

The Orchid and the Edelweiss

The young tourist leaned against a big rock in the niche he had traced not long ago, while traversing a steep slope near the top of mount Gigilos. The rain did not seem to affect him much -it was not as intense as three hours ago, when he had began his walk at the beginning of the Samaria Gorge, anyway- but had become quite irritating; its drops landed monotonously on his gore-tex hiking suit, trying to penetrate the waterproof synthetic fabric in vain.

He lowered his hood and took a folded piece of paper out of one of his pockets. He unfolded the paper and tried to read it; it was a handwritten map made by his uncle a long time ago. He took a look at it, then compared the drawn path with satellite data from his GPS which he took out of another pocket of his suit.

"The entrance to the Tripiti Gorge can't be more than an hour's walk from this place..." he soliloquized, "...and the cavern just one more hour, or an hour and a half at worst..."

He folded the map again and put it into an inside pocket of his jacket. Then he took his rucksack off his back and left it to rest at his feet. Having removed its rainproof cover, he unzipped it and put what was needed to make some food out of it.

A few minutes later, with the canned beef simmering on a Primus stove, he drank some tea from his thermos and sat on a round stone.

The rain seemed to have quite lessened but thick mist had started descending from the mountains around; it was mist that would make his mission more difficult. He decided to rest some more, however, before continuing. So he unzipped his jacket completely and put an old fashioned, off-white envelope out of its inside pocket.

Inside the envelope was, among other things, a letter that the Notary of his now-dead uncle had given to him, thus executing his will, in a heavy office decorated in classic style, somewhere in London.

He started reading it.

"Dear Andrew,

The almighty Lord did not bless me with a family. Perhaps I didn't quite pursue such a life myself, to be honest. Until the turbulence of the Great War that had roused my life would simmer down, so that I could slowly put the pieces of my shattered past together again, I had got past the age for marriage for good. Which woman would even think of getting married to a crippled, retired army officer anyway?

You Andrew are the dearest of the few relatives that I've got left. And you are the only one suitable, because of your interest in traveling and exploring, to satisfy my last wish.

But please, let me narrate a story so that you can understand my motives and the purpose of my actions:

That story starts on the first days of June, in 1941, at Western Crete, near the plateau of Omalos. Me (2nd Lt. Jason Saunders, at the time), Captain Patrick Connors, Sgt. Jack Flammors from Scotland and Major John Lee Dermott were hiding in those mountains surrounding the plateau,

weapons-in-hand. We were all soldiers of the British Task Force of the Island of Crete and had taken part in a race against time, against our endurance, against our will; With the whole of Northern Crete at the mercy of the Axis armies, the decimated remnants of the Allied Forces had huddled in the southern coastline of the island, waiting to be crammed in submarines, war and merchant ships, even fishing boats and be transferred to the harbors of Egypt and the Middle East.

So ourselves, on the basis of the alternative evacuation plan "Argonaut-One" were going to move through the Samaria Gorge towards an isolated small coastal village by the Libyan Sea called Santa Roumeli; there we would probably find means of transportation to leave the island, a caique or a hoy perhaps. The area of the gorge was completely inapproachable for planes and in it lived, in small communities, local people friendly to our forces.

So you can only imagine our disappointment when we saw, at that night of the fourth of June, 1941, German patrols scattered around the entrance to the gorge.

"They fell from the sky, out of planes, hanging with ropes from pieces of cloth", the guide, a local resistance fighter, explained. "They are not many, but we are unarmed and unprepared. They did not bother us, anyway; they seem to be searching for something in the mountains..."

It was during the third night of our escape that we decided to camp at the slope of a mountain by the plateau. It was necessary for us under the present situation and those conditions to sleep during the day and move during the night, so that we would have a hope of evading the German invaders and avoid captivity.

So that we could descend safely into the gorge, the guide recommended that we should move beside it, through a smaller, more dangerous gorge, the Tripiti gorge.

