

Operation Jinx



Joab Stieglitz



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The pounding at the front door shook house. Karol opened the door, but before the short man could say anything, three German soldiers in the black uniforms of the SS entered. They were followed by a sinister-looking man in a black leather overcoat.

“Monika Berger!” one of the soldiers shouted while another pointed his submachinegun at Karol. The third turned his weapon toward the creaking staircase that led to the second floor. A woman with shoulder length dirty blond hair, wearing a silk bathrobe, raised her hands and stopped her descent.

“I am Monika Berger,” she said.

“Your papers!” the man in the overcoat said in smooth Czech. The woman climbed down the stairs slowly. She reached into the pocket of her robe, and held out the identification booklet. The man took it, glanced inside, and put it in his pocket.

“Doctor Berger,” the man in the overcoat said, “I am Untersturmführer Metzger of the Gestapo. You will come with me.” He took hold of her arm.

“Have I done something wrong?”

The Gestapo man smiled unpleasantly. “No, fräulein. There are some people who require your attention. They have been assembled at your clinic.”

“Very well,” Berger said. “Give me a moment to put on some clothes.” She waited until Metzger released her arm and the soldier lowered his weapon.

After the assassination of Reich-Protector Reinhard Heydrich, the German response had been thorough and brutal. Whole villages suspected of aiding the assassins were razed and their populations killed. Thousands of other Czechs and Slovaks were randomly arrested and executed in reprisals. As a result of the German retaliation, the Czech resistance had been decimated.

Monika was not alarmed. Delilah Carty had been selected for her specific skill set and trained for activity behind enemy lines. She had survived twelve weeks of cartography, Morse code, combat and weapons training before becoming Doctor Monika Berger. Then she, Karol and Benedikt had been dropped into the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. They had been sheltered by the fledgling resistance in the village of Dyslinka for almost a week.

Monika dressed quickly and descended the stairs. Karol had his hands up, still staring down the submachinegun. She picked up the medical bag she kept at the ready from the table in the front hall.

“We are going to your clinic,” Metzger said with a malign grin. “Why would you need you bag?” The soldier who had called out her name snatched the bag from her hands and rifled the contents. He removed a scalpel and a bone saw from it.

“You have not told me the nature of the injuries,” Monika said. “I might need those. I am only allowed one of each. That is why I carry them with me.”

“I see,” the Untersturmführer said distractedly. “Then let us be on our way. Fraulein.” He opened the door and gestured to her. When Monika hesitated, the soldier holding her bag pushed her through it. “Bring him too.”

Outside, two more SS soldiers stood to either side of the front door, and a staff car and a truck blocked the street. Monika was pushed to the car and pressed into the rear seat, followed by Metzger. The soldier placed her medical bag in the front passenger seat and then took his place in the driver’s seat.

At the sound of the truck’s engine, the automobile lurched forward. The village of Dyslinka was a simple collection of a dozen or so whitewashed two-story homes with peaked, red tile roofs along the banks of the Laniliany River. The village was surrounded by the Căușoia Forest, beyond which lay pastures and farms.

At this hour, the village was quiet. The curfew required all residents to be indoors by 21:00, so the only people she saw were German soldiers patrolling the silent streets for the short trip up the Barahirsk Road to the clinic.



When they arrived at the clinic, another staff car and a truck were already parked outside, guarded by two SS soldiers. Metzger’s car parked behind the other car. The driver came around and opened the rear door. Monika stepped out, followed by Metzger, who took hold of her arm again and led her into the building.

Once through the door, they found an SS Officer with his arm around Vojtěch’s shoulders and holding a gold box in his other hand. Karol was under guard, along with Benedikt and Emília. A squad of the black uniformed soldiers was positioned around the room.

Monika concealed a shudder at the site of most of her team and their resistance helper all under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo.

“Good evening, Doctor Berger,” the SS Officer said. “Hauptsturmführer Udo Bartz at your service.” He nodded his head. “Young Vojtěch here was just about to tell me about this Jewish icon we found in your belongings.”

