

In early 1942, Italian Partisans steal the Nazi Enigma Machine. The British must obtain it from a North Italian Lake. A cruiser carries a Racing Seaplane to Naples Bay. The pilot flies to the lake, gets the Machine, but finds the cruiser sunk and can't return. He must get Enigma home or be captured. How?

The Enigma Strategy

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# **THE ENIGMA STRATEGY**

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# **THE ENIGMA STRATEGY**

**Bill Baldwin**



## PROLOGUE

**TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 1940**

**LONDON, ENGLAND, 8:40 P.M. GMT**

**GARTER AND BUCKLE PUB, 311 WADDON WAY, SOUTH  
CROYDON**

“**B**loody useless!”--the words came smashing through the smoky hubbub like a bad smell. “*Goddamn* useless! Where the bloody hell were you R.A.F. cowards when we needed you?”

Bart Robbins, Flight Lieutenant, R.A.F., tried to ignore the words, even though they were surely aimed at his back. A dark-haired man of 30 years and medium height, he had remarkable flying abilities, thoughtful brown eyes, and presently a tired mien. Slouched at the bar of a crowded pub whose name he hadn't even noticed, he'd cheated death too many times in the last few hours to have any stomach for further combat—even if it was only verbal. He nursed both a large whisky and a monumental headache. The latter resulted partially from the thunder of a Rolls-Royce Merlin XII aircraft engine, partially from the dried oxygen he'd inhaled for the better part of the day, and, more than anything else, from the bastard Kraut whose Messerschmitt BF-109E had riddled the left wing of his Spitfire Mk IA and nearly blown him out of the sky. The German overshot him in the heat of the moment, then exploded in a hail of Robbins' .303 steel-jacketed machine-gun bullets. On landing at nearby Croyden Airfield, south of London, the Spitfire's shot-up left landing gear collapsed as it touched down. Robbins, exhausted after three back-to-back missions, was too slow to save the plane—which momentarily dropped onto the stub of the oleo strut before snapping it off, along with the left wing, as the crippled fighter skidded and spun over the grass airstrip, coming to rest with a jolt that rattled Robbins' teeth. Miraculously, there had been no fire. Robbins climbed out of the cockpit with only major bruises where

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the belts had cut into his chest.

He stared at the bottles lined up at the back of the bar. One Spitfire for one Messerschmitt and a Kraut. All in all a bad day, with the last few retreating British and French soldiers trickling back from the Dunkirk beaches aboard a rag-tag gaggle of boats that had only *just* managed to save many of their lives—and none of their critical equipment. Now, this son-of-a-bitch behind him wanted someone to blame for the debacle.

“Bloody useless Royal Air *Farce!*”—louder and more pointedly this time. Also closer.

Robbins ground his teeth. The words were slurred and considerably run-together. Their speaker had already taken on a good load—probably what gave him the empty courage. But the man could have no idea what *really* had gone on above the clouds over Dunkirk. During the past few days, he and his fellow Brits would have lost a lot more on those French beaches had it not been for the handful of outnumbered Spits and Hurricanes swirling among hordes of Nazi Messerschmitts, Junkers, Dorniers, and Heinkels, keeping them from their intended targets below. Since the evacuation of Allied soldiers from France began on May 26, Robbins himself had destroyed two BF-109s, an ME-110 *Zeroister*, and two JU-72 *Stukas*.

“If you can’t do any better than that with those overblown Spitfires of yours, we’ll soon have to surrender, won’t we?” the irritating voice cawed. This was followed by raucous laughter—in a room otherwise gone stone quiet.

