

PEORIA

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Fragmented and conflicting reports of Mengele's suicide traveled like bad air to the far corners of the globe—like an infected flea jumps from rat to rat during a plague, like the Asian bird flu virus migrates on international flights, like a feeding vampire runs from the dawn. Not even Control was sure if it had been the real Mengele, infected with that horrible, painful (and possibly imaginary) venereal disease known as “The Red H,” who had blown his brains out in the lonely motel room in Peoria, Illinois (a location which any amateur thespian would tell you might warrant such an act). Adding confusion to the validity of the intelligence surrounding the death were the multiple sightings of the evil doctor, during the years that followed, in remote locations in South America. Most of these Mengeles were evidently Hemispheres impersonators and doubles, who were trying to make a quick buck by adding to the mystery surrounding the fate of the shadowy war criminal. I am sure Control had activated these confederates himself, hoping to drain the coffers of his enemies by sending Shadow Farm agents on wild goose chases. It must have been a confusing and frustrating time for the ex-Nazis and neo-Nazis who had been laying low for nearly half a century, counting on the doctor to lead the *in vitro* rebirth of the Third Reich. Most who learned of Josef Mengele's suicide cursed his life and not his death, although a few sorry individuals toasted the doctor's legacy, in the back rooms of bars in Paraguay and Idaho, with cool glasses of Liebfraumilch, reserve stock perhaps set aside for victory celebrations that had never come. These pathetic old men told some of the old stories, a few of the new, and then went home to their on-line porn sites and denture cream, leaving, without much fanfare, the soul of another devil to ooze into the special chamber of hell set aside for him. Mengele was by now historical ash, except for novelists and screenwriters looking for an unadulterated touch of evil to add to new conspiracy stews over the loss of moral ballast

in modern times. Mengele's apparition also appears to some of the more sensitive among us, as late night heartburn or a cold sore that keeps reappearing on your lower lip. He's that shadow running past you, that you just catch a glimpse of out of the corner of your eye. He's the Ghost of Hamlet's father, had Hamlet's father been Claudius, or even Macbeth.

A few facts are known about the events that occurred immediately before and after Mengele's demise. Three days before his death, Mengele emerged from his room one last time. He got ice and a diet soda from the machine down the hall. Then he went back to his room and watched the same pay-per-view Disney movie over and over again (the 1998 Lindsay Lohan remake of *The Parent Trap*, which Mengele was in the middle of viewing when he blew his brains out). It was a desk clerk who found the body and called the police. Other guests at the motel complained of a stench emanating from behind the door of room #62. It was a complaint that the motel's manager, a Mr. Peepers, was quickly able to cover up and managed to make disappear. Mengele died anonymously. Out of habit he had started carrying no identification whatsoever, discovering (the hard way) that even fake papers could be traced. As is often the case with this type of villain, we sense that they are dead intuitively—in peculiar, metaphysical ways. It was as if, with Mengele's passing, a sense of balance and order was returned to the world and the divine scale that is weighing all human souls for eternity, tips ever so slightly (if but for a moment) to the net good. There were other signs as well. In Eastern Iowa, a rainstorm that was going to cancel a Little League baseball game mysteriously turned south and a father dying of cancer got to see his son play one last time. People all over the world felt lucky that day and they didn't know why. They fell in love and conceived children, who they hugged a little tighter at night, knowing that they had become safer in the overall scheme of things.

No mysterious stranger with a limp and German accent (and/or dueling scar) stepped forward to claim Mengele's body (as he would have in a grainy 1970s Nazi conspiracy film), and since the City of Peoria routinely cremated unclaimed John Does after a year of storage in the county crisper, the doctor's corpse—tattooed by the county coroner with a serial number—went directly from a frozen state into an oven, an irony that even Goebbels might have

appreciated. He was given a pauper's funeral, and his ashes were placed in an unmarked slot in a public mausoleum. Mengele's worldly effects, which had been packed away in storage containers by the Sheriff, were either tossed in the dumpster or donated to the local Goodwill.