We did exactly that. Under the noses of the German soldiers, and with a great deal of luck I must admit, we climbed up a steep, treeless, rocky mountain called Gigilos at the right of the gorge. From there, we managed to find the entrance to the Tripiti gorge, in which we entered, descending from the other side of Gigilos.

Our surprise and desperation was great when we saw light in the gorge in the summer night. Using binoculars, I managed to discern a small campfire and German Alpinists with torches and mountain gear walking in teams, practically to all directions.

Our guide calmly signaled us to follow him.

Through a rough, steep path with prickly bushes wounding our arms and legs, we were guided to the entrance to a small cavern. It was nearly dawn when we got in and hid there.

With the guide keeping watch, the rest of us made some food and, after quickly eating it, tried to take a nap.

Our rest didn't last for more than an hour. The guide woke me up and pointed at a team of ten Germans ascending the path towards the mouth of the cave we were in. Immediately I woke up the rest of the others and together we decided to withdraw deeper inside the mountain since it was not certain that the Alpinists were searching for us. The local disagreed, however, telling us that the cave was haunted and led straight to Hell!

Not wanting to leave our lives at a foreign island because of a mere superstition, we finally persuaded him to help us some more. Hesitatingly, he lit an oil lamp and we began our descent into darkness. Just a hundred steps were enough for the daylight to be lost, as the way started narrowing, leading further downwards.

After some more walking, the cave became as small as a tunnel, only to lead, further on, to a place that seemed to have been artificially shaped as a hall. The light of the guide's twinkled in a weird way, reflecting on strange idols probably made of precious metals, which were shaped in an odd way, with hideous forms. An altar situated at the middle of the room and two spiral constructions to the left and to the right of it made us speculate that we had found a temple of some sort.

Flashes of light at the other end of the tunnel, swears and threats in German and sporadic gunfire indicated that our team had been found by the Alpinists.

A shot hit our oil lamp, destroying it, putting our light out; we returned fire and the light at the other side of the tunnel was lost too.

Even after all these years, I have never got over the horror of the uncertainty that fighting in the dark brought to me. Perhaps that is the reason why I cannot remember what exactly happened afterwards.

Somehow (call it luck, or destiny, or plain coincidence), me and the guide, bleeding, wounded, managed to emerge back to daylight alive.

With the grace of the Almighty Lord we succeeded to enter, chased by the Germans, the Samaria gorge. There, Cretan guerillas helped us hide in the mountains. And after three months of fighting and evasion, I was lucky enough to find refuge in submarine carrying members of an escaping commando team back to the Middle East Headquarters.

So many years have passed since then, but my thoughts are still haunted by the vision of my comrades that were lost, that were wasted that day, that died in the dark belly of that Cretan cave. It's hard to wash memories away...

Do I have compunction and guilt about having pulled through? Should I have stayed with my team and meet my doom in that chamber, in complete darkness? I do not know. I will soon take my place among them, being so old and cancer-struck, anyway.

I do not want you to pity me. I've had my life and lived it as well as I could. I wish I didn't have to dragoon you into the errand I am going to ask you to do for me. But I never had the courage or the necessary parts of my body available so that I could venture back into the cave of the Devil.

With the map that you'll find enclosed in the envelope and the instructions at its back you will be able to map out a way to the entrance of the cave. Reach in safety and enter with great caution for the task you have to perform is of great importance to me.

The pathway to the chamber I mention in my story is rough, dangerous and does not forgive the mistakes of a flippant explorer.

I hope that the path leading downwards is not closed; pieces of the unstable ceiling had fallen during our fight with the Germans, probably because of the noise of the gunshots. I have already described the chamber to you, so you'll know when you find it; the path you are going to follow there

is clear, as well. When inside, it is most probable that you will come across skeletons, remains of great adventurers; of freedom fighters of a meaningless, silly war; respect their memory and do not forage through their possessions for anything. The dead, you see, have no real power in the world of the living but sometimes they can haunt our dreams and bring ill fortune to us.