During the last couple of days, the world had kicked at Robbins viciously; drunks who had no idea what they were talking about weren’t of much interest. He put the heckler out of his mind. Hell, he didn’t need to fight this war at all. He might wear the blue uniform of an R.A.F. officer, but he was no Brit: he was an American, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., only son of the late Bartram Robbins Sr., well-known aeronautical engineer. He’d learned to fly his father’s biplane in that city’s notoriously vile weather—proving himself a natural pilot—before joining the U.S. Navy’s fledgling air arm as an Ensign in 1930 at the age of nineteen. By 1931, he was assigned to the Navy’s Bureau of Aeronautics, helping Lieutenant Al Williams attempt

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to revive his ill-fated *Mercury* racer for what would turn out to be the final Schneider Trophy Race. After Williams' disappointing non-start, LTJG Robbins had bounced around the Navy, always flying the latest, most dangerous airplanes and earning himself a reputation as a promising young officer and pilot. But the 1930's were tough times for the Navy; in 1938, he found himself an out-of-work civilian again, albeit one with impeccable recommendations. When Hitler invaded Poland and the war started, the R.A.F. was only too glad to accept an experienced military pilot; they immediately put him to work driving a Spitfire for 72 Squadron, based at Croyden airfield, close in to London's South End.

"Bloody flying coward, you're too gutless to turn around and face a real soldier, aren't you?" The voice lapsed into a slurred snicker, then the ugly laugh again.

"Leave him alone, why don't you, Ollie?" a second, wholly patrician voice suggested out of the hushed silence.

"Yes, Ollie," a third voice—this one female—advised. "He's not hurting anyone, now, is he?"

"That's just the bloody trouble," the first voice growled, this time much closer to Robbins' ear. "His kind *never* hurts anyone—including the Huns!"

Robbins shut his eyes, determined to ignore the insults. Muscular and wiry, he'd done his share of boxing in the Navy; he'd been good at it and had nothing to prove in the fisticuffs department. Certainly not to a jackass like...

Abruptly, someone smashed the barstool from under him. He tumbled to the floor on his shoulder, bashing his head on the bar rail. Stunned, he struggled to his knees to see a crowd shrinking away from him—and the blur of a boot that caught him in the chest, knocking him back into the bar again. He had only a moment to recover before the boot came again, not so well placed this time. As the blow glanced off his thigh, he grabbed the ankle—pushed it sideways with all his might. His attacker roared in surprise and pain as he joined Robbins on the floor.

Robbins sprang to his feet in a defensive stance—waiting. Only dispassionate warriors survived in the chaotic skies over Britain those



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days; emotion was tantamount to suicide. In the charged moments of silence that gripped the pub, he watched his attacker, a young Air Commodore—equivalent of a U.S. Army Brigadier General—scramble to his feet; teeth bared and drunken malignancy in his eyes. Dashing looks: chiseled features, tiny blond mustache, tailored uniform; they fairly screamed privilege—possibly even royalty. Abruptly, the man attacked again, leading with his chin. A short left to the gut bent him forward just so...then Robbins calmly swung a roundhouse right that began near his knee and terminated noisily at the angle of the man's chin in a spray of saliva and crushed teeth. Lifted bodily from the floor, the Air Commodore stumbled backward into the bar, continued over the countertop and landed on the other side in a shower of breaking glassware. As the last beaker tinkled to the floor, a moment of complete silence took the room. But only a moment...

A woman in too much makeup and a long fur coat began shrieking at the top of her lungs.

“Crikey!” someone shouted, “He’s done in Lord Blakley!”

“M’god!” another shrieked. “Lord Blakley!”

“*Police!*”

Rubbing his hand, Robbins looked round in confusion. Three youngish, worried-looking R.A.F. officers were crowding behind the bar, and he heard the shrill whistles of approaching Bobbies. Suddenly, he felt his arms pinned behind his back. He struggled, but someone held him with the strength of a Joe Louis. “Let go of me!” he yelled. “What the hell’s wrong with you—he hit me first!”

“Doesn’t matter, Flight Lieutenant,” the man behind him grunted. “You’ve ‘it the Commodore, you have. And you’re going to pay for it.”

“Pay for what?” Robbins demanded as he struggled. “Did you see what the son-of-a-bitch did to me first?” He managed to twist around sufficiently to see that his captor was a huge Army Sergeant Major with a red face and blood-shot eyes. “Let me go, damn you, Sergeant. I’ve done nothing except defend myself.”

“You’ve ‘it a superior officer, you have, sir. And that’s wrong by a long shot.”

