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Shadow Ritual

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and
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Translated by Anne Trager

LE FRENCH BOOK 

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The main characters are all imaginary. The authors did find inspiration in historical and Masonic documents and real science. The descriptions of the Masonic ceremonies are relatively accurate, but the novel does not represent the official beliefs of the Masonic jurisdictions mentioned.

*“The urge to discover secrets is deeply ingrained in human nature;
even the least curious mind is roused by the promise of sharing
knowledge withheld from others.”*

—John Chadwick,
The Decipherment of Linear B

ULAM

The entryway

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*Question: What did you see as you entered?*

*Answer: Grief and distress.*

*Question: What is the reason for this?*

*Answer: The commemoration of a mournful event.*

*Question: What is that event?*

*Answer: The death of Master Hiram.*

...

*Question: What else was done?*

*Answer: The canvas covering the coffin representing the tomb was lifted with a sign of horror.*

*Question: Enact that sign, my brother. What word was pronounced?*

*Answer: Macbenac, which means the flesh falls from the bones.*

—Master Freemason preparation

## PROLOGUE

1945

*BERLIN*

The bombings had redoubled at dawn, and the ground trembled. The man's razor slipped a second time. Blood dribbled down his stubbly cheek. He clenched his jaw, grabbed a damp towel, and dabbed the cut.

Designed to last a thousand years, the bunker's foundations were showing signs of weakness.

He looked in the cracked mirror above the sink and barely recognized his face. The last six months of combat had left their mark, including two scars across his forehead, souvenirs of a skirmish with the Red Army in Pomerania. He would celebrate his twenty-fifth birthday in a week, but the mirror reflected someone a good ten years older.

The officer slipped on a shirt and his black jacket and shot a half smile at the portrait of the Führer, a mandatory fixture in all the rooms of the Third Reich Chancellery's air-raid shelter. He put on his black helmet, adjusted it, and buttoned his collar, fingering the two silver runes shaped like S's on the right.

His uniform had such power. When he wore it, he soaked up the fear and respect in the eyes of passersby. He reveled in the gazes that oozed submission. Even children too young to understand the meaning of his black uniform pulled away when he tried to be friendly. It reactivated some primitive fear. He liked that. Intensely. Without his beloved leader's national socialism, he would have been a nobody, just like the others, leading a mediocre life in an

ambitionless society. But fate had catapulted him to the inner circle of the SS.

Now, however, the tide was turning. Judeo-Masonic forces were triumphing again. The Bolsheviks were scampering, ready to take over like a swarm of rats. They would spare nothing. Of course, he hadn't either. He'd left no prisoners on the Eastern Front.

"Pity is all the weak can be proud of," Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler liked to tell his subordinates. That same man had given him—a Frenchman—the Iron Cross for his acts of bravery.

Another tremor shook the concrete walls. Gray dust fell from the ceiling. That explosion was close, maybe just above the bunker in what remained of the chancellery gardens.

*Obersturmbannführer* François Le Guermant brushed the dust from his lapels and examined himself again. Berlin would fall. They had known this since June, when the Allies invaded Normandy. But what a year it had been. A "heroic and brutal" dream, to borrow the words of José-Maria de Heredia, the Cuban-born French poet Le Guermant loved.

A dream for some and a nightmare for others.

It began after he'd joined the SS Sturmbrigade Frankreich and then the Charlemagne Division, swearing allegiance to Adolf Hitler. This came two years after he'd marched off with the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism. Marshal Pétain's spinelessness had disgusted him, and he had set his sights on the Waffen SS units that were taking foreign volunteers.

He had fought bravely, and one day a general invited him to dinner that changed his life. Anti-Christian comments filled the conversation. The guests praised old Nordic religious beliefs and championed racist doctrines. Le Guermant listened with fascination as they related the strange and cruel stories of the clever god Odin, the dragon

slayer Siegfried, and mythic Thule, the ancestral homeland of supermen, the real masters of the human race.

Le Guermant was seated next to the general's liaison, a major from Munich who explained how SS officers with pure Germanic blood had received intensive historical and spiritual training. "The Aryan race has waged battle with degenerate barbarians for centuries," he said.