They stood by the receptionist’s desk, where the collected documents of her associates were piled haphazardly. The young Czech resistance volunteer was pale as death. He glanced at Monika with a look of panicked uncertainty. The others were more composed.

Benedikt and Emília Poláček were seated on the chairs in the waiting area. Their farm had been the location of the incident Monika suspected was at the heart of this

interrogation. The farmer was actually Captain Spencer Burns of the American OSS, while Emília Kocourková was planted by the resistance to pose as his wife. Together they were preparing the farm as a secret training area for resistance fighters.

Monika nodded confidently at Vojtěch and then took the vacant seat at the desk. The young man gulped and glanced at the German's hand on his shoulder.

"So, young man," Bartz said, "why was this gold box hidden in the Doctor's trunk when there is all this other Jewish paraphernalia scattered about the building?"

"I.I put there," Vojtěch stuttered. "It belonged to the old doctor, Dr. Jakubowicz, who was Jewish."

"Were you aware that this... object... was hidden among your belongings?"

"I was," Monika replied evenly. "It was wrapped in that shawl with the swastikas on it, so I thought it was legal." The fringed garment was white with black stripes and a Star of David. The six pointed star had been augmented with an embroidered swastika in its center.

"Then why did you hide it?"

"I put it away..." Vojtěch blurted out, "...for safe-keeping," he added meekly.

"I have only been in practice here for four days," Monika interjected, "and the needs of the village have precluded cleaning up the clinic." She indicated the various articles of Judaica that decorated the room. "I have only been able to keep up with the demand with the assistance of Vojtěch here, since Oberleutnant Fischer directed me to do so. Tonight was the first time I was able to sleep in my own bed."

"This is true, Herr Hauptsturmführer" Metzger asserted. "Leutnant Jaeger tells me that the Oberleutnant has been very lenient with the people of this village, and that he has diverted Wehrmacht medical supplies to Doctor Berger for the care of the villagers."

"We will address Oberleutnant Fischer's deficiencies at another time," Bartz said curtly. He released the young Czech, who a soldier herded to a seat next to the others. "At this time, we are interested in another matter. I want a full account of all events related to this 'sledge-wielding madman' that Jaeger described in his report."



They were brought into the examination room. Benedikt, Emelia and Vojtěch were seated in chairs along the wall opposite the door. A body lay on the metal examination table. Blood had seeped through the white sheet that covered it.

Metzger brought Monika to stand on the opposite side of the tables. He glanced at her identification and said, "You are Monika Berger?"

"I am," Monika replied calmly.

"And you are a medical doctor?"

"Yes."

"And you are originally from Brno."

“No,” Monika said calmly. “I am originally from Budwitz in Moravia. I attended university and medical school in Brno.” The Gestapo man made notes in a small notebook.

“And you arrived in Dyslinka on April 29th of this year?”

“That is correct.”

“Why did you come here, to this village?”

“Since the arrival of the *German administration*,” Monika said with emphasis, “the population had become increasingly more hostile to residents of German ancestry such as myself. I sought a place where I would be accepted.”

“So why did you take up residence in Dyslinka, or all places?” Bartz asked. “If you were after personal security in the Reich, surely a doctor like yourself would be more comfortable in Prague.”

“I had heard that the villages in the west were in need of medical personnel. I had taken a train Pilsen to visit a medical school acquaintance, who told me of the vacancy here.”

“His name?” Metzger asked.

“Doctor Jakub Kadlec.”

“And who are these people to you?” He pointed to her associates beyond the corpses.

“Doctor Kadlec drove me to Dyslinka in his car, but it broke down here in the village. Karol is a mechanic. He made the repairs. We got to talking and,” she blushed, “well, you know.”

“And the others?” Metzger said indifferently.

“The Poláčeks brought me a man who had been attacked by an assailant with a sledgehammer.”

“This is the man,” Metzger said, and removed the cover from the corpse nearest to her.

The young man was naked. His skin was pale with a bluish tint. His left thigh appeared to be deflated, and there was a large contusion on his torso. Emília shrieked and nestled her head in Benedikt’s chest until one of the soldiers separated them.

“Yes.”

“And who is he?”

“His name is Tadeáš Pavlíček. He was a worker at the Poláček’s farm.”

