apple for a peach?” queried Wilhelm as he lopped the apple through the bars to the guard.

“Since you are so choosy, you'll get neither,” said the guard, grabbing the apple mid flight and biting deep, grinding flesh and seed between his teeth, chewing noisily with his mouth open. With his focus on Quintscher, he didn't notice Bardon tracing a design into the dust of the cell floor, consisting of lines like lightning bolts flowing into curves.

“*Salve Hagos! Estote meum castellumque praesidium contra omnium hostes, conspicuusque nonconspicuus, in quisque magiceum opum*!” projected Quintscher, as he pointed towards the guard's throat.

Startled by the outburst, the guard opened his mouth to tell his prisoners to be quiet, but no sound emerged except a broken gurgle. He could feel the mouthful of apple lodged in his oesophagus, the painful sensation of the blockage cutting off all passage of air. His lungs struggled and his face reddened in desperation and panic. He grabbed at the bars of the cells, pleading through his eyes for the men to do something. Sinking to his knees, a searing pain began to tear through his lungs. He finally collapsed, just as Bardon reached through the bars and grabbed the keys off his belt.

Bardon unlocked the gates of their cell and rolled the guard over. Forcefully, with an energised hand, he struck the guard's back, dislodging an organic mass of apple flesh which had seemingly expanded in volume, the seeds appearing to have sprouted with tendrils.

A cough and a gasp emitted from the guard as he started breathing erratically, his form still on the edge of consciousness.

“He'll survive. Come, we have little time,” said Quintscher.

Together, the two men crept out through the door into the night air, darting into the shadows of the compound. They reached a door at the side of the compound and, using the guard's keys, opened the way to freedom, disappearing into the maze of Parisian streets and back alleys.

They were unaware, however, that their escape was watched from an upper story window by a pair of eyes. And they were serpent's eyes.