Before, Le Guermant would have mocked the words as the wild imaginings of indoctrinated minds, but in the candlelight, the magical stories were a powerful venom, a burning drug that flowed into his blood, slowly reaching his brain and cutting it off from reason. Le Guermant was caught in the maelstrom of a titanic combat against the Stalinist hordes, and at that moment, he understood the real reason he had joined this final battle between Germany and the rest of the world. He grasped the meaning of his life.

On that winter solstice in 1944, in a meadow lit up by torches, he was initiated into the rites of the Black Order. As he faced a makeshift altar covered with a dark gray sheet embroidered with two moon-colored runes, he heard the deep voices of soldiers chanting all around him: "*Halgadom, Halgadom, Halgadom.*"

"It's an ancestral Germanic invocation that means 'sacred cathedral,'" the major told him. "But it's nothing like a Christian cathedral. Think of it as a mystical grail." The major laughed. "In a Christian context, it's like a celestial Jerusalem."

An hour later, the torches were extinguished. As darkness swallowed the men in ceremonial uniforms, Le Guermant emerged a transformed man. His existence would never be the same. What would it matter if he died? Death was nothing but a passage to a more glorious world. François Le Guermant had joined his fate with that of this community. It was cursed by the rest of humanity, but he would receive sublime teachings promising new life, even if Germany lost the war.

The Red Army continued to advance. Le Guermant's division took a battering. Then, on a cold and wet morning in February 1945, when he was supposed to be leading a counterattack in East Prussia, Le Guermant received orders to report to the Führer's headquarters in Berlin. There was no explanation.

He bid good-bye to his division, only to learn later that his fellow soldiers, exhausted and underequipped, had been decimated that very day by the Second Shock Army's T-34 tanks.

The Führer had saved his life.

On his way to Berlin, Le Guermant passed countless German refugees fleeing the Russians. The radio broadcast Dr. Goebbels's propaganda: Soviet barbarians were pillaging houses and raping women. It made no mention of the atrocities committed by the Reich when they had marched victoriously on Russia.

The lines of frightened runaways went on for miles.

How ironic. In June 1940, his family had pulled a cart along a road in Compiègne, France, fleeing the arriving Germans. Now he was a German soldier, and he was retreating. From the backseat of his SS car, he contemplated the dead German women and children lying on both sides of the road, some in an advanced stage of decomposition. Many had had their clothing and shoes stolen. This depressing spectacle was nothing compared with what he would find when he arrived in the capital of the dying Third Reich.

Past the northern suburb of Wedding, he gazed at the burned and crumbling buildings, the victims of incessant Allied bombings. He had known Berlin when it was so arrogant and proud to be the new Rome. Now he gawked at the masses of silent inhabitants trudging through the ruins.

Flags bearing swastikas hung over what remained of the rooftops. His car came to a stop at an intersection on Wilhelmstrasse to let a convoy of Panzer Tiger tanks and a detachment of foot soldiers pass. Le Guermant watched as a man spit at the troops. Before, such behavior would have

led to an arrest and a beating. On this day, the man just went on his way.

A banderole remained intact on the side of an intact building—an insurance company—that hadn't been destroyed. "We will vanquish or we will die," its large gothic letters read.

Arriving at the chancellery guard post, he found the bodies of two men hanging from streetlights. They hadn't been as lucky as the man who had spit at the troops. The dead men were wearing placards: "I betrayed my Führer." Probably deserters caught by the Gestapo and immediately executed, Le Guermand thought. Examples. No Germans could escape their destiny. The bodies, their faces nearly black from asphyxiation, swayed in the wind.

To his surprise, there was no officer to meet him at the bunker, but instead, an insignificant civilian. His threadbare jacket bore the insignia of the Nazi Party. The man told him that he and the other officers of his rank would be assigned to a special detachment under the direct orders of Reichsleiter Martin Bormann. His mission would be explained in due time.

The man led him to a tiny room. Other officers, all detached from three SS divisions—Wiking, Totenkopf, and Hohenstaufen—had received the same orders and were lodged in nearby rooms.

Two days after they arrived, Martin Bormann, secretary of the Nazi Party and one of the few dignitaries to still be in Adolf Hitler's good graces, called the Frenchman and his comrades together. With a cold, self-confident gaze on his bloated face, he looked at the fifteen men gathered in what remained of a chancellery meeting room. Then Hitler's dauphin spoke in a strangely shrill voice.