You only have to find the Major's diary: You will recognize it by its black, leather cover and the silver spiral that is engraved on it. The entries in it are in a code you will not be able to decipher, but do not worry: The key to its decryption is in London, at the hands of my lawyer. He is the man that the diary relating to the events until that fateful, for my soul and the life of the others, night should be delivered to.

He will proceed to take all necessary action so that our story becomes known. It is the least tribute that can be given to fighters lost doing battle in a foreign land and still rot unburied there, remnants of an epic age, an age of risk, blood, death and sometimes of honor.

Your reward for this errand shall be most generous and will fill your pockets immediately after the delivery of the diary to the solicitor's office of Mr. Dermott, Jr. in London.

I will be watching over you from the skies,
Your uncle
(Signature and seal illegible)"

Andrew folded his uncle's letter again and put it back to the envelope. Something else besides the map and the letter was inside. He took an intricately carved item out; it was an amulet of pure platinum with an accompanying chain of the same material, depicting a flower he could not recognize, in the centre of which a tiny black crystal of excellent quality had been placed...

Andrew recognized that amulet. His uncle used to wear it on his neck so he wore it himself, considering that his uncle would probably have wanted him to do that, enclosing it in the envelope for that reason.

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"...you will die, young Saunders", the oldest of the three -obviously German- tourists said in badly-accented English, "...without knowing why your fate was sealed in such an undeserved manner!"

Saunders gulped. Three middle-aged men were standing in the Hall of the Shrine opposite him, pointing their revolvers at his direction. The two of them were around forty-five to fifty years of age, while the third, the middle one, was probably a bit older and seemed to be their leader. All of them were dressed in worn mountaineer's clothes that had been soaked by rain. They also looked wet to their bones, but it didn't seem to affect them much.

The middle one spoke again.

"Do you know why you are here? What did your uncle tell you?"

How did they know him? What was their relation to him? They were not common thieves or even tomb raiders or smugglers of antiquities, Saunders thought.

The young Englishman's mind was in turmoil. He felt like an idiot because he seemed not to know of things that could cost him his life, as the rapid flow of events around him seemed to indicate.

Finally he decided to open his mouth. "I do not know who you are or what you might be wanting from me", he whispered with a trembling voice, "but the only thing I am searching for is..."-he looked at the debris around him- "...that diary there!"

The Hall was quite big, carved in the interior of the cavern and probably cubic in shape. When he had entered, a little while before, he had observed four idols at the corners of the room. They were made of porcelain and were gilded at places. Their proportions were weird (tall and slim, perhaps two and a half meters tall) and depicted archpriests, or perhaps gods. They were certainly human in appearance, yet the characteristics of their faces were gaunt and emanated supernatural anxiety. The eyes were thin, almond-shaped, and demonic; the mouth and the nose were slight too.

Andrew Saunders' finger did not point towards any of the statues, however; it pointed at a thick, black tome of leather cover that rested on the big, parallelogram altar at the middle of the room, exactly on its center. To the left and right of the tome were two golden bas-reliefs of spiral shape and also drawings and some words written in a language he could not comprehend, probably consisting of ideograms and hieroglyphics.

"That tome over there", Andrew said and lowered his hand. "That's what I want and it even seems not to be worth much. Take the idols or anything else you might want... It is all yours."

"...the diary is the only thing I want..." he said, finishing.

The leader of the three mountaineers laughed out loud and his laughter echoed in the cave.

"You ask of something you cannot have, because it is the most important object in this Hall. But we have talked enough!" he said.

Then he armed his Glock and fired.

Andrew did not feel much pain. He only felt surprised. His legs were suddenly unable to hold his weight and he fell to the floor. With his life force leaving his body through his open wound, he took a final look around, perceiving the skeletons of the dead of 1941 with the remains of their tattered clothes and something glittering on their necks with a faint crimson glow. Then he died.