The gaggle of young officers raised the Commodore and braced him against the bar, long strings of blood and saliva trickling from his

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mouth. Two grimy Bobbies and a military policeman wearing sooty white leggings barged through the door. The Commodore grimaced and pointed at Robbins. "Arrest that man!" he spluttered brokenly, as if the very act of talking was painful. Clearly, Robbins had broken the man's jaw. He'd meant to.

"'Ere," the Sergeant thundered. "'Ere's the one that done it. Lock 'im up!"

"But he hit me *first*," Robbins protested as the two Bobbies snapped handcuffs onto his wrists. "Doesn't that count for something?"

"Not if 'e's an Air Commodore an' you're a Flight Lieutenant," one growled in his ear. "It's not a time we can let down our guard; we could lose the war if we ignore military discipline."

"But...," Robbins protested.

"No buts about it, Flight Lieutenant," the military policeman said gruffly. "You're going to jail as an example to anyone else who thinks 'e can touch a superior officer like that."

With an absolute sense of unbelief, Robbins found himself being muscled out the door of a pub whose name he never learned after until his Military Court Martial...

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YANK ACE GETS 20 YEARS

R.A.F. ace from U.S. sentenced for attacking Brigadier (the Hon.) Sir Oliver Blakley.

By Felix Villers, Staff Writer for the London Daily Mirror

October 10, 1940. Military justice prevailed Tuesday as American Bartram Robbins, an R.A.F. volunteer pilot, was sentenced to a term of 20 years in prison for striking a superior officer. The plaintiff, Air Commodore Howard (the Hon.) Oliver Lord Blakley was hospitalized after the attack. The military tribunal seated to hear the case debated for nearly a week before finding Robbins guilty, a point of contention being that all

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witnesses testified it was Lord Blakley who attacked Robbins, and that the American was merely defending himself. However, the verdict turned on the principle that in time of war, military discipline takes precedence over normal concerns, and that under no circumstances may a superior officer be attacked in any way by a subordinate. Robbins will be incarcerated in H.M. Military Penitentiary NR. 3 at Walworth, where he will share the hazards of war with the citizens of London...

## CHAPTER 1: A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

SUNDAY, JULY 27, 1941

MILAN, ITALY, 4:30 A.M. CET

THE GERMAN-ITALIAN FRIENDSHIP UNION, 1023

ESPOSIZIONE BOULEVARD

With a professional eye, Carlo Margottini watched all 23 of his charges marching silently along the dark alley behind the new German Friendship Union: chorus singers, ballet dancers, stage hands, musicians, even a few principals, each carrying a bottle of lamp oil and surely sweating behind a ski mask. Twenty-three were far more than necessary, even prudent, for such an operation, but nearly everyone had demanded a part in tonight's drama. So, Margottini, 45, lanky, and red-haired—stage director at the city's world-famous opera house, *Teatro alla Scala*—made sure they were included; he was that kind of person.

Margottini and his long-time chum, Luigi Rizzo, gaunt Security Chief from the same opera house, had set up their Marxist cell nearly six years earlier in 1934. At first, it was hardly more than a discussion group in the back room of the *Giaguaro Bar* a few city blocks from the Theater: a place to dream about Utopian ideas in Party literature smuggled from Moscow—as well as blow off a little steam about what the gangster Benito Mussolini and his *Fascisti* were really doing to Italy in the name of restoring political stability.

Then, to the dismay of the little cell, within a year came the Fascist-inspired assault on Ethiopia, severely straining Italy's military and economic resources, already weakened by worldwide depression. At the same time, a wave of international hostility to this bald aggression led Mussolini—now calling himself "*Il Duce*"—to forge closer ties with Germany's strutting Nazi Chancellor, Adolph Hitler. Next, in November 1935, the Nazis actually became Italy's comrades in arms when Mussolini announced an alliance called the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Suddenly, Fascism, once merely associated with resolving

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domestic problems, had abruptly made Italy the avowed enemy of Britain, France, the United States, and even the Soviet Union. The country found itself unconditionally linked with Hitler's plans to vanquish much of Europe and Russia, which further isolated her internationally and forced Mussolini onto a perilous program of economic self-sufficiency without foreign trade. While ordinary citizens prepared for what threatened to be a calamitous war, government propaganda became more belligerent, the tone of mass rallies more militaristic, and Mussolini's posturing more vain as well as delusional. Italian soldiers even started to mimic the goose-step marching style of the *Wehrmacht*—only they called it the “Roman Step.”