"Gentlemen, the Russians will be here in a few months. It is possible that we will lose the war, even though the Führer still believes in victory and has put his faith in new weapons even more destructive than our long-range V-2 rockets."

Bormann let his eyes drift over the group before continuing his monologue.

“We need to think about future generations and remain committed to final victory. Your superior officers chose you for your courage and loyalty to the Reich. I speak especially for our European friends from Sweden, Belgium, France, and Holland who have conducted themselves as true Germans. During the few weeks we have left, you will be trained to survive and perpetuate the work of Adolf Hitler. Our guide has decided to stay to the end, even if he must give his life, but you will leave in due time to ensure that his sacrifice is not in vain.”

Le Guermand looked around. The other officers were murmuring and shifting in their chairs. Bormann continued.

“Each of you will receive orders that are vital for our work to continue. You are not alone. Other groups such as yours are being formed throughout German territory. Your training will begin at eight tomorrow morning and will last for several weeks. Good luck to all of you.”

During the two months that followed, they were taught to live an entirely clandestine life. François Le Guermand admired the organization that persevered, despite the impending apocalypse. He felt detached from his French roots, from that nation of whiners that had prostrated itself at the feet of Charles de Gaulle and the Americans.

Le Guermand was cloistered in underground rooms and went days without seeing sunlight. A rodent’s life. There was no rest between the lectures and coursework. Soldiers and civilians introduced him to a vast network that was especially active in South America, as well as Spain and Switzerland.

They were trained in covert bank transfers and identity management. Money didn’t seem to be a concern. Each member of the group had a duty: to go to his assigned country and blend with the population under a new identity. Then wait—ready to act.

By mid-April, the Soviets were just six miles from Berlin. Three hundred French survivors of the Charlemagne Division were guarding the bunker. That was when the liaison officer from Munich arrived. Bormann deferred to the major, as though he were a superior officer. Le Guermant ate a quick lunch with the major, who called Hitler an evil madman and then held out a black card embossed with a white capital T.

“This card marks your membership to an ancient Aryan secret society, the Thule-Gesellschaft,” the major explained. “It has existed since long before the birth of Nazism. You have been chosen for your courage and devotion. If you survive the war, other members of the Thule will contact you with new orders.”

The cut on his cheek was now imperceptible.

It was finally time. It was April 25, and they were scheduled to leave on April 29.

Le Guermant polished the tips of his shiny boots. He wanted to be impeccable for this final meal with his comrades.

He stepped out of his small room, left the bunker, and took the long underground tunnel to the exit, emerging aboveground. He headed toward a large military building. The two soldiers on guard saluted him, and he hurried to the conference room.

Le Guermant walked through the door and looked around. Something was off. His companions were standing straight as fence posts and staring at a dark-haired man in a chair at the back of the room. The man's SS jacket was unbuttoned. Tears were rolling down his cheeks.

It was one of his comrades, a transmission specialist. Le Guermant stepped closer and stiffened when he saw two patches of dried blood where his ears had been. The man was groaning and mouthing a plea for help.

“Gentlemen.” Martin Bormann's voice echoed in the room. “What you see here is a traitor. He was packing his bags to join Heinrich Himmler. The BBC announced

this morning that our loyal Heinrich has offered the Allied troops unconditional capitulation. Our Führer was enraged and gave orders to execute anyone planning to join this betrayal, starting with his companion Eva Braun's own brother-in-law, Herr Fegelein."

The man was still groaning.

Bormann approached the prisoner calmly and touched his shoulder. He smiled and went on. "Our friend wanted out of his assignment. We cut off his ears and tongue so he couldn't converse with his master about our glorious Führer's decisions."

The party hierarch ran his fingers through the prisoner's hair, a distant look in his eyes. "You see, a German, and an SS at that, cannot turn on his own people and go unpunished. Learn that lesson. Never betray. Guards, take this piece of trash outside and shoot him."

Two guards seized the man's arms and dragged him out.

With the man gone, some of the tension in the room lifted. Everyone knew Bormann hated Himmler and was waiting for the occasion to discredit him as commander of the SS. Now it was done.

"Time is flying, men. Marshal Zhukov's first army is approaching, and his troops are already at the Tiergarten. You will leave sooner than planned. Heil Hitler."

The officers straightened and shot out their arms in response. "Heil Hitler."