"You didn't have to kill him, Kurt. It was too much", the second of the three said in German. He was a chunky guy, bald as a coot, wearing small, old-fashioned round spectacles.

"Nein, Ditter", Kurt replied. "He was a target of opportunity and had to be eliminated without sentiment."

"Well, he seemed not to know many things about what really happened in here", the third of the company said, a kempt, spare man well in his forties with typical Arian lineaments, as he took a big camping light out of his backpack, which he turned on.

"He knew or he did not know, it matters not to me. He could prove dangerous for our undertaking. And that was reason enough for me to dispose of him. End of conversation. Put off your personal torch lights. Johan, secure the entrance. Ditter, search the boy's body.

Andrew was dead. He knew it. He was impressed, however, with the fact that he neither had seen his past life's images racing in front of his eyes nor had he felt any pain. A white tunnel where he should enter to travel to afterlife had not appeared, either. And angelic chants from beyond were nowhere to be heard... Nothing of all the things a typical freshly-dead man would expect to happen, marking his passing from one field of existence to another, had taken place.

He was standing beside his corporeal body. He had an ethereal, transparent form that was shimmering unworldly; surely, he still remained in the cave where he had met his doom. Everything, however, seemed different, distorted: The corners of every object around him were unstable, while any movement he could discern through the dull, green twilight that was illumining the room was out of phase, like it was happening in slow motion.

A more sudden move to the left made him turn his head.

He could pick out five human forms, ethereal like his own. Those forms were armed with machine guns and were wearing military uniforms of a past age. Four of them took battle positions behind two of the statues and behind the altar, while the fifth opened a saddlebag and put an object out of it, placing it on the centre of the parallelogram, sculptured stone. The other four began firing. One of them was killed. He fell to the ground, unmoving. A second one came out of his hiding place and, holding a bayonet in his right hand, stabbed the air in front of him. Moments later, he clutched his abdomen and toppled to the ground, grimacing of pain and started having spasms.

Andrew approached at the forms which did not pay any attention to him, but continued to play their roles in a silent performance instead.

He focused his sight at the form that had placed the object on the altar.

The spectre raised its arms high, like in invocation and started reciting or perhaps chanting something, which could not be heard. The silent theatre went on and another form fell dead, obviously pierced by bullets, as it tried to run from its hiding place to the entrance of the Hall, throwing the machine gun away and unsheathing a knife from its belt.

The invocation ended and the spectral form by the altar lowered its arms, smiling.

That smile reminded Andrew of somebody, perhaps someone he had met or known during his past life, but he could not tell for sure.

Then, the smiling form made a signal to the other form that had remained standing. Both of them moved towards the entrance to the Hall, where they vanished. The show that had been played in front of Andrew's surprised, immaterial eyes had come to an end.

"So that is how old-Saunders persuaded him! Well, I did not consider him capable of such a machination..."

Kurt Jurgens folded the letter of Andrew's uncle, put it back in its envelope and shoved it in a pocket of his jacket.

"Well, you can change your clothes now, and in a short while we can attempt to reopen the Gate."

With quick moves, the three of them changed their soaked clothes with dry ones that they had in their backpacks. Then they approached the altar, at the place where the black tome with the spiral glyph was resting.

"Take your positions", Kurt said sharply. He then took a small, blue semi-transparent sphere out of his backpack.

"Now we shall see why this Gate remained shut for such a long time", he murmured and placed the sphere on the tome.

For a few moments, nothing happened. But then the sphere began vibrating and, a few seconds later it levitated a few inches over the tome, where it kept on vibrating and pulsating, changing colors. Just as it seemed to have reached the zenith of its activity, it suddenly...fell to the ground, motionless.

Kurt bent over it and took it. It was now colorless and completely transparent, like a piece of glass. He played with it a bit, inspecting it carefully.

"This book, gentlemen", he said finally, pointing his finger at the tome "...is a Neutralizer. It gathers the Vrill energy of the surrounding environment and grounds it, channeling it with regard to the spiritual imprint of its user."

