

**SCHOOLBOY · SPY · ASSASSIN**

# **KATIPO JOE**



**WOLF'S LAIR**

**BRIAN FALKNER**

*The trouble Misch is ready for comes without warning on the outskirts of a small village.*

*Misch is tense, like a cat coiled to spring. Joe follows his gaze – is it his imagination or are there shadows moving in the dark woods?*

*The question is answered in a blazing needle of fire from between the trees, piercing the air in front of them. There's a shattering explosion, and now pieces of metal are raining down over the open-topped Kübelwagen, and Joe realises in horror that the armoured car is no longer ahead of them ... just a burning chassis, still rolling forwards down the road before veering off to crash into an open culvert.*

## **KATIPO**

(Māori, meaning night-stinger)

A New Zealand spider,  
related to the Australian redback and  
the North American black widow.

The katipo is New Zealand's  
only native venomous spider.

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# **BRIAN FALKNER**

**SCHOLASTIC**  
AUCKLAND SYDNEY NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO  
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## The Katipo Joe Trilogy

Blitzkrieg  
Spycraft  
Wolf's Lair

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This story includes real historical figures as well as fictional characters. Most of the locations are also real, including the Berghof, Lake Königssee, the Wolfsschanze (the Wolf's Lair) and the locations in Berlin. Many of the events are based around real historical events of World War Two, such as Operation Barbarossa. The assassination plots in the novel are based on actual British and German plans to kill Adolf Hitler, specifically Operation Foxley and Operation Valkyrie. For a full discussion of the fact vs fiction elements of this story, go to [www.brianfalkner.com/katipo](http://www.brianfalkner.com/katipo)

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First published in 2022 by Scholastic New Zealand Limited  
Private Bag 94407, Botany, Auckland 2163, New Zealand

Scholastic Australia Pty Limited  
PO Box 579, Gosford, NSW 2250, Australia

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ISBN 978-1-77543-748-2

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A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the National Library of New Zealand.

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12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 2

Publishing team: Lynette Evans, Penny Scown and Abby Haverkamp

Design: Smartwork Creative, [www.smartworkcreative.co.nz](http://www.smartworkcreative.co.nz)

Cover design by: Leon Mackie

Note: The train image on front cover is merely an approximation of the real Führersonderzug.

Typeset in Crimson Text

Printed by McPherson's Printing Group, Maryborough, Victoria, Australia

Scholastic New Zealand's policy is to use papers that are renewable and made efficiently from wood grown in responsibly managed forests, so as to minimise its environmental footprint.

For Brian and Robyn

Two of the loveliest people I know.  
Here's to wonderful boat trips and card evenings  
and many fun days still to come.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Those who can make you believe absurdities,  
can make you commit atrocities*  
—Voltaire

It is with a certain amount of trepidation that I have included Adolf Hitler as a living, breathing character in this novel, the third book in a series. In the first book Hitler was only seen from afar. In the second, he was centre stage but only very briefly. In this third book he has a much more prominent role, as is necessary for a novel set primarily inside Nazi headquarters as the Second World War gathers momentum.

I could have included Hitler by using only words he is recorded as having said, either in speeches or in his books or in his notes and diaries. I considered that option but did not feel that would paint a true picture of who he really was. I felt it was important to try to get a handle on how one man could galvanise an entire nation into the atrocities of World War II.

To do that I had to create a fictional persona for Hitler. A character, who says things and does things that the real Hitler did not do. Yet I have strived for an approximation of the truth, as much as it is possible for me to do so. I have

relied heavily on the recollections of those who knew Hitler personally: Hitler's bodyguard, Rochus Misch; Hitler's secretary, Traudl Junge; Hitler's valets, Karl Krause and Heinz Linge; his house administrator, Herbert Dohring; and his chambermaid, Anna Plaim; along with Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments, who regarded himself as perhaps Hitler's only friend.

Through their eyes I have tried to get a picture of the man, and to represent him as faithfully as I am capable of doing, within the context of a spy adventure story.

Other real-life characters in this book are also depicted as accurately as I can, although some characters have been amalgamated for the sake of narrative.

Brian Falkner  
25 April 2022



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# **PROLOGUE**

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## **THE CARPENTER**

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**Munich, 2nd November 1939**

THE CARPENTER ARRIVED early for dinner and a beer, the last of the blasting cartridges concealed in a battered, but otherwise inconspicuous leather suitcase.

He found an empty space at the end of one of the long tables in the busy restaurant and placed the suitcase carefully on the floor underneath, between his legs.

“Guten Tag.” A waitress appeared at his elbow, all smiles, buxom in her traditional Bavarian dirndl dress, her hair in plaits tied with red ribbons.

“Guten Tag, Fraulein ...” The carpenter left the sentence hanging.

“Strobel,” she said. “But call me Maria. What would you like?”

“What is good tonight, Maria?” the carpenter asked.

“The bratwurst is always good,” she smiled.

“Bratwurst and rye then,” the carpenter said. Sausage and bread, a simple meal for a simple man with a simple task.

“And a jug of beer?”





“Just a stein, thank you.” He wanted a clear head when handling explosives.

The beer arrived first, slopping from the sides of the thick glass mug as Maria set it down in front of him, two beer jugs swilling in her other hand. He would have to nurse his drink carefully. The establishment did not close until 10:30, and when his beer was empty, he would be expected to vacate his seat. It was crowded; a busy Thursday night in the Bürgerbräukeller, one of the most popular beer halls in Munich. He recognised a few faces but was careful not to look at them too long, or to acknowledge anyone. He did not want to be noticed.

When his meal arrived, he closed his eyes and silently recited the Lord’s Prayer before taking a bite. Not because he was particularly religious, but because it calmed him.