Many people, who thought that Mengele had taken the easy way out, would have preferred to hunt him down with torches, like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, perform unspeakable acts on his body, and then dispatch what remained of him to hell in flames. But even as a burning man, Mengele would never express regret for all he had done in his monstrous life. After all, Mengele didn't shoot himself because he couldn't bear the shame of what he had done. He shot himself because of what he thought *had been done to him*. In his final moments, Mengele felt persecuted by the very people whom he had persecuted in the worst possible ways. Mengele may have mourned, on some objective level, the loss of his son, but he felt nothing for all the fathers whose sons' lives he had forcibly donated to science. Besides, there were the usual childhood losses to remember—his dog, his mother, those carefree days skating on a frozen pond—which left no time to empathize with anyone else. In the end the dispassionate scientist could refashion the doctor's credo "First, do no harm" into "It could have been worse, much worse."

No one hated to hear about Mengele's passing more than Nazi hunter Irving Berlin, who had made bringing the doctor to justice his life's work. Berlin knew that as a consequence of Mengele's suicide, humanity might never be able to identify the rest of the doctor's victims, those who had died anonymously or without living relatives to remember them. Berlin (wrongfully) assumed that The Angel of Death kept these records either locked in a safety deposit box somewhere or locked in his head. The sad reality was Mengele had no idea how many he had killed. He certainly didn't remember their names. Berlin also believed that Mengele had developed, via eugenics, a living, breathing doomsday weapon. This genetic time bomb, most likely a child, was both a victim of Mengele and a danger to humanity and might have been identified during an interrogation. Berlin believed that if the doomsday weapon did exist, then it probably took the form of Mengele's grandson, since sociopathic traits often skipped a generation. At least that was Berlin's theory, although Berlin's conspiracies were joked about around the office.

When he filed his report with his superiors they laughed and said that they thought maybe Berlin had watched *The Boys from Brazil* one too many times.

The symbiotic relationship between this detective and this criminal was reminiscent of those silent serial dramas that were so popular in Germany around the time of the First World War. The master criminal's network of confederates and informants well-placed on every rung of the social ladder, along with the criminal's own mastery of disguise and of the art of the sudden escape through fireplaces, secret panels inside picture frames, down sewers and tunnels, kept him one step ahead of the detective who thought and operated according to social logic as opposed to dream logic to catch him. For Berlin, there were not enough clues but plenty of signs: the still warm impression left by Mengele's thumbprint on a quarter in the tip jar on the counter of a Burbank diner, an empty toilet stall (seat up) at the Joyce Kilmer rest stop on the Jersey Turnpike, a half-played game of solitaire (face cards up) laid out on a briefcase in a Greyhound station in Duluth, a receiver dangling and still swaying from a pay phone in Grand Central. There were never any witnesses, no descriptions of the man who had just left. It was as if you had arrived one moment after a wise guy got hit. Hear no, see no, speak no evil.

Berlin was the first to arrive at the motel in Peoria. He got an anonymous call from a man identifying himself as "S" about where Mengele was hiding out, but once more arrived a few seconds too late to capture the war criminal, hearing the muffled pistol shot in the hallway as he was approaching the door to the room. Berlin had a chance to examine the body and look through Mengele's personal effects before the sheriff arrived. Mengele had blown his brains out with his old Walther P38 service revolver, using a pillow as a silencer, as he had often seen assassins do in spy and gangster films. Feathers from the pillow were stuck to the blood splatter on the wall, and this created the odd illusion, when Berlin first entered the room and his eyes were adjusting to the dark, that Mengele had sprouted wings. There was an unfamiliar odor wafting in the air, not entirely unpleasant, a tropical mixture of damp magazines, rubbing alcohol and citrus. Notebooks were scattered all over the place, filled with cryptic notes, drawings and newspaper clippings. Irving Berlin had been on the Uni-Bomber case (because of its initial

neo-Nazi overtones), and these notebooks reminded him of some of the notebooks they found in Kaczynski's shack. The newspaper clippings were want ads mostly. Irving Berlin had a vague recollection of watching a late-night Sherlock Holmes movie where a German spy was communicating with his puppet-masters via the classifieds. Mengele's notes were dedicated to one crackpot theory or another—from sketches of Wilhelm Reich's "orgone" generator, to mathematical "proof" of top-secret Masonic cloning technology. The notes were tiny and hardly legible. Mengele had used special German engineering pencils to write. It was said the lead from these pencils, originally used to design U-boats, was so fine that a person could write almost invisibly.