"How was this ...Neutralizer.... used here, Kurt? What do you think?" Ditter Schnebels asked.

"It obviously sucks the energy of this Gate, thus effectively keeping it shut. It probably uses that energy to conceal this place from curious eyes afterwards. That's two birds with one stone! That must be the reason why nobody has visited this cavern since '41, when the Society had sent the team to secure it." Kurt replied.

"We were outwitted by the Orchid in that matter..." Johan Kristensen soliloquized.

"Yes, but if these are so then how did young Saunders enter?" Schnebels asked again, looking at the dusty skeletons of the dead of the battle of 1941, then at Saunders' freshly killed corpse.

"Well, the boy had a map, a GPS and instructions", Jurgens replied. Perhaps the old man had marked this place for future missions somehow..."

"...Or perhaps he had given him some sort of a key that could temporarily reverse the grounding so that he could locate the entrance" he added, after a small pause.

"You seem to refer to some sort of a mystical artifact. But I did not find such a thing on him when I searched his body!"

Johan Kristensen intervened in the discussion with a sarcastic tone in his voice. "We are obviously chattering without reason about unimportant things", he said. "I do not know about you, but I do not feel comfortable in this place. It reeks of death and power that I am not in a position to comprehend, with all the theoretical knowledge I have received by the Society as an Edelweiss."

“It would be most wise”, Jurgens concluded, “to end our job in here as soon as possible. We reopen the Gate and then we leave, OK? Now bring me the Crystal.”

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Andrew Saunders could see the three men discussing around the altar. Everything, however, seemed to be taking place in slow motion and the sound was distorted. As a result, Andrew heard the speech as if it was bellows of animals grazing wearily in a field. Unable to understand the discussion of his killers, he decided to take a look around.

The cave was pretty much as he remembered it being when he was still alive. The colors, however, seemed to have faded and, besides a light humming vibration he could feel in the room, as well as the intense corners that now characterized the shapes around him, he noted that the shadows had become more acute and, in a particular way, frightful. The illumination was not coming only from the big lantern the three murderers had placed in the middle of the room, but also from the walls of the cave, which emitted a sick hue of green, glimmering light.

With a better look, Andrew managed to detect a strange glow on the necks of three of the skeletons; they were wearing small medallions that produced red flashes. The tome that had cost him his life also illumined with a clear, pure –one could say- blue flame that looked as if it was not emanating from the book, but rather ended up there.

With slow, contorted moves the three men created a triangle around the altar with their bodies and arms. One of them seemed to be carrying something in his right hand. He raised it high above him and Andrew saw artificial darkness outlining it, as the object sucked the light of its surrounding area.

Andrew felt horror, sensing oncoming disaster, emotions that probably were multiplied in intensity at the level of existence he now was; he retreated, urged by primeval instincts to move away from the altar.

The three human forms started moving back and forth and growling words that would probably be unintelligible for ordinary people even if they were heard in normal motion. A bit like psalmody, a bit like insults and a bit like dissonance, the voices of the three men and their slow, mechanical-like movement continued and blackness started to emit from the raised hand of the central figure which held the strange object high above the altar.

The bluish flame of the book was flickering, unsure in its movement.

The green glimmer of the room faded.

Darkness spread.

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“...In the name of the Coalition of the Rise, for the glory of the Subterranean Realms, with the power of a Knight of the Order of the Edelweiss, I, Kurt Jurgens, Magister of the Swords of the Swastika, now UNSEAL THIS GATE!!”

Jurgens completed his invocation and clenched his hands together, shattering the crystal that shone with a black fire.

The leather tome burst into flames. In seconds it had been reduced to ashes.

The spiral designs on the altar lit up and started to swirl, while a rhythmical, repeating humming sound started resounding through the room, slowly at first but then faster, as the bas-reliefs revolved with increasing speed.

Between them, a Gate to other Realms opened.