Next to him, the old man with the scar on his face was a regular. Like the carpenter, he usually sat in a world of his own, not joining in the rousing conversation and laughter of the others at his table. Unlike the carpenter, he had a jug of beer, not merely a glass, and usually ordered a second. His meal tonight was a plate of sauerbraten with red cabbage and beer bread.

On the opposite side of the table sat two brothers of similar age. The carpenter had seen them here often over the last few months and had once or twice shared a table with them. Heavysset, red-faced and jowly, they drank jugs of beer but ate no food. Both, he knew, would leave early, perhaps to a dinner waiting at home.



The carpenter observed people. He noticed people. What they ate, where they sat, who they did or didn’t talk to. The way their hands moved, the places their eyes looked. Watching people had long been a habit, now it was almost an obsession. Would he know if an agent of the Gestapo was among the diners? He was not sure he would. What would be a tell-tale sign? A good agent would not stand out. It could be the man with the scar ... one or both of the brothers ... perhaps the large group of railway workers a few tables away, the noisiest and most noticeable bunch in the restaurant, inconspicuous in their conspicuousness.

The one thing that gave him confidence was that he had not been arrested yet. If anyone had discovered his excavations in the pillar in the great hall next door, he would certainly have been in a Gestapo cell by now.

But it paid to be careful. For that reason he varied where he sat, often outside in the beer garden, even as the weather turned cold as the year drifted towards winter. Mostly though he sat inside in the restaurant, adjacent to the hall, enjoying the fug of meaty aromas, beery breath and the all-enveloping hum of voices, punctuated here and there with drunken singing.

“Another beer?” Maria was back.

“I’ve not yet finished this one, thanks,” the carpenter smiled, indicating his stein. She returned his smile and moved on.

He finished his meal, took a small sip of his beer, placed it back on the table and studied it. Nearly two hours to go.



He had stolen the explosive powder from an armaments factory where he had worked, the blasting cartridges and detonators from another job as a labourer at a quarry. He had brought all of it to Munich in a wooden trunk, concealed beneath a false bottom. Over many months he had slipped into the great hall each weeknight. It was only used for special functions and therefore was deserted, except on weekends when there were regular dances. He hid in a storeroom upstairs off the gallery until the building was locked at 10:30 p.m., then crept back downstairs. Working by torchlight, he had cut the wooden lining of the pillar, creating a secret panel, then, bit by bit, piece by piece, he had scraped away at the mortar holding the bricks, removing them one by one to create a cavity.

Those months had mostly been spent on his knees, which had blistered after just a few nights. The blisters had burst, weeping and festering. But he had not relented. Night after night he had returned, eating his meal, nursing his one beer, then spending the darkness hours chipping away at the innards of the pillar.

By day he designed, built, and tested the mechanism that would set off the bomb. His own invention, constructed from clocks and car parts, it could tick away for up to six days – when, precisely on time, a spring-loaded, steel-tipped striker would slam into the percussion cap of a rifle cartridge. That was the trigger.

He had chosen the pillar carefully. It was right behind the rostrum where the speakers would be standing. Not only that,



but it was also the main support for the gallery above, and would, he was sure, bring the heavy balcony crashing down on the heads of those gathered on the speaking platform.

At 10:20 he silently recited the Lord's Prayer again, then rose and made his way to the bathrooms. Upon exiting, he checked that the coast was clear then turned right instead of left, pushing through the double doors into the great hall. He quickly scaled the stairs to the gallery and slipped into the storeroom, hiding in his usual place behind a strategically placed pile of cardboard boxes. He rolled up his trouser legs one by one and dabbed at his weeping knees with a rolled-up handkerchief. He did not like the smell of the wounds. He would have to see a doctor, but not before he had finished his work. Kneeling tonight would be utter agony, but mercifully quick. Compared to the laborious task of removing the bricks, this was the simplest of tasks.

When all was quiet, and the doors to the great hall had been locked, he crept quietly downstairs and removed the secret panel. He opened his leather suitcase and gently placed the last of the blasting cartridges as far back in the cavity as he could, to leave room for his timing mechanism. He replaced the panel, crept back upstairs, and lay down on the hard, dusty wooden floor of the storeroom to sleep and wait until morning.

#### **4th November 1939**

THE CARPENTER SAT at the table in the great hall watching the dancing, his dance ticket in his hand. Several



times he had received an inviting glance from one of the young ladies in the hall, but each time he had declined with a slight shake of his head.

People were dancing, happy, laughing and clapping. Did they not see what was going on around them? Two months earlier Hitler and his Nazis had led the country into war. Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland ... that had been the trigger. Poland was the line in the sand that Hitler had finally crossed, causing both France and Great Britain to declare war.

There were rumours that an invasion of France was next. Had Hitler not learned anything from the World War? Germany had been crushed, humiliated, in 1918. This time it would be worse, the carpenter was sure of it.

But a Germany without Hitler was a different Germany altogether. The Nazi party *was* Hitler. Without him, the party would fall apart. Without the Nazis – without Hitler – Germany could make moves towards peace.

Hitler had been a notoriously difficult man to pin down. He changed his plans frequently, often at the last minute. He took different routes and different vehicles. But there was one place you could count on him being: same time, same place, every year.

The Bürgerbräukeller beer hall was where it had all begun for Adolf Hitler, with a failed coup d'état in 1923 that had brought the Nazis to national attention. Every year, on the 8th of November, Hitler returned and gave a speech to his 'Old Fighters'. Those who had supported him from the very beginning. The 8th of November was in four days' time.