Berlin found the mother lode in the bathtub: a black plastic garbage bag filled with an odd assortment of iconic, and possibly totemic, relics that Mengele had collected over two decades searching for his son. The Nazi hunter knew he had to act quickly. Hemispheres cleaners would soon arrive at the motel room to dispose of Mengele's artifacts. Berlin went through the bag and catalogued each item it contained, placing it on the bed alongside a numbered index card and then photographing it with the Polaroid camera he always carried with him. He would send the photographs to the board of directors of the foundation that funded his work, explaining that he thought the ephemera might provide clues to the Nazi Underground Railroad that they had been searching for in order to destroy. Privately, however, Berlin knew that all the Nazis worth keeping in hiding had already died and that the trinkets in the garbage bag were just the collection of a madman.

Still, Berlin examined the artifacts long and hard, trying to unmask connections between the relics and Mengele's victims. There was obviously a hidden logic to the collection, but Berlin struggled to find one. Some objects seemed to relate to nightmares that had haunted Mengele (the Goofy jack-in-the box, the bird's nest, the *Hogan's Heroes* snow globe with Bob Crane wearing a Santa hat), and other items looked like trash he had found on the side of the road (the receipt from Starbucks, the used latex condom, the single wooden chopstick stained with duck sauce). Berlin was convinced that this was no ordinary collection, however. He believed that the objects were souvenirs that Mengele had taken from his victims. But Berlin was at a loss when it came to taking this theory to the next

step. What Irving Berlin failed to notice was the most important piece of evidence of all, the “Dr. J” autographed basketball pump.

This was not a real basketball pump, but was, in fact, a large syringe disguised to look like a basketball pump. Inside the syringe was a special liquid that Mengele had developed and snuck out of Nazi Germany. This venom was called “The H-Solution.” The H-Solution consisted of Hitler’s spinal fluid, a biological delivery agent, and a virus containing RNA called “The Dresden Code.” When injected into the blood stream of a normal human, that human’s DNA would be transformed into the Führer’s.

In addition to spending the past decade searching for his son, Mengele had attempted to convert everyone opposed to him into Hitler (at least genetically). Whether he was successful remains in doubt, if not actually doubtful, Herr Heidegger. Some travelers who claimed to have been approached by Mengele at truck stops, and who ridiculed his vision of a racially pure society, reported later waking up in the middle of the night in a sweat and tremors after dreaming that they were injected in the stomach by a cartoon-size needle. These potential victims of “The H-Solution” were given a head-to-toe screening by the Hemispheres medical staff and found to exhibit only minor symptoms of genetic transformation into Adolf Hitler. A few developed a rash on their buttocks, some had head colds, or experienced flashbacks to National Socialist rallies, and one woman—already cursed with masculine features—sprouted some black facial hair beneath her nose.

As Hemispheres’ most prized assets, the H-Agents, Horner, Horatio and Hartmann had all been inoculated against “The H-Solution,” with more possible confusion arising here in the apparent correspondences between H’s, as between agents and solutions. If infected, the immune systems of the agents in question became so compromised that they were unable to resist the potentially fatal cocktail of paranoia, megalomania and a complex of inferiority-related ailments. The potency of “The Solution” was strong enough to knock out the most bullish or bearish agent, send him or her reeling into the next frame of futurological existence in which all old loyalties are discarded and no new loyalties forged, as well as all realities being questioned. Those who have experienced “The Solution” and lived to tell about it all say the same thing: First you see Hitler, then you see Death.