An explosion shook the room.

François Le Guermant turned to leave with the other men. But Bormann grabbed his arm and gave him a harsh look. "You know your instructions. It is vital for the Reich that you follow them to the letter."

The room shuddered with another explosion, and the spasm spread through Bormann's hand. Le Guermant looked him straight in the eye.

"I will leave Berlin by the underground network and go to a point in the western suburbs that is still safe. I will lead a convoy of five trucks to Beelitz, nineteen miles from the

capital. There, I will bury the crates we transported. But I must keep one briefcase.”

“And then?”

“Then I will join our ninth army, which will fly me to the Swiss border. I will figure out how to cross the border and get to an apartment in Berne, where I will wait for further instructions.”

Bormann’s face relaxed a little.

Le Guermant cleared his throat and asked, “Sir, what’s in the crates?”

“That is not for you to know. Just obey. Do not be undisciplined like your compatriot Frenchmen.”

Bormann gave a weak smile, pursed his lips, and turned and walked away.

### *DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP*

Sunlight seeped through the dirty window, lighting up the dust particles dancing in the air, the only animation in the ramshackle barracks. The place was rank with death. Two days earlier, on April 23, the kapos had locked the doors, not bothering to remove the corpses.

Among the dozens of emaciated bodies, only three men—all of them French—were still alive.

Henri, a neurologist from Paris arrested in 1941 and recently transferred from the Reich’s medical research labs, had been delirious since nightfall. Deprivation, cold, and the long march ending at Dachau had depleted his strength. Leaning against a wall, he struggled to keep himself upright.

“We were wrong. The devil does exist. Evil is here, among us, lurking deep in our consciousness, waiting to be released. It’s like a coiled snake or a malevolent brother bent on forcing out the password to a room filled with everything he’s been lusting for.”

The youngest of the three, twenty-year-old Marek, turned to the third, Fernand, a retired administrative worker deported from Montluçon, France. "He won't survive the night."

"I know. What can we do?"

Henri slumped to the floor. Panting, he continued. "They woke up the ancient snake, the source of all evil. It gave them the seeds of hell. The fruit of the tree of knowledge has dropped to the ground. The seeds have sprouted everywhere."

Fernand pulled a bowl from under a cot. He dipped his fingers in the gray water to wet Henri's lips.

"Other demons will rise tomorrow. We will worship them. Evil wears many masks. It takes over because we are full of pride."

"What are you saying, brother? I don't understand," Marek said.

Henri sniggered. "They went everywhere to find him, even the outer reaches of the deserts. But he was here the whole time. He was just waiting for us."

"His mind is going."

They heard boots stomping, and the barracks door swung open. Four men in green uniforms rushed toward them. All but one were wearing helmets. The one without the helmet brought down his heel and crushed Henri's hand. The dying man cried out.

"Take him away," the torturer shouted.

The soldiers grabbed Henri and lugged him out. The door slammed shut. The two remaining prisoners hurried to the grimy window.

Henri was forced to kneel in front of the SS officer. Brandishing a metal-tipped cane, the officer turned toward the barracks and smirked at the two Frenchmen. He twirled the cane and slammed it down on the kneeling man's shoulder.

Marek and Fernand heard something crack. Henri howled. The officer ordered his subordinates to lift the

prisoner and turned toward the barracks again. Wearing the same look, he used the cane to slam the back of the prisoner's neck.

Henri fell to the ground, facedown.

The blood drained from Fernand's face. He turned to Marek.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes. He knows who we are. He's perverting the ritual. But why? We aren't a threat to him anymore. We're nothing!"

"Marek, if either of us survives, we must remember this murder and hold these people accountable, just as the three men who murdered the master were brought to justice."

The SS officer stretched and then leaned over Henri, whispering in his ear. The Frenchman shook his head.

The officer scowled and straightened. He raised the cane over his head and brought it down on the victim's head.

That was the last of the three blows—one to the shoulder, one to the back of the neck, and a final one to the head.

The torturer was well versed in Freemason ways.

The German nodded to the two prisoners and started walking toward the barracks.

Fernand and Marek watched in silence, holding onto each other as their final moment arrived.

The door flew open. Sunlight flowed into the room, illuminating every inch, as if to better accompany the return of darkness.