This was the carpenter's second dance night that weekend. He had brought the timing mechanism – so beautifully and carefully crafted – with him the previous night, only to find that it didn't quite fit into the cavity. So he had taken it home with him and made it slightly smaller. Now he sat at the Sunday night dance, watching and inwardly shaking his head at the stupidity and futility of those young women and men, whirling and twirling around the floor. Could they not see the dark abyss into which Adolf Hitler was leading them?

He thought about Manfred, his son, the result of a short relationship with a waitress from Konstanz. What would Manfred think of his father? When this was all over, would Manfred see him as a hero ... or a murderer?

By 12:30 a.m. the festivities were beginning to die down and, as the great hall emptied, the carpenter slipped quietly upstairs to his storeroom. When all was quiet, he carefully made his way back down. This time, the timing mechanism fitted perfectly.

He checked the time, set the dials, then removed the pin to start the timer at precisely 2 a.m. He had set it for two days, nineteen hours and twenty minutes. The clock would slowly tick down, before firing the cartridge and setting off the bomb at precisely 9:20 p.m. on Wednesday, 8th November, 1939.

Hitler's speech was scheduled to start at 8:30 p.m.





# **BOOK ONE**

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# **DER FÜHRERSONDERZUG**

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The death of one man: this is a catastrophe.  
Hundreds of thousands of deaths: that is a statistic!  
— Kurt Tucholsky, *Jewish/German Satirist, (1890–1935)*

# 1 HIMMLER

**Obersalzberg, 18th June 1941**

THE CLACK OF THE SOLDIER'S boots on the hard wooden floor of the staircase sounds like a clock – *click clack, tick tock* – counting down the last seconds of the young man's freedom, perhaps of his life. If he could make a run for it, he would, but that chance disappeared the moment they entered the highly secure compound of Obersalzberg in the Bavarian Alps, nerve centre of the Nazi war machine.

The man walking beside Joe is Sergeant Rochus Misch, one of Hitler's personal bodyguards. He collected Joe from the hotel by Lake Königssee and drove him to the Berghof, Hitler's lavish home and headquarters. Tall, tough, and amiable, Misch is the person least likely to give Joe cause for alarm ... which gives him great cause for alarm.

Everywhere people are hurrying, scurrying, busy packing boxes for the move to the new headquarters near the Soviet border. The invasion of Russia starts in a week

and the Führer wants to be set up in his ‘Wolf’s Lair’ as soon as possible. Most of the people they pass smile at Joe, wanting to bask in his glory, unaware of his secret.

Joe and Misch reach the second floor and start down a long corridor. Here the floor is carpeted and the sound of his shoes and Misch’s boots, slightly out of sync, sound more like a heartbeat, *lub-dub, lub-dub*.

Misch looks down at Joe, who smiles, feigning non-chalance. Not too much, because nobody would really enjoy a trip to the office of Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, the much-feared head of the SS.

*Lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub.*

They are nearly at Himmler’s office now. The heartbeat stops, replaced by a quick rap on the door. It sounds like gunshots. They wait. Misch does not knock a second time. Himmler is not a man to be hurried.

It seems that minutes go by during which sweat prickles under Joe’s scalp and on his spine. The back of his neck has developed a crazy itch but he dares not scratch it.

“Enter,” Himmler’s voice eventually sounds, cool and calm from within.

The office is dimly lit, as it was the last time Joe was here. Himmler seems to like it that way, perhaps because of the way the light from the windows behind his desk silhouettes him, casting his face into shadow. The effect is quite demonic, although Himmler does not need any assistance in that department. The man *is* a demon; worse, a devil in human form.



“Hello Jürgen,” Himmler says, greeting Joe with a minimal smile, dismissing Misch with a flick of a finger. “Sit down.”

Himmler has a toothbrush moustache much like Hitler’s. His hair is fashionably undercut, close-shaven around the temples and back but longer on the top. His glasses are frameless and clipped to the bridge of his nose. His eyes are pig-like and too close together. His chin is weak.

The windows are open and outside a hawk shrieks as it draws a black streak across the sky, diving for unseen prey. The door shuts behind Joe with a decisive thud that reminds him of the guillotine at Stadelheim Prison. The room smells faintly of cigar smoke, which surprises Joe. Hitler is violently opposed to smoking and Himmler is slavishly devoted to Hitler. He must be away for the day or Himmler would not dare to smoke in here.

Himmler closes a folder, laying it to one side. Joe wonders what is in it.

“Only a few days left here in sunny Bavaria,” Himmler says with a pleasant smile. “Do you have much planned for the day, Jürgen?”

His tone is friendly, but that is his way. The Reichsführer is at his most dangerous when he is at his most convivial. On the surface he appears friendly, charming even, but Joe can sense the malignance beneath, and knows that what he is seeing is not so much a smile, as it is a feral beast baring its teeth.

“A few of us are going swimming at the lake,” Joe says.



Himmler stares at him, unblinking. "It is beautiful there. You and your sweetheart will miss it when we all go to the new headquarters." He does not wait for a response, but asks, "And how is little Sofie?"

Joe cannot work out if Himmler is making conversation or if his words conceal some sort of threat. With Himmler it is always best to assume the worst.

"She is looking forward to the opportunity to serve the Führer, as am I," he says.

Himmler raises his eyebrows slightly at the formality of Joe's response but does not press it. He stands and motions Joe over towards a sturdy wooden table by the far wall, beneath a hanging tapestry: dark colours, earthy greens and browns flecked with streaks of bloody red. At the head of the table is an elaborately carved wooden chair inscribed with runic symbols, including the swastika and the twin lightning bolts of the SS.

An object on the table is wrapped in a black velvet cloth. Himmler unfolds the top layer, then another, to reveal a picture frame, face down, strung with piano wire, ready for hanging.