But, if the late Thirties seemed to be going out of control for the mostly apathetic Italian population, worse was on the way. By 1940, Hitler was clearly turning their country into a puppet state of Germany. Upon urging from the Reich in May of that year, Mussolini cravenly invaded an already prostrate France, then declared war on beleaguered Great Britain. In October came Italy's disastrous invasion of Greece, during which outnumbered Greek forces not only contained the Italian attack but chased the vaunted *Armata Italia Imperiale* all the way back into Albania. It took a German army to extricate them from utter humiliation that December—and again early the following year, when General Rommel's Africa Corps was required to stave off an Italian Army collapse during a British offensive in Libya.

For Italian Communists like Margottini, however, Hitler's brutal invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 was truly the last straw—it demanded far more from his Communist cell than simply providing a forum for blowing off steam. The stark aggression came as a shrill warning that something drastic—something substantial—needed to be done about the spreading malignancy of an even worse Fascism coming from outside. Thus, here he was, at 4:30 on a Sunday morning near a back entrance to the Germano-Italian Friendship Union, resolved to accomplish something of real consequence.

The masked figures melted silently into the shadows as a watchman in a German Army tropical uniform stepped through an exit lighted by a bare bulb, carefully locked the metal door behind him, and

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began his outside rounds. He hadn't taken his third step before Rizzo's blackjack smashed through his side cap with a THUD and he dropped silently to the filthy pavement. Margottini checked the German's pulse. "Too healthy," he pronounced—then taped the man's mouth, wrists, and ankles before dumping him in a large trash receptacle across the alley. Moments later, Rizzo re-opened the side exit with the soldier's keys and motioned everyone inside.

The reek of stale cigarettes and souring beer was almost palpable in the great, becolumned auditorium. By the dim glow of night lights, huge pictographs of Hitler and Mussolini emerged wraithlike from the dark shadows of the high proscenium arch surmounted by a massive Nazi eagle and wreathed swastika that overpowered the room. The hall had been used the previous evening for a huge assembly to drum up support for...Margottini couldn't remember what; Nazis were always drumming up support for something. In any case, it had clearly been a major debauch: Chairs littered the floor in every attitude, and at least 30 tables overflowed with half-filled pitchers of beer, wine bottles in various stages of depletion, and stacks of soiled plates.

For the past two weeks, Margottini had tormented himself about this first mission his cell would undertake—he'd seldom done anything quite *this* illegal before. But right was on his side, so he treated the operation as simply another operatic production—with no worries about egoistic tenors or off-key trombones! It permitted him to disregard most of his anxiety. After all, insuring that people were at the proper place at the proper time, performing well-rehearsed sequences of actions was how he made a living.

He glanced at his watch—so far, so good. In the dim light, everyone looked busy. One group drizzled pungent lamp oil over the tables; they'd be the men from the chorus. Others at the far end of the room—dancers, he presumed—gracefully tugged at huge velvet drapes, piling them on the floor in strategic places, ready for the next round of lamp oil.

Struggling with an urge to rip off his itching, sweat-soaked ski mask—he'd forbidden anyone from doing that—he picked his way among the squalid tables to a corner where two tenor soloists prepared one of the "igniters": a short candle set in a soufflé dish half-full of

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lamp oil. Margottini had tested this simple device time and time again. The candle would burn approximately five minutes before igniting its puddle of lamp oil; the flame would then spread along trails of oil-soaked newspapers branching off to the piles of similarly oil-soaked draperies. With igniters in two opposite corners, he estimated the whole structure would be ablaze within an additional five to seven minutes—and woe be to anyone trapped inside.