It was tall, at least twelve feet high, parallelogram in shape and its interior showed a world very much different than anything the three Knights of the Order of the Edelweiss had ever come in view of, in reality or in their uneasy dreams.

Towers of jade, like mosques, towered over oval, dull-colored buildings. Walls that seemed to change color periodically protected great cities and fiery crafts were speeding on the orange-hued sky. Through purple clouds, a black sun, chaotic and hellish, came into view; it was a black body of energy, fitting with the structures of the castles, the temples and the towers over which the dark orange light it scattered around the Elseworld was reflecting. Crimson, dark-green and blue banners with swastikas, curved swords and spirals ending in serpentine heads painted on them were waving on observation posts, watchtowers and temples.

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Andrew felt an indescribable emotion of terror and horror out of this world inundating him, as the Gate reopened. His ethereal form seemed to fade in and out as the Gate sent away and then collected again energy, creating waves in the area around it that hit the walls of the Hall and returned back to its center, only to collide with other waves that emitted from the now-open passage; it was a terrifying sight that made the surrounding area look like the surface of a lake that is hit by the raindrops of a sudden autumn storm.

The young adventurer did not feel malice in the Hall. It was not the existence of Evil that created the sense of danger or the premonitions of imminent destruction and calamity. Rather, it was the supernatural feeling that was flowing from specific spots in the area: From the Gate, from the altar and from the medallions of the three skeletons. Especially the last ones were now sending out intense red flashes that blinked slowly with an unsteady rhythm that was not chaotic, however. The whole Hall of the Altar was the resonator of a hollow hum that was coming from the activated Gate. With every new hum the medallions seemed to shine ever more intensely.

A pinch on his ethereal neck made Saunders focus his attention on his immaterial body. He noticed that the amulet he wore when he died was still on *his* neck, a foreign object to the rest of his new being, since he felt it almost like being material. With a life of its own, it blinked with a purple hue, emitting light at a frequency and rhythm attuned to the three medallions on the skeletons.

Like communicating, the four objects were exchanging glints, having started a conversation of some sort, quite intense and mysterious.

Their peculiar "dialogue" kept on for a little while, until all four objects suddenly went off, leaving only the humming of the Gate to play its own ungraceful tune inside the Hall.

Then, Andrew's amulet lit again and sent away a burst of blue light. One of the medallions answered with a similar burst and exploded, releasing a wave of tremendous energy that shook the whole cave.

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"Trap!", Jurgens screamed. "It's a trap!" Pieces of rock were falling from the ceiling of the Hall, while the whole room was convulsing with successive tremors which it seemed that it would not last out for long.

"Let's get out of here!" the leader of the three Edelweiss barked. "We had been set up all along!"

Ditter Schnebels strode quickly towards the entrance of the chamber in an attempt to swallow the distance that separated life from death and salvation from disaster, but a big chunk of falling rock hit him at his neck, toppling him unmoving to the floor, a few feet before he could manage to get out of the collapsing room.

The second of the three, Johan Kristensen knelt over him and tried to ascertain whether he was still alive. Dead Schnebels' head tilted to the left and a flash mirrored in his lifeless eyes.

Kristensen looked behind him and saw light on the neck of the second of the three skeletons. The flash became more intense and the medallion blew up, giving off energy ripples of such strength, that they continued to be visible even after colliding with the walls. One such ripple penetrated Kristensen's body in the chest, opening a black, charcoaled hole and, coming off his back, diffused on a wall of the chamber behind him. He took a final look at his last living companion, who was observing him with despair, then looked at his chest and remained motionless, knelt on both knees.

The image in the Gate blurred.

Receding in a corner of the Hall, Andrew watched, unable to react but at least safe from the danger that the chaotic scenery of entropy around the Gate presented. He made pessimistic thoughts over his, probably non-existent future, inevitably reminiscing about his past life, when he perceived one more presence in the area.