### *SOUTHWEST OF BERLIN*

He had to get out of the truck. François Le Guerland shouted an order to lob grenades on the crates.

Outside, the enemy was gunning down the occupants of the five trucks, which were stopped on the road.

His command went unheeded. The soldier was already dead. Half his face had been blown away. It was too late to

leave the truck now. Le Guermant pushed the body out of the vehicle and swerved off the road. Swearing, he headed toward a line of trees.

Everything had started so well. He had left Berlin without a hitch and taken command of the small convoy as planned. They were just six miles from the hiding spot when they drove around a bend and straight into a Russian roadblock.

What were the Ivans doing there? General Wenck's Ninth German Army, which was retreating westward toward American lines, was supposed to control this zone. Le Guermant realized that the rout had occurred more quickly than they had thought.

He had to get out of this mess.

A Russian soldier appeared from behind a bush. He took up position in front of the truck. Le Guermant accelerated and ran the man over. A concert of bullets whistled through the air. A projectile hit Le Guermant in the shoulder, and blood spurt all over the steering wheel. Le Guermant howled, and an acid taste filled his mouth.

He glanced in the rearview mirror to check on the rest of the convoy three hundred yards behind him. One vehicle was on fire, and Russian soldiers were already climbing into the others.

He bit his lip. The crates couldn't fall into enemy hands. He pressed hard on the gas pedal, and the truck sped along a muddy lane toward the dark forest.

His heart was pounding. He didn't have much time. The Reds would catch up and kill him slowly, making him pay for all the atrocities the Germans had committed.

One of the trucks exploded, giving him some breathing room.

He raced along, hit a rut, and swerved, nearly losing control. But he managed to right the vehicle. He would need at least a minute to reach the woods. He allowed himself a bit of hope. No one was behind him.

He let out a yelp of victory when he reached the first trees standing guard over the forest. The truck bounced over another rut, and Le Guermant grimaced in pain. The blood was pounding in his head, but there was no stopping. Those damned Ruskiies would never take him alive.

The truck careened past the trees, no Russians in sight. Le Guermant chanted to himself as the sunlight disappeared behind the thick branches. Maybe he would get out of this alive.

Then he saw it. A gigantic tree trunk was blocking the track just yards in front of him. He slammed on the brakes, skidding and slipping on the mud until the weight of his cargo shifted and the vehicle tipped over. The truck started rolling down a hill covered with emerald-colored ferns.

The descent seemed to last an eternity.

Helpless, Obersturmbannführer Le Guermant gazed at the branches slapping against the windshield like wild animals clawing the vehicle.

Then, by some miracle, the slope flattened out, and the battered truck came to a stop in what looked like a muddy creek.

Le Guermant's head hit the steering wheel, but he didn't feel any pain. He had slipped into a kind of trance on the edge of madness. Everything around him was dark. The truck had slammed into a rocky bank covered with blackish moss. Only a few rays of sunlight could make their way into this dark chasm.

There was no noise. Nothing but a heavy, wet silence.

He managed to climb out of the cab, his head spinning and his legs shaking. Blood was spurting in fits from his temple and dripping down his face and neck. He was slipping in and out of consciousness, but he was still standing, and a survival instinct was deeply embedded in his muscles.

He walked around the truck and climbed into the back. If he was going to die here, he wanted to know why. What was in those damned crates?

And what was that sickly sweet smell? He looked down and saw that bullets had ripped open a can of motor oil, and the dark liquid was spilling between the crates. He took two steps to retrieve the can and slipped. He reached out to keep himself from falling. He felt something hard, but soft too. And sticky. It was a bullet-ridden face. He pulled his hand away and retched.

Gathering his last strength, Le Guermant sat down next to one of the crates. He picked up the assault rifle next to the body and started hacking at the top.

His vision was blurry. His brain wasn't getting enough blood. In a burst of rage, he gave the crate a final blow, which broke the oak planks open.

Wood shards and a bundle of old papers landed on his lap. Papers. Nothing but stupid pieces of paper.

His mouth went dry, and his hand stiffened. He stared at the yellowed sheets full of symbols. He didn't recognize much, but the black skull was unmistakable. He focused on it. No, it wasn't the familiar skull on his SS helmet. It was misshapen—and it was wearing a grotesque smile.

François Le Guermant started laughing uncontrollably, like a madman, as he slipped into the shadows.