Lighting the igniters was a ticklish job Margottini reserved for himself and Rizzo. With the last of his people making their way back into the alley, he struck a match and held it aloft as a signal. A similar match at the other end of the room signaled Rizzo was ready as well. Hardly daring to breathe, Margottini then brought his match to the candle wick with trembling fingers—ready to smother the whole thing with his body if the lamp oil caught first.

It didn't—but neither did the wick continue to burn. In seconds, the little flame shrank to nothing and went out, leaving a momentary glow that quickly faded to darkness.

Fervently crossing himself despite his best Marxist inclinations, he struck a second match, paused breathlessly after it flared, then knelt to the candle. This time, he touched the match to the wick until it burned with a steady glow.

Allowing his first breath in what seemed like an hour, he stood and blew out the match, paused to make sure the candle continued to burn, then highballed it to the alley only moments behind Rizzo.

After the stench of the banquet hall, even city air smelled fresh as Margottini loped over the cobblestones toward the waiting van. They'd done it! Soon, the presumptuous hall would be a pyre of warning to the arrogant Nazis *and* their Neo-fascist associates. Italy's honor cried out for such a deed, and Margottini was not a man to shirk responsibilities.

The first glimmering of false dawn had colored the eastern sky pale blue when Rizzo jumped into the rear of the van and slammed the door. Seconds later, Margottini vaulted into the cab beside Bartolommeo Eustachio, a nervous, hawk-nosed little tenor from the chorus who had signed out the big, unmarked van for “church work” that weekend. The Teatro always found ways to support the Church, though the Directors would have been distressed to know that Eustachio hadn't been to a

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service in a decade. “Drive around the front of the building, Barto,” Margottini puffed. “I want a last look.”

Nodding enthusiastically, Eustachio released the brake, clashed the big van into gear, and swung out of the alley onto Vincenzo Street.

As they made a second right turn onto Esposizione Boulevard, Margottini froze, eyes wide. There, beneath the hall’s eagle-and-swastika marquee, at least ten old women in long dresses and aprons were shuffling into the building single file—*the cleaning brigade!* “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!” he choked; he’d completely forgotten about *them*. “I must stop them, Barto!” Vaulting from the moving van, his ski mask half covering his eyes, he nearly fell on his face before stumbling wildly across the sidewalk, bellowing at the top of his voice, and scattering the old women like a flock of plump geese. Inside the lobby—one floor below the great hall—he pulled two more old women from an open elevator and literally flung them into the street. But not before suffering a tooth-rattling blow to his head from a huge black umbrella.

Worse, the screaming, terrorized women had attracted a police cruiser, which was even now pulling up under the marquee, siren hooting. Dazed, Margottini’s only option was taking the elevator himself to the second floor lobby—where he pushed open an auditorium door just as the first igniter burst forth in a noiseless explosion of light. Stopping in his tracks, he backed out into the lobby only to hear sounds of boots in the stairway—the police! No place to go now but *through* the spreading inferno and out the same exit he and his comrades had used only minutes before.

He dodged back into the auditorium, squandering precious moments to lift the panic bars of all three lobby doors and lock them from the inside. At that moment, the second igniter flashed into life a few feet away, its impact diminished by a wall of flame to the left of the proscenium arch. Just as someone began yelling and banging on the doors, both piles of draperies erupted in great columns of flame all the way to the ceiling. On the verge of panic, Margottini drew a deep breath through his ski mask, then careened toward the stage exits, dodging tables and overturned chairs as swirling, black smoke began filling the room. Half blinded, he upset a table in a cascade of shattering crockery



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and glass, smashed his shin against a chair, and nearly collided with one of the great fluted columns. Somehow, he battled his way to the far end of the room and out into the alley.