The Gate blurred and through it a humanoid form emerged, although its analogies were immoderate for a human. The "person" standing in front of the Gate was about 11 feet tall. He wore a garment that looked very much like a priest's vestment. It was black, flowing, with precious stones stitched at the level of the chest and silver threads masterly sewn to portray weird symbols and, perhaps, phrases. The garment's hood was pulled up, covering the characteristics of the humanoid's face. The whole attire was complemented by a belt that looked like it had been made of liquid metal, gleaming the way silver of unsurpassed purity shines. In its hands, the person was holding a wooden staff with edges made of pointed green diamond.

Kurt Jurgens moved towards the presence, which seemed to have a material as well as an ethereal existence, with slow, heavy steps, mooring

something, then bowed his body and began chanting inconceivable verses and sounds.

The alien form, which did not move as slowly as Jurgens, made a move with its staff in front of him.

The Edelweiss was beheaded.

His agitated soul left his broken body and, like the ones of his unlucky comrades before him, browsed around with surprise for a moment, then evaporated.

Red eyes searched the room carefully, finally focusing on Saunders' ethereal form. With a piercing gaze, the eyes observed him, head to toe, stopping at the height of his neck. For a few moments the creature did not move, thinking, unaffected by the room that kept on shaking and collapsing.

Finally it advanced, bending over the Englishman's corpse and took it to its arms. It fell back towards the Gate, motioning with its head at Saunders to follow. He did.

When he passed through the gate, his amulet flashed for one final time. The third skeleton's medallion responded, exploding.

Terrible noises were heard, like a powerful giant was crushing everything in his path, trying to cut solid masses of matter.

A great rift cut the chamber in two, swallowing everything. The Gate faded, as the altar was lost in the abyss of the cavern-chasm along with corpses, skeletons, statues and rocks.

"More than three months have passed since the events that took place in Crete. Three months since the incidents that changed my life for ever.

I write these words in my journal because I am still unable to realize the facts, to understand how all my beliefs and my aspect of this world crumbled in a few moments. I still cannot concede that I am not dreaming, that I am awake- perhaps more awake than those who think they are wide-awake; than those who, in fact, are being tossed in the tempestuous seas of ignorance and oblivion, with true reality being a single flickering light in the night, on top of a wind-beaten lighthouse.

I cannot compromise, and will never compromise, with the fact that I died and lived again, with the fact that I looked behind the veil with which my five inadequate senses had clouded my mind and my immortal spirit, and saw terrible things. My soul is restless, because it tricked my Fate and bypassed my destiny; I am very much afraid that the price of this violation of the universal, predetermined, divine laws will be heavy, when in the end I get to pay it.

Yet the reality and the truth hiding behind it is one and is inherent in this unlucky world, independent from the convictions and beliefs of most people – not only mine-, cruel and difficult of access.

In the heart of hearts of this planet, a whole new world lies, for the watcher from above the ground. Our Earth is hollow- or better perhaps, our earth is full in its interior, full of wondrous ideas, technologies, creatures, hidden knowledge, myths and civilizations.

How old these subterranean civilizations are, I do not know, but they are older, very much different and more advanced in many of their aspects than our own.

Their inhabitants have followed other paths of corporeal and spiritual ascension and evolution, or perhaps mutation, from us, their Chthonian brothers. Tall and slim, yet strong, with a piercing gaze and sharp of mind, they are masters of the inner forces, lords of a superior force with projections in the material as well as the spiritual level, a multi-existent force, the Vrill Force, as they call it.

The knowledge of their existence has existed all along, in esoteric manuscripts, at murals, in fables and legends. It also existed in the minds of enlightened people, safe keepers of the true terranean and subterranean history, holders for the keys to locked secrets of the past...

Of a past that persecutes the present and the future, with the forbidden knowledge it hides.

Yet it was only in the end of the 19th century that the possibility of reunion of the Chthonian (the above-ground) with the Hypochthonian (the below-ground) Civilizations began having support in a small circle of illuminated minds. And it was in the middle of the 20th century when the Rise began a serious possibility-almost a certainty.