"Here," Himmler says. "Tell me what you think."

He presents it to Joe, who takes it and turns it over.

The frame is simple, embellished only at the bottom with the German Eagle. It contains a photograph of Joe, standing next to Adolf Hitler, shaking hands. Joe knows this photograph, or at least when it was taken. The previous day, at the ceremony. The photo has been signed by the Führer.



Joe forces a smile onto his face. "It's wonderful!"

Himmler gives a knowing smirk in return.

Joe hands the photo back to Himmler who places it on the velvet cloth. Himmler sits in the ornate and uncomfortable looking wooden chair and indicates that Joe should also sit, on one of the wood and rattan chairs evenly spaced around the table.

The man's smug smile slowly dissipates, like ripples faded in a pond. "The investigations continue into the disappearance of Major Vogel and Oberleutnant Köberlein," Himmler says. "You will be pleased to know that we have located their bodies."

"Really!" Joe feigns surprise. The only real surprise is that it has taken them this long.

"Yes, at the bottom of a cliff on Mount Jenner, on the Austrian side."

"What do you think they were doing on The Jenner?" Joe asks. He must think as Jürgen would think, say what Jürgen would say; act interested, curious, but not as though he is prying for information.

"We believe they were chasing a woman ... or, more correctly, a woman and the commando team that snatched her from the Gestapo on the night of June fifth. They killed a guard, stole a motorcycle and somehow extricated the woman from the clutches of the Gestapo, before fleeing over the mountain track."

Himmler takes off his pince-nez spectacles and polishes them with a soft cloth, watching Joe's reaction carefully. Joe



keeps his expression neutral and does not break eye contact with the man. That would look deceitful.

Himmler puts on his spectacles and continues. "We believe Vogel and Köberlein were on the tail of the commando team when they fell. There was a break in the path above where they were found, so it is possible that they just slipped in the dark – one tried to rescue the other, both were lost. Or it is possible that they got into a fight with the commandos and were thrown over the edge."

"Were the bodies of any of the commandos found with them?" Joe asks. It seems a natural question to ask. He knows of course that there weren't. There were no commandos that night, just Joe and his mother limping along that dark and dangerous trail.

"No," Himmler says. "So we have to assume that all the commandos got away. If in fact there were any commandos in the first place."

Joe manages to look curious and not to show the sudden thudding of his pulse.

"We have a witness," Himmler says.

Joe's heart hammers even faster. "That is most excellent news," he says. "Who?"

"The second guard from the motorcycle."

*The second guard!* Joe had forgotten all about him.

Himmler continues, "He did not see a team of commandos. Just one man – a small man, he says – who murdered his comrade and stole his uniform."

"That's awful," Joe says.



"Tell me again your movements that evening," Himmler says.

*Act surprised at the question,* Joe tells himself. *An innocent person would be surprised to be asked.* "Me? Why?"

"You do not get to question my questions," Himmler says, his eyes hard, his chin firmly set. He leans forward, glaring at Joe over the top of the photograph.

It is only that photograph, or what it represents, that is stopping Joe from being thrown into a Gestapo dungeon right now, he is sure of it. As Hitler's hand-picked successor, he enjoys a certain amount of immunity.

"That was the night of our dinner at the Berghof," Joe says.

"Yes. I was present. I do not need you to tell me this," Himmler says.

"Of course," Joe lowers his head briefly in apology. "Afterwards we were taken back to our hotel. We were all tired and went straight to our rooms. At least, I did. I cannot be sure of the others."

"They all concur on that point," Himmler says. "And after that?"

"Nothing," Joe says.

Nothing ... except he attacked and killed a German soldier and stole his motorbike, then snatched his mother from the back of a moving Gestapo staff car and escaped over the high mountain trail, killing two Gestapo officers along the way.

"I went to bed and slept," Joe says.





“Indeed, and there is no evidence to the contrary,” Himmler says. “Except perhaps for the word of Eva Braun who says that the next morning you looked exhausted, as if you had not slept at all.”

Joe manages a smile. “She is not wrong. My sleep was fitful at best. My head was full of the plans we had discussed, about the invasion of Russia. I put my neck on the line. I called the Führer’s plans a mistake. That night I lay awake most of the night worried that I was the one who had made the mistake by daring to criticise the Führer.”

Although not a word of that is true, it has the ring of truth, and Joe knows it. Everybody knows what it means to criticise the Führer in his presence.

Himmler smiles grimly. “Time will tell if that was a wise decision. But whatever your reasons for not sleeping, you had ample time to help rescue that woman and still be back for breakfast.”

Joe stares at him, flabbergasted, as Jürgen would be.

“Do you really think I am capable of killing an armed German soldier, not to mention two Gestapo officers? Do you think I would rescue an enemy spy and help her escape across a mountain?” He shakes his head slowly. “I wish I was half that brave and resourceful. But what possible reason could I have for aiding the enemy?”

“Indeed,” Himmler says. “And yet you were seen talking to her – a secret meeting – just one day earlier.”

“Which I immediately reported,” Joe says. “To yourself, in fact.”



“And that is perhaps the only fact that is keeping you out of a Gestapo kitchen.”

“Sir, you cannot be serious,” Joe jumps to his feet, the chair scraping backwards on the wooden floor. “I am a loyal Nazi. A dedicated follower of the Führer. I love the Fatherland!” He narrowly restrains himself from throwing his arm into the air for a Hitler salute. That would be a little too much.

“Rest assured, we are still investigating the events of that night, and we will uncover the truth,” Himmler says. “If, as you say, you were not involved, then you have nothing to worry about. But if, on the other hand—”

“I had nothing to do with it!” Joe cries.