Coughing and spluttering, he struggled to catch his breath before tossing the ski mask into the trash receptacle containing the German guard. Then he lit out in the opposite direction to the one Rizzo had taken, moving as fast as his ravaged lungs would permit while working his way deeper and deeper into the maze of inner-city streets. Now sirens were hooting from a number of directions—both fire and police, he surmised. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a great column of greasy, black smoke mounting into the air. Huffing painfully, he paused for a moment to enjoy the fruits of his handiwork. Then, stopping in a public restroom, he used his handkerchief to clean up as much as possible before catching one of Milan's angular electric trams for the short trip home.

Less than half an hour later, Musetta, a tiny, orange-striped cat who shared the apartment, noisily dressed him down for having the temerity to be out all night without so much as stopping by to provide a treat. Margottini endured stoically; Musetta's fleeting ire was probably better than being questioned by the police.

### **PARIS, FRANCE, 1:00, P.M. CET GALERIE NATIONALE DU JEU DE PAUME. PLACE DE LA CONCORDE—JARDIN DES TUILERIES**

"*This, Herr Doctor Professor, is the real treasure,*" Jean-Louis Norvard whispered, gently removing the black-velvet dust cover from a dark painting in an ornate frame. "A true masterpiece by Édouard Manet—one of his best." Bony, hirsute fingers gave his hands the manifestation of two long-legged spiders.

Beside him, tall, powerful SS *Obersturmfuherer* Heinrich Seelmann—presently dressed in a pin-stripe business suit of obvious assessment—frowned and peered at the painting with the eye of a true connoisseur, which he was. A successful Berlin art appraiser as well as an early—*generous*—patron of the Nazi Party, he now enjoyed a plum sinecure in Paris with Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg's *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, or ERR. Initially established for the purpose of

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collecting Jewish religious objects and books for anti-Semitic research, the ERR had lately become a primary organization for confiscating art works from French Jews. Their repository before transshipment to Germany: Paris' Jeu de Paume Museum.

Even in the small, poorly lighted room, the painting was breathtaking, Seelmann thought reverently. *The Willows*, an 1881 work in oil by the Impressionist Édouard Manet, showed a nude reclining by a grove of willow trees. Not only was it a magnificent painting, the canvas itself was a perfect example of Manet's devotion to what he called "pure painting," a belief that brush strokes and color patches are the artist's primary reality, not that for which they stand.

Adolph Hitler would turn his back on the painting as "degenerative art" and bar it from the tasteless art museum he planned in the city of Linz, but half his General Staff would be clamoring for it—including the overstuffed *Herr* Göring, who would want such a famous painting for his equally overstuffed lodge, Carenhall.

But none of that ilk would get their hands on this one, Seelmann promised himself with a little smile. Among his prewar clients, a few were both sufficiently cognizant and wealthy to guarantee that such treasures were quietly delivered into the proper, appreciative hands—their hands. And in these *special* transactions, considerable money went into Seelmann's own pockets, minus certain "payments" to despicable Parisian vermin such as this Norvard and his minions. He glanced around the small room—the doors were closed. "You are certain this is genuine?" he demanded under his breath.

"It came directly from the Finegeld-Rothschild palace on the Loire," Norvard assured him, rubbing his hands absently. "A very private collection indeed. An assistant of mine accompanied it from the moment it left the palace wall. I pay him well for his services."

Seelmann took a final look at the painting and nodded to himself. "It appears on none of the official inventories?"

"It is quite unaccounted for, *Herr Doktor Professor*," Norvard promised. "As if it never existed in the castle at all." He made the fatuous little laugh that Seelmann hated—it caused his skin to crawl. "Since its previous owner is cowering in America, who is to say otherwise?"

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“Good,” Seelmann said, rolling his eyes as Norvard replaced the velvet cover over the painting. “You will take it to the ‘special collections’ room immediately. It will travel aboard *Reichsmarschall* Göring’s train as part of a special package.”

“Immediately, *Herr Doktor Professor*. And my, er, *bonus*? I shall need to compensate my assistant to insure his silence—as well as our safety.”