Always on the lookout for H-Solution attacks, Hemispheres entered into a state of high alert when, shortly after Mengele's suicide, trace amounts of Hitler were found on the body of a man hung out to dry by some cleaners who were not at all interested in pressing his clothes. The realization that this anonymous corpse was that of an H-Agent sent Control spinning into paranoid overdrive. The location of the body, the fact that there was a body at all, was communicated via the Mengele Code, the approved means of intra-agency and inter-Hemispheric contact set up by Control after the war. Lingering doubts about the authenticity of the Mengele who died in Peoria, and the uncertainty of the real Mengele's life status or whereabouts caused some confusion with the code that did not reference the monster whose name it put to separate use. A certain amount of confusion is not necessarily a bad thing where spying is concerned, so long as the proper people are confused and there is some way of monitoring this confusion at the other end. Much of spying is really a bloodless game, when it is not a blood sport, not so much cat-and-mouse as kitty treats and mouse pad.

The overall effect of this wholesale undermining of history and biography is essentially a housecleaning in which the subject no longer remembers where he put anything or what there was to be hidden in the first place. "What's my Poland?" "Where's my paintbrush?" "Were my parents German?" These were the questions that appeared on the Mengele-encoded note found on the dry-cleaned body on the wet pavements of the *Tauentzienstraße* in Berlin, roughly midway between the zoological garden and the zoo. The location of the body might be significant. The disorientation that the H-Solution would have produced in the victim prior to his death no doubt led to indecisiveness arising from uncertainty. Being unable to tell the difference between a zoological garden and a zoo (Does the former contain the latter? Are there animals in the first, and, if so, have they been planted there?), it is likely that the H-Agent died midway between the two points of interest on a Berlin tourist map for a reason. Of course, what distinguishes a zoological garden from a zoo is not the animals but their habitat, that is, context. Understanding context is one of the first things to go as the mind breaks down under the influence of the H-Solution, so named because its namesake (Hitler) had no rational sense of borders, and borders define context. And, just as obviously, it was

a “solution” that solved nothing while proclaiming that it solved everything. In fact, it undermined the whole idea of there ever being a solution, since problems, like solutions, are necessarily dependent upon context too.

There is another possible explanation, though. In order to immunize a body against the onset of a disease, you have to inoculate it with a specimen of the virus. So, it is possible that the body in question died not from the actual disease that the virus produced but from an adverse reaction to something, not necessarily the virus itself, to which the body was allergic. If this were the case, then it remains uncertain as to whether the death of the body was intentional or accidental—death from allergic reaction or misadventure. To ascertain the answer to this question, we must first determine who this body was, and that won't be easy. All that we have to go on (fingerprints having been altered, along with facial features and even dental bridgework) are the three questions that the note found in a jacket pocket asked: *What's my Poland? Where's my paintbrush? Were my parents German?*

It's not much, but it's a start. What do these three questions mean, why were they asked and, most importantly, who asked them? The local police had no idea, nor did Interpol for that matter. One investigator did theorize that the dead man was a secret agent and that the three questions were part of a recognition conversation that had not yet been memorized. This scenario is certainly possible. However, I have it on good authority (you'll just have to trust me on this) that the three questions were notes the man had made to himself about a line of interrogation of a prisoner that would be taking place later that day. Granted, in coming up with this hypothesis, I have the advantage of both hindsight and intimate knowledge of the personal habits of Hemispheres operatives. I know for a fact that the dead man in the street was an H-Agent who was known as a master interrogator who liked to jot down seemingly nonsensical questions as they occurred to him during his long walks in the streets of foreign cities. Later, these questions would be the exact questions needed to break, say, a double agent who had held out for months in the dungeon at Hh (Hemispheres headquarters) known as “Downtown.” There was only one H-Agent capable of this type of metaphysical inquisition and that was Hartmann.

I've seen firsthand what Hartmann's inquisitions did to people.