“An energetic display of emotion,” Himmler tuts, and stares at Joe until he resumes his seat. “You will of course accept my apologies for the fact that we will be watching you very closely from now on. Should you even sneeze without good reason, we will want to know why.”

“And so it should be,” Joe says. “I cannot wait to prove my innocence to you beyond all doubt.”

“Indeed. But it is not me you will be proving it to. Our new head of Gestapo in Berchtesgaden has some more questions to ask you. I have approved it, but insisted that I meet with you first, due to your, er ... special status. You will report to the Gestapo office this afternoon at two. It is quite near your hotel.”

“I know it,” Joe says.

“You do?” Himmler raises an eyebrow.



“I met with Major Vogel there once,” Joe says.

“Of course. Do not forget. This afternoon at two. You will see Major Becker. Please be open and forthright with him.” Himmler stands, indicating that the meeting is at an end.

Joe stands also and reaches out for the photograph. “Thank you for this,” he says, “it will be one of my most cherished possessions.”

Himmler stops him with a raised palm. “It is not for you, Jürgen.”

“My apologies,” Joe says. “I thought—”

“This is a priceless memento of a very special day,” Himmler says. “I will take great delight in sending it to your parents.”



## 2

# **THE GESTAPO**

### **Berchtesgaden, 18th June 1941**

HEIKE EMERGES SLOWLY from the lake, lithe, athletic, dripping, shaking her head like a dog and showering Joe and Sofie with droplets of water. Her swimsuit is white, contrasting with the olive of her skin. People tan quickly here in the mountains.

On the water behind her, a boat with a brightly coloured sail is skimming across the surface in a strong puff of breeze, a swastika ensign trailing from its stern. Over by the jetties, the tourist ferry is just coming in to dock, decks full of excited children on a school trip.

Around them the Bavarian Alps judder towards the vast blue of the sky. When Joe first arrived in Berchtesgaden, he found the mountains oppressive, claustrophobic almost, but he has grown to love their embrace. It is one of the things he will most miss when they move to the swampy depths of the East Prussian forest.

Thomas arrives in the shallows a moment after Heike,



swimming ashore then scrambling up behind her. His chest is broad, his muscles taut and sinewy. Boxer's muscles. Burly without being bulky.

He grabs her around the waist and swings her around in a circle as she squeals and giggles like a child. Joe looks away, uncomfortable, not at their undisguised display of affection, but at the pangs of jealousy that he cannot avoid. He wonders what it must be like to feel like this. To share someone's hopes and dreams, to feel their fears and suffer their disappointments ... to value their life above your own.

It must be exhilarating and yet at the same time terrifying.

In a few days the eight teenagers – strangers – who had been chosen from around Germany and thrown together to compete for the most prestigious of prizes, will depart, most for their home cities. Thomas and Heike will go their separate ways, at least until they can contrive to meet up again. In the uncertainty of war-torn Europe, that could be a long time coming.

The last few weeks have been a wild ride, but now, freed from the requirements of the competition, the eight have had little to do except relax at the lakeside, go hiking, or play cards and board games in the lounge of the hotel.

Today, Hannelore and Karl, the two who at the start seemed most likely to win, have gone for a trek to the Königsbach waterfall, a spectacular natural pool flowing out over a rocky edge to the insanely blue lake far below. No doubt a little private romantic time for them before they too



are sent back to their homes. Like Thomas and Heike they had met at the start of the competition and had formed a relationship, although Joe wasn't sure if theirs was more one of convenience than of intense romantic feelings.

The other two competitors had shown absolutely no interest in each other.

Gertrud is sitting up at the cafe outside the hotel, wearing a flowing red dress, high heels and a white silk head scarf, looking a good deal older than her actual sixteen years. She was smiling in false modesty from behind her peekaboo hairstyle at the soldiers and fishermen who attempt to engage her in conversation or just stare at her movie-star legs.

Ernst, the thin, sullen-faced boy, is nowhere to be seen. He seems to have only ventured out of his hotel room for meals and the few activities that Eva Braun has organised. Perhaps he is unhappy at being sent home. The son of a Baron, perhaps he is embarrassed not to have won. But not everyone could win. Heike and Thomas, athletic and attractive, were chosen to star in Goebbels' new propaganda film. But the big prize had gone to Joe and Sofie.

That he had been chosen out of the four boys to become Hitler's eventual successor was incredible enough. That Hitler had selected a British spy for the position was simply astounding. Sofie's selection as his official partner was a relief. At least with her he did not have to be on his guard all the time. She might be a German, but she was emphatically not a Nazi, although that was a cloak she wore when she



needed to; the only way to survive in Hitler's Germany.

"I nearly beat you that time," Thomas says, letting Heike go.

She glides smoothly over to where their towels lie warming on the pebbles, picking up both and tossing one to Thomas, which he catches easily.

"I had to slow down so I didn't embarrass you too much," she says, drying her hair. "At times I thought there was a hippo lumbering through the water behind me."

Thomas laughs easily and Joe and Sofie laugh with him.

"Time for coffee and cake," Thomas says.

"We just had lunch!" Heike says. She flicks her towel at him but misses.

Thomas flexes his muscles. "It takes fuel to keep this machine running," he says.

Heike snorts. "When you're forty you'll be a fat old Burgermeister wearing lederhosen and an alpine hat, I can see it now."

"I hope so," Thomas drops his towel and starts to do the Schuhplattler, a traditional German slapping dance, stomping his feet and slapping his knees and thighs.

"Oh, please don't ..." Heike says.

"And you'll be a fat old Burgermeister's wife in a dirndl and plaits," Thomas says.

"Are you proposing?" Heike asks with a mocking expression.

"Yes!" Thomas says. "I'm proposing that we go get coffee and cake."