A supporter of the theory of the Hollow Earth, fanatic in his madness, or a realist because of his archaic knowledge, begins his search, and a World War. A nation follows him. The Thule Society revives, the Order of the Knights of the Edelweiss is formed and the quest for knowledge and power begins. The plans of the Leader of the Swastika become known and the Black Orchid is also formed.

An anti-organization by birth, with the sole purpose of preventing the contact between the two worlds, at least till the end of the war and until more information regarding the hollow Earth has been gathered.

So a cat-and-mouse hunt began, in an irrational theatre, the theatre of a world at war. The victory, in the end, was marginal for the Black Orchid. The Edelweiss made formal contact with the Subterranean Realms just a few days before the end of the war, through a forgotten Gate at the Pole, around which they built a base. A base-hideout, still invisible and impregnable to this day, only God knowing how well equipped and with what technology. From there, the leaders of the former Society of Thule, now the Coalition of the Rise, with the Order of the Edelweiss as their executives, direct the Invisible War that has broken out and ravages the world above the ground and the Subterranean Realms.

On the other side, the Black Orchid is now controlled by the Council of the Seven and continues to collect information on the Subterraneans and to shut Gates, striving to avert a possible forthcoming rise that would destroy the existing world order with unpredictable consequences. Full scale wars have taken place around Gates: The Gate of the Holy Crescent in Kuwait remained open for many days, being an easy passage to the surface for the would-be Hypochthonian invader, until the army managed to shut it down again with great losses. Gates in Afghanistan, in Bosnia, in Afrika, in Russia and in the Middle-East open up and are shut down again, as the fight is in the balance, for the fragile present.

The Gate of the Gorge of Winds in Crete was permanently destroyed three months ago, not because of my actions, but thanks to the Triangle of Medallions that my uncle had cleverly set up in 1941, sacrificing the souls of three of his dead comrades, immediately after the battle with the Edelweiss-Alpinists in the Hall of the Altar of the Spiral Waves, as I later learnt the chamber in the Devil's cave was called.

He sacrificed their souls, the same way he intended to sacrifice me, so that the Cancellation of that Gate would be certain, since the Orchid's goal is to destroy as many Gates as possible.

And I would have been sacrificed, were it not for Jaarl el Kvaoth. I was lucky that an ally, as he proved to be, of the Orchid, a member of the Union of the White Moon, an enemy of the Rise, pulled me back to the paths of life. Jaarl used the amulet of my uncle, my anchor to the world of the living, and the Vrill Force to bring me back to my mortally wounded body which he healed. He enlightened me, giving to me the knowledge of things that I cite in this entry. He concealed me and then he helped me escape to the surface world via the Gate of the Easter Islands, on the ocean floor.

So I live again. I walk under the blue sky of the surface. What will I do in the end? I do not know. Is our world ready for the Rise? I do not believe and I do not foresee such a thing. Are the Hypochthonians ready to rise to the surface? Jaarl told me that they aren't. The voice of reason is a minority in the Subterranean Realms too, where purity of bloodline, evolution through eugenics and the supposed inherent superiority seem to mediate the prevailing dogma of life, and many see us as the degenerate descendants of Arius.

I do not know how to act. I keep staring at the sky for hours. It changes his colors in a miraculous way as night gives its way to day, spreading a magical curtain of constellations over my head. The world keeps changing, and this continuous change is probably inevitable. Perhaps the Rise is the change we need to proceed to the next stage of our cultural evolution, or maybe it will be the cataclysm that is going to sink us back to our bestial ignorance and degradation we have fought for thousands of generation to get out of, creating and destroying.

Because that's what we are, in the end; Order and Chaos together, Good and evil, Creation and Destruction, life and death simultaneously, a spiritual sphere that encloses Everything and Nothing, ready to obey its inner voice or the tossing of a pair of cosmic dice...

THE END