He made your head boil. Somewhere deep inside your brain was the information he required and he knew just how to coax it out of there. In Hartmann's universe, nobody was innocent. Alzheimer's patients, newborn babies and even dead men could be made to talk. It didn't matter if he met his mark "Downtown" or in a crowded bar. Eventually, he gained your confidence by being so damned dapper and polite. He kept his fingernails manicured and clean. He wore cologne that reminded you of your grandfather. He wore a wedding ring with the devotion of your widowed third grade math teacher. Hartmann liked the books you liked and could talk about football or cooking, depending on your taste. He carried a box of properties with him at all times. Inside the box were items from your childhood: old, forgotten toys, some photographs, and perhaps a few pieces of fruit. He lets you taste a strawberry and it brings you back to your mother's kitchen. Hartmann is your mother, isn't he? He looks just like her in the dark. He kisses you on the forehead, like your mother did when she put you to bed. Hartmann seduces you, rapes your memories, spits your ego out on the bloody floor—and then he really gets down to work. As Hartmann is breaking you, he palms the note containing three questions. These are not the same questions that he died with in his pocket, but they are questions meant specifically to break you:

"Who is Juan Carlos of Spain?"

"What is the cotton gin?"

"What is sublimation?"

But this time, Hartmann isn't the one doing the interrogating, is he? For it's his corpse that's found on a Berlin street. Forensic evidence shows his body was dumped there after a long night of torture. Someone has turned the tables on Hartmann—but who? Was he killed by the H-Solution or by the H-Solution vaccine? There is a small prick on his neck, which the coroner mistakes for a mosquito bite. The location of this dot, exactly three centimeters below the left ear, proves that Hartman was injected by an assassin known as "Nurse Jane." The sanction was obviously by Control's order. Has Hartmann betrayed the Old Man? What information did he know that made him dangerous to Hemispheres? Was he connected to Mengele somehow?

Whatever the reason, Control selects "Nurse Jane" for the wet work, because she's become Control's weapon of choice—smooth

and easy on entry and exit, always leaving a clean wound with no excess blood or trace evidence. She is first and foremost Control's pet snake, ready to strike on his command. But where does Nurse Jane interrogate Hartmann? She can't take him "Downtown," or are there parts of "Downtown" that exist in other parts of the world? Are these other "Downtowns" found in the damp, dingy kitchens of Hemispheres safe houses? In the back rooms of Laundromats? In unmarked vans and in abandoned hockey rinks?

Let's say Nurse Jane does take Hartmann to some basement. (We owned a lot of basements in those days.) Does Nurse Jane perform unspeakable acts upon Hartmann's body? Perhaps she removes her uniform and bra and forcibly suckles Hartmann. Hartmann is disgusted. But also titillated. Nurse Jane smiles and walks over to her suitcase filled with implements of the trade. Hartmann realizes they are his own personal interrogation devices. She reaches in the suitcase and pulls out a plastic baggie. Inside the baggie is a strawberry. A tear forms in Hartmann's eye. Nurse Jane makes Hartmann eat the strawberry. His reaction is immediate. It's like somebody rammed a hot poker into the roof of his mouth. Nurse Jane takes a few more items out of the suitcase: a pack of very old dental floss and a pair of gloves. Nurse Jane puts the gloves on Hartmann's hands. She begins to floss Hartmann's teeth. Hartmann feels like he is burning up. The interrogation devices are imbued with the psychic energy of Hartmann's own victims. Their pain will soon be his.

And that's when the voices start up inside his head. These aren't the voices of people that Hartmann's interrogated. These are voices of people who are interrogating him. The voices are searching every square inch of his mind and draining everything Hartmann knows, everything he remembers and everything he's ever dreamed. One voice in particular stands out in the chaos. It's the voice of Hitler, speaking in what seems like a code, although Hartmann can't understand the meaning. He tries very hard to figure out the message, but he can't. Soon Hartmann's hands begin to shake and then he goes blind. It's the end of the line for Hartmann and he knows it. He gives in to the inevitable. He loses the will to fight. The voices inside his head recede. Hartmann doesn't hear Hitler anymore. The ghost network has been disconnected.

For a moment there is a feeling of intense loss and then

nothing. His head slumps to his chest and it's over. The scene fades and everything goes away. It's like Hartmann was never there. ■