They all laugh again.

If not for the war, if not for the brooding evil up in the mountains behind them, this could be any group of teenagers frolicking on a summer's day.

But there is a war, and Joe's friends are also his enemies.

He watches Heike as she drops the towel and stretches, limbering up her muscles. She has changed since they first arrived at Berchtesgaden. It didn't happen immediately, it was a slow, gentle shift, a butterfly easing out of its cocoon, a sprout uncurling in a garden. But she is no longer the sharp-featured, sharp-tongued girl she presented on the day Joe met her. At least not when she is with Thomas. They fit together in some way that Joe cannot quite understand. He softens her. Her hard edges seem to blur when she is with him. And she completes him in some way too. They are like two halves of a shattered vase, like the missing piece of each other's puzzle.

Joe steals a glance at Sofie, the gentle blonde girl lying face down next to him on the beach. Theirs is a romance of pretence. A show for the Nazis. Nothing more. She has made it clear that while their countries are enemies, that is all it can be.

Thomas is dressing, pulling on a shirt that has been neatly folded next to their towels. He does not change his wet swim-shorts and leaves the shirt untucked, the shirt tails darkening as they dampen. He starts to buckle on his watch.

"What time is it?" Joe asks.



Thomas glances over. "Ten before two."

Joe gasps. He jumps up and snatches up his towel. "I'm late," he says.

"What for?" Sofie asks drowsily.

"I have to see the Gestapo."

"Good luck!" Thomas says.

Joe bends down and kisses Sofie on the shoulder, just for show. She reaches up a hand, just for show, and he takes it, squeezing it gently, just for show, before running off towards the hotel.

TEN MINUTES LATER, in full Hitler Youth uniform, his knife in his belt, his hair neatly brushed, Joe is standing at the foot of the stairs outside the temporary Gestapo office above a boating supplies shop. The stairs are old, wooden, creaking, and smell of fish.

He has arrived on time but for some reason his feet do not want to take these stairs. His heart is pounding even faster than it was earlier that day up at the Berghof. He wills it to slow, fearful that it will reveal itself in a throbbing vein in his neck or at his temple. He could have escaped. He *had* escaped. He had reached Austria with his mother. It was still part of Germany, but only a short step to Yugoslavia to meet up with the partisans and be transported on to England. But he had chosen to return to continue his mission, a decision that seems more and more like a fatal mistake.

He wills his foot to move, lifting his shoe from the ground and placing it on the first step. After that, the rest



come easier. Whatever the outcome, there is no turning back. His hand rests for a moment on his knife, black-handled, marked with the swastika, the words 'Blood and Honour' inscribed on the blade. He hopes he won't have to use the knife. The Gestapo men have guns.

The door to the front office is open, allowing a cooling breeze to blow through from the lake. A young lieutenant seated at the front desk is eating cold sausage from brown greaseproof paper. He is gaunt of face with a pale complexion and dark crescents under his eyes as though he has not slept. The new major must be working his staff hard, Joe thinks.

The lieutenant looks up as Joe enters, carefully wipes his hands on a cloth and makes a note in a book. According to the clock on the wall, Joe is one minute late.

"Major Becker is expecting you," the lieutenant says, and gestures towards a closed door.

Joe nods and walks as confidently as he can to the door, knocking twice and waiting.

"Enter," a voice says.

The man in his deadly black uniform with the blood red swastika armband is standing at the window, his back to Joe. He must have watched Joe arrive, perhaps looking for clues to his guilt in his posture or facial expressions. He waits until Joe closes the door before turning to face him.

Joe gasps, unable to conceal his surprise. He reaches for the doorframe to steady himself, suddenly aware of how keyed up he actually was, and feeling weak at the knees with



the sudden release of tension. It was a wise strategy for the major to wait for Joe to shut the door before revealing his identity.

“My name is Becker,” the man says.

But it is not Becker. It is probably not Mathias either, but that was his name when Joe last saw him, on his arrival into Germany just a few months earlier. He had told Joe then that he had borrowed the Gestapo uniform from a warehouse, but that was clearly another lie. Secrets within secrets, wheels within wheels. Major Becker – or Mathias or whatever his real name was – clearly works for the Gestapo, or he wouldn’t be here. That he is also a British spy is beyond doubt.

Mathias raises a finger to his mouth then a hand to his ear, indicating that their conversation may be overheard or recorded.

Joe nods his understanding.

“So, you are Jürgen Weyl,” Mathias says, looking Joe up and down as if he has never met him before.

“Yes, sir,” Joe says.

Mathias nods his head. “I have heard a lot about you. Most of it ... encouraging.”

“Thank you, sir,” Joe says, noting the pause in Mathias’s words.

“As you have been informed, I am investigating the deaths of two of my colleagues, and the disappearance of a third,” Mathias says.

“A terrible situation,” Joe says.



“Indeed,” Mathias says, playing the part of the suspicious Gestapo officer to the tee. “I would like you to take a ride with me.”

“Where to?” Joe asks, a natural thing to ask.

“Are you in the habit of questioning Gestapo officers?” Mathias asks mildly.

“No, sir,” Joe says.

Mathias winks at him as he gathers his coat.

THE INTERROGATION begins on the drive. The questions are sharp, and pointed, but not so much that they might trip Joe up or trap him into inconsistencies. Joe sits with Mathias in the back seat of the open-topped staff car. The Gestapo driver, the pale young lieutenant from the front office, says nothing, but hears every word.

The questions are nothing that Joe would not expect. Similar to those Himmler has already asked, but extending to the other missing officer, Lehmann. For a Gestapo officer, Lehmann had been almost pleasant. Square-jawed, with a thick monobrow and glasses with comically thick frames.