“The money will be deposited in your bank in good time,” Seelmann growled. “As soon as I receive payment from my *patrons*.” Momentarily, he wondered how Norvard would spend his share. He, himself, had been depositing as much as he could—as quickly as he could—in good, solid Swiss banks. Clearly, these idiot Nazis were quite incapable of anything approaching a “Thousand Year Reich.” In the beginning, he’d had much hope for them. But now...Eventually, their arrogance—not to mention this outrageous behavior toward even honest Jews—would surely bring the whole of Germany to ruin.

Less than an hour after he departed the *Jeu de Paume*, he posted a telegraph via civilian lines to a Berlin address:

DEUTCHE NTL F. T. BERLIN F. MILAN  
VIA RCA 28 JUL 1941

NLTO. T. MELHORN  
NES BERLIN 078 GERMANY

WILLOWS IN HAND. WILL DELIVER AS  
AGREED. PAYMENT RQD HERE  
IMMEDIATELY.

SEELMANN

### **SOUTHEAST MILAN, 8:30 P.M. CET THE GIAGUARO BAR, 12 VIA VERBANO, BANQUET ROOM**

The Giaguaro Bar in South Milan, owned and operated by ancient, stooped Aloisio, “il Giaguaro,” Vasari, was one of Margottini’s favorite haunts—a comfortable spot with scarred, masculine furniture and sawdust on the floors. A man might take his leisure there, drinking local

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beers or wines, snacking on the pungent cheeses of the surrounding countryside, and enjoying the company of other patrons—most of whom shared similar political convictions. The establishment boasted a large banquet room that Vasari rented out for wedding parties, political rallies, and other functions—including tonight’s meeting of Margottini’s cell.

Margottini had ordered a critiquing session closely following the mission to identify those parts of the operation that might need improvement or where teamwork might have broken down. But, with exception of the unfortunate cleaning-women episode, the jubilant members agreed that things had gone miraculously right. The story had been featured in the late edition of the day’s *Gazette Milano*.

### 2 FIREMEN INJURED AS GERMAN-ITALIAN UNION BURNS

Police search for body of mad arsonist in ski mask

By Giovanni Refugiato, Staff Writer  
for the *Milan Gazette*

A suspicious blaze that began at approximately 5:00 A.M. yesterday injured two firemen and eventually leveled the City’s recently completed Germano-Italian Union building on Exposition Avenue. More than eight fire companies were summoned to extinguish the blaze that investigators initially attributed to one of the outlawed Marxist groups in and around the city. However, Police now believe the fire may have been set by a ski-masked madman or pyromaniac, whom witnesses and early-arriving Officers observed running into the building soon after the blaze broke out; the man is thought to have perished in the fire. The Union’s German watchman was later discovered bound and

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gagged, but otherwise uninjured, in a large refuse bin behind the building...

Vasari and one of his waiters had just carried in the first celebratory bottles of Chianti when, without warning, two uniformed city policemen burst through the back door, raced across the banquet room, and blocked the interior doorway to the bar. In the stunned silence, two more policemen secured the back door, then stood aside to admit a small, athletic man in his middle sixties, fastidiously dressed in a dark-blue business suit, white shirt with wing collar and cuffs, black bow tie, homburg hat, and carefully shined shoes.

Margottini knew who he was immediately—anyone who read the newspapers had seen the man’s picture at one time or another—Chief Inspector Gieuseppe Correlli of the *Carabiniere Speciale Milano*. “Which of you is Carlo Margottini?” the man demanded without preamble.

“T-that is my name,” Margottini stammered, rising from the table on suddenly shaky legs—*what did the Inspector know—or suspect...?*

“Thank you, Mister Margottini,” Correlli said in a quiet voice. “I wanted to be certain you were present—as leader of this so-called ‘secret’ group.”

Trapped by the Inspector’s relentless gaze, Margottini could only remain standing in the silent banquet room. *How did he find out about...?*

“Please be seated, Mister Margottini,” Correlli ordered, stroking his chin thoughtfully. He nodded to the officers at the exits. “Wait for me *outside*,” he ordered as he made his way his way to the front of the banquet room, “...and let no one pass until you hear my knock. Understand?”

The policemen nodded, then stepped out of the room.