Joe had not enjoyed murdering him, and had enjoyed even less the way he had done it, the fight, the underwater struggle, before weighing down his body with a rusty chain and sinking it in the middle of the lake.

He manages to answer all of Mathias’s questions in a way that seems plausible, even if it is only for the ears of the driver.



He knows where they are going well before they get there. He was here only two weeks earlier. The mountain track across The Jenner that leads to Austria.

"I am going to show you where the two officers were murdered," Mathias says as the car pulls to a halt beside the track. "We will see if that assists your memory with any details." To the driver, he says, "Please stay with the car."

"Sir—"

Mathias silences him with a curt, "I doubt I am in any danger from this young man. Even if he were an enemy agent, I am quite capable of protecting myself. What I don't want is to come back to this car and find out on our way down the mountain that the brake lines have been cut."

The driver nods and salutes. "Yes, sir."

The last time Joe was here was in the prelude to a thunderstorm. It was dark, wind-whipped and dangerous, with swaying branches of trees reaching out spidery hands for Joe and his mother. The mud and the rocks of the trail were wet, and when the storm started – thunder crashing, lightning ripping the sky apart – the trail was at least as deadly as the two men who were chasing them. Today, on a sunny afternoon, it is no more than a pleasant stroll through the bush, a river glittering in the gully below.

As soon as they are out of earshot, Mathias says, "Vogel had thorough files on you. He had all the facts, he just hadn't put it all together quite yet. You were days, perhaps only hours away from being arrested."

Joe considers that. That night this track had led to



freedom, but he had turned back. In hindsight it was an impulsive, ill-considered decision, but a course of action which, once decided on, there was no way of changing.

"Hitler's dog, Blondi," Mathias asks. "Did she once belong to you?"

Joe nods. "I was given her as a puppy in Berlin before the war."

"And how did she end up with Hitler?"

"That's a long story," Joe says.

They reach the remains of the burnt-out motorcycle. Joe stares at it, surprised it has not been cleared away by now. Perhaps it has been left as part of the investigation. He remembers igniting the leaking fuel as rifles cracked below on the path and bullets whizzed around him. It had worked, delaying their pursuers, giving them a head start.

Mathias has to climb up onto a stony slope to get past the obstruction, and Joe follows. The trees here are charred black. If not for the encroaching storm that night, Joe might well have started a forest fire.

"Vogel had even identified your family in Berlin but was unable to find a clear photograph of you from that time."

"My mother was always a little camera-shy," Joe says. "She was always fussing about her hair or something. At the time I thought it was a little silly."

"Now you recognise it for what it was," Mathias says.

"Tradecraft," Joe nods. "Spycraft."

"Vogel had also worked out the link between the air raid on Misburg and the stoppage of Jürgen's train at Bissendorf,"



Mathias continues. "He was a clever man and a very determined investigator."

"Should I have come back?" Joe asks.

"Undoubtedly not," Mathias says. "Had any other Gestapo officer taken over Vogel's role, you would have been arrested almost immediately. Fortunately, Vogel had not shared his findings with anyone other than Köberlein. I think he wanted proof positive before arresting one of the Führer's golden ones."

"It may not make any difference," Joe says forlornly.

"What do you mean?" Mathis glances sideways at him, as he pushes aside a limp, low-hanging branch.

"I met with Himmler yesterday. He showed me a photograph of me and Hitler."

"And?"

"And he is sending it to Jürgen's parents. As soon as they see it, they will know I am an imposter."

To his surprise, Mathias does not seem completely perturbed by that. "Ahh," he says. "We'll have to see what we can do about that."

"Do? What can you do?"

"There are options."

"What options?" Joe demands.

"Are you sure you want to know?"

"I am."

Mathias glances back at him and shakes his head slightly. "Their farm is near Hamburg, not far from the coast. MI5 could ask Bomber Command to schedule a raid in the area."



Joe stops walking. "Do you think you might do something that doesn't involve butchering innocent people this time?"

A pace ahead of him, Mathias stops and turns to face him. "Butchering is such an emotive word, Joe. You need to take your emotions out of this. What if the only way we can protect you is to kill them?"

"I've heard this argument before."

"Well, hear it again," Mathias says. "Suppose we do nothing. They identify you as a spy. You are arrested, tortured and killed by the Gestapo. From your point of view that's not a great outcome. From our point of view, also not great. We lose the best agent we've ever had in Germany. The only ones who win are the Nazis."

"You twist things around like you always do," Joe says. "They are innocent people. They don't deserve to die. Jürgen has a twin sister. She doesn't deserve to die either."

"Neither do the millions of innocent lives that you could have helped save," Mathias says. "I regret that I will have to request the bombing. But in the meantime, let me see if I can come up with any alternate plans that might forestall the need for such drastic action."

He turns and begins to walk again. The path here is narrow, compressed between a cliff face on one side and a sheer drop on the other. Joe trudges along behind Mathias, looking down at the stony trail. They are almost at the break in the path, he thinks, although it is difficult to tell; things looked different in the dark.





He is right. The V-shaped gap in the trail is ahead of them, now clearly marked off with warning signs and a wooden barrier. He looks to his right. There are the small shrubs he clung to, off the side of the trail at the top of the cliff, as Vogel and Köberlein raced past him. The branches look so puny, he is surprised they held his weight.

“This is the place,” Joe says.

“I know,” Mathias says. “The bodies were found downstream and there were bloodstains on the rocks below here. How did a fifteen-year-old boy manage to overpower two armed Gestapo officers and throw them from a cliff?”

“Just lucky I guess,” Joe says.