In the continuing hush, Correlli leaned his elbows on the ornate music stand that normally served as Margottini’s podium, glanced around the large room, then frowned. After a long silence, he spoke. “I have no idea who is responsible for setting fire to the German Union this morning,” he said. “Nor have I even begun the investigation of that fire—an assignment I accepted personally from Rome, mind you,

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because it was the only way I could keep our friends from *Il Duce's* Secret Police out of the inquiry." His eyes narrowed. "I assume everyone here has heard of the OVRA."

A wave of grumbles and profanity swept the banquet room. Since its inception in November 1926, Senator Bocini's powerful *Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell'Antifascismo*, or OVRA, had earned even more fear in Italy than Heinrich Himmler's dreaded Gestapo in Germany—some of it deserved.

Margottini swallowed hard. His plans hadn't taken *that* into consideration. And there were those ugly rumors of Fascist-operated concentration camps on the Lipari Islands as well as...

"While I remain in these happy circumstances of ignorance," Correlli continued, breaking onto Margottini's startled reflections, "I have decided to contact a number of *supposedly* covert organizations like yours before someone again attempts such an imbecilic stunt and brings *real* trouble to Milan."

Margottini's heart jumped like a frog. *Imbecilic?*

"If," Correlli continued, his penetrating blue eyes darting around the room, "anyone here believes—for even a moment—that the destruction of the Union Building was in any way a worthwhile gesture to the Nazis about *anything*—including, Mister Margottini, their recent invasion of the Soviet Union—then have a second thought. Ask yourselves: Did it destroy even a single Nazi tank...a bombing airplane...a cannon? Did it send as many as one German fighting man home to a hospital? Did it give pause to even the least of Hitler's generals? No. It did none of these. It was a useless gesture, *signori*," he said, extending his hands to the whole room, "—one that could be repeated a thousand times all over the world *with no effect on the Nazi war machine whatsoever*. A thousand times nothing is still nothing—*nulla*. Nazis do not understand gestures; they understand deeds."

The words hit Margottini hard—they made abundant sense. He winced and closed his eyes to sort out his thoughts, but the Inspector was clearly not yet finished.

"Because of certain circumstances," Correlli continued, once more appearing to speak directly at Margottini, "I *probably* will fail to apprehend the perpetrators of this particular crime—in spite of the

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pressures Rome will bring to bear. However, should another example of such useless imbecility occur, believe me when I say that I will not rest until I have brought these perpetrators to justice—and turned them over to the gentle ministrations of Senator Bocini’s colleagues.” He scowled. “Keep in mind that fighting this morning’s blaze—to ensure it didn’t *also* destroy *Italian* property nearby—not only cost the Milan Fire Department the yearly salary of *ten* firemen, but *will yet* cost my Police Department both time and money that much better could be spent fighting real crime, especially the smuggling that takes so much from the country’s already war-ravaged economy.”

Suddenly, Margottini wished he could simply disappear. He was beginning to feel like a prize fool.

“One last piece of advice you may take for yourselves, or pass on to the real perpetrators of this crime, should you know who they are,” Correlli continued, his angry gaze now burning into Margottini’s very soul. “If anyone feels so strongly about...” he shrugged, “let us say some *hypothetical situation*...that he simply *must* take action, then let me personally request he dedicate his energies to something worthwhile—*something that accomplishes a modicum of enduring consequence*. *Signores*, I implore you, never waste your time on gestures—especially ones that affect fellow Italians more than the...*hypothetical individuals* who are your real targets. Accomplish something they will notice—something *they can feel*. *Comprende?*”

Margottini found himself nodding like a schoolboy during an upbraiding by the *Direttore*; he’d endured many in his youth. But instead of continuing, Correlli turned abruptly on his heel and strode to the bar door. He rapped twice with his walking stick, then marched to the back exit, rapping twice again. In moments, the only evidence of his visit was the total, stunned silence that remained in the banquet room like a specter.

Margottini, however, took little notice of the man’s exit. He was already casting about for a new project, one that would produce accolades instead of scorn from true heroes of the People’s Struggle like Chief Inspector Gieuseppe Correlli...

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