It hadn’t been entirely luck. He had disguised the hole in the path with a stolen German army greatcoat. Vogel had fallen for it – fallen *into* it – and when Köberlein had gone to help him, Joe had charged the second man from behind, shunting him over the edge too.

“Some people make their own luck,” Mathias says, in a tone that suggests he thinks it was anything but luck. “And I need you to be lucky again.”

A cold chill runs down Joe’s spine. “Lucky in what way?” he asks.

“The invasion of Russia will begin any day,” Mathias says. “If there is another Blitzkrieg victory, like Poland and France, then suddenly the whole of Western Europe will be under German domination. That would be a disaster for Britain. Hitler will have access to vast Russian oilfields,



resources and manpower. After that, the invasion of Britain would be merely a formality.”

Joe waits silently, watching him, wondering where this is going.

“During the last war, Germany was not able to conquer France in four years,” Mathias says. “This time they did it in six weeks. To achieve that, Adolf Hitler overrode all the advice and objections of his generals. Military men with years of experience. The man may well be a military genius.”

“Who might be able to pull off the same kind of victory in Russia,” Joe says.

“Exactly,” Mathias says. “It is vital that Hitler does not direct Operation Barbarossa.”

“And where do you see my role in all this?” Joe asks.

“Hitler drinks a lot of tea,” Mathias says, watching his reaction carefully.

“You want me to poison his tea?” Joe asks, a little sceptically.

Mathias shakes his head. “You would not get close, there is too much security around everything that Hitler eats and drinks. However, we may have discovered a chink in his defences.”

“Go on.”

“You will be travelling with Hitler to Berlin and on to East Prussia on the Führersonderzug, his heavily defended train.”

“Yes,” Joe nods. “We leave on the twenty-first.”



“At ten a.m.,” Mathias adds. “Travelling overnight to Berlin and the next day onto East Prussia.”

“I think so, yes.” Joe is surprised that Mathias knows more about Hitler’s travel arrangements than Joe does, but then again, he should not be surprised.

“The dining car on Hitler’s train is a Mitropa, you are familiar with the brand?”

Joe nods. The distinctive red Mitropa carriages are a common sight in Germany.

“There is a water tank in the top of the carriage, above the kitchen. It contains the water used for drinking – and for making tea, coffee and so on.”

“Wouldn’t you be also poisoning everyone else in the carriage?” Joe asks.

“Yes, you might accidentally end up killing a bunch of high-up Nazis,” Mathias sighs. “Such a tragedy. But I would certainly avoid drinking the water yourself.”

“What about Sofie?”

“You care about her, don’t you, Joe?”

“What I feel about her is my business, not yours.”

Mathias laughs. “Everything is my business, Joe. Everything connects. Can you not see that? It’s just a giant chess game ... and Sofie is one of the pieces.”

“I don’t want her harmed.”

“If you try to keep her out of danger you will put both of your lives at risk. So ... do you care about her, Joe?”

“Define ‘care,’” Joe says.

“If you and Sofie were in a plane and it was crashing and



there was only one parachute, would you take it?”

“No,” Joe shakes his head. “No, I wouldn’t.”

“I think you would, Joe. You just don’t know it yet.”

Joe sighs and looks away.

“What is this poison?” he asks after a while.

“All I know about it is its code name: ‘I’. It’s tasteless and odourless.”

“How would I get the poison into the water tank?” Joe asks.

“There’s a small hatch on the roof of the carriage to allow filling and cleaning,” Mathias says.

“On the roof?”

“Yes. On the end of the carriage there’s a maintenance ladder. The hatch is not locked. It would take only a second to drop the ‘I’ into the tank.”

“You make it sound so easy,” Joe says.

“Do I?” Mathias smiles. “There is just one complication. When the train is stationary, it is heavily guarded. You would have to do it while the train is moving.”

“You’re joking!” Joe says.

“And at night,” Mathias adds, “otherwise there is too great a chance that you will be seen. And not while there are people in the dining car, or they will hear you scrambling around on the roof.”

“Oh, great ... is that all?” Joe says. “Doesn’t sound difficult. How about I do a tap dance on the roof while I’m up there?”

“If you like,” Mathias says. “But do it quietly.”



“Even if I succeed, they will know it had to be someone on the train who did it,” Joe says, “and I am already under suspicion.”

“The poison is very slow acting,” Mathias says. “It’ll take a few days before it has any effect, so they will have no reason to suspect it happened on the train. In any case, we will endeavour to spirit you away from the Wolf’s Lair before the poison takes effect.” He turns abruptly. “Come – we must turn back before they think you have thrown me from the path as well.”

He chuckles at this although Joe does not find it funny.

“What if I fail?” Joe asks. “What if I fall off and kill myself, or can’t get the hatch open, or ... just chicken out?”

“You are not the sort to chicken out,” Mathias says. “But in any case, you know how MI5 works. They will have a backup plan. It is imperative that we get to Hitler before he reaches the Wolf’s Lair. It is impregnable. Once there, we cannot touch him.”

“What is the backup plan?” Joe asks.

“I have no idea,” Mathias says, “but I know how they think. Plans need backups and backups of the backups. Undoubtedly they have something else up their sleeve.”

“If that photo reaches Jürgen’s parents, then none of this will matter,” Joe says.

“That is true,” Mathias says. “You had better hope those bombs find their target.”

Joe is silent for a moment, then asks, “What do I do?”

“The poison is concealed inside a pen,” Mathias says.



“It looks perfectly normal. You can even write with it. But twist the top, and you will hear a crack from inside. Just drop the pen into the water tank, but be careful not to splash any on yourself.”

“Where will I find this pen?”

“In your left pocket.”

Joe slips a hand into his pocket and feels the smooth surface of a pen. He does not even bother to ask how it got in there.