“What were the extent of his injuries?”

“As you can see,” Monika said pointing to the leg, “his left leg had been shattered. The fragments were too small to remove. Had he lived, I would have had to amputate it.”

“Was that the cause of death?”

“No,” Monika said clinically. “His ribs were also shattered, and his lungs, heart and liver were all shredded by the fragments.”

“Was he still alive when you initially saw him?” Bartz asked with unsettling interest.

“Yes. He survived another hour.”

“What did he do in that time?” the Hauptsturmführer asked with increasing excitement.

“He was unable to speak. He was barely breathing, and he was rapidly losing blood, but his eyes were sharp and he was conscious and aware until the end. It was quite remarkable.”

“And he was killed by a two blows from a sledge hammer?” Metzger asked

“I could see no signs of any other injuries.”

“The killer must have been incredibly strong,” Bartz interjected.

“Yes. And tall. Tadeáš was struck from above. His assailant was taller than he was. I would estimate that he was perhaps two meters tall. And given the force of the blows, he must have weighed two hundred kilos or more.”

“Such a person must be known in the village,” Metzger said accusingly.

“As I said, I have only been in Dyslinka for four days, so I do not know everyone.”



“Who is this man?” the Gestapo man demanded.

“We did not recognize him,” Benedikt said. He and Monika had switched places, and he now stood before Metzger.

“Emília and I were in the village getting supplies. We returned around midday. When we arrived at the farm, there was a commotion inside the farmhouse.

“Suddenly, Arnošt flew out through the basement doorway. I immediately dismounted the wagon and ran toward him. But I stopped short when the giant came out of the basement and moved toward Arnošt’s body where it landed. I shouted at it, but it did not seem to notice.”

“And what did this giant look like?” Metzger said with suspicion.

“He was tall. A head taller than me. His complexion was a ruddy brown, like someone who was out in the sun a lot. He had wide shoulders and was very muscular.”

“What was he wearing?”

“His clothing was stretched and torn, as if he had grown in size while wearing it. The open shirt revealed his bare chest, and the trousers were torn to above the knees.”

“Go on,” Metzger said.

“Tadeáš ran out of the basement with a rifle and fired at it twice. He hit it once in the leg, but it did not seem to notice. Instead it turned and hit him, breaking his leg, and then punched him square in the chest.

“I threw a log at the thing and hit it in the chest. It wasn’t injured, but upon seeing us, it ran off around the side of the house. I ran after it, but when I rounded the corner, there was no trace of it.”

“And you are certain that is what happened?” Metzger said.

“Yes, it was just like that.”

“Do you agree, madam?” He looked squarely at Emília.

“Yes, sir,” the large Czech woman said. “It was just as my husband described.”

“There was nothing omitted? You have no details to add?”

“Well,” Emília said after a moment, “I ran over to help Arnošt, but he was already dead. I helped Tadeáš into the kitchen and splinted his leg, but it was clear that he needed a doctor. I gave him some brandy and Benedikt placed Tadeáš in the back of the wagon.”

“Stop there,” the interrogator shouted. “You are certain that the story you have just told me is complete and accurate?”

“Yes sir,” Benedikt said.

“That is what I recall,” Emília added.

“Interesting,” Bartz said with unnerving curiosity. “If this story is accurate, then why did you not mention the sledge hammer?” His eyes darted between Benedikt and Emília. “And why did you refer to the attacker as ‘it’?”

“It was just a turn of phrase, Herr Hauptsturmführer,” Benedikt countered. He was visibly flustered, but kept his tone even. “I mean, the brutality of the attacks was like that of a monster more than a man.”

“I see,” Bartz said, unswayed. “Was this giant not completely clothed in burlap? And weren’t there no eyes, ears, nose or mouth?”

“The Hauptsturmführer knows of this thing?” Emília said to him with awe.

“That is none of your concern,” he replied.



“Now, Frau Poláček, tell me what happened after the attack at the farm.” Metzger had a file in his hand.

Emília now stood next to Metzger. Benedikt was returned to his seat under guard. She was composed. She glanced at Monika for confidence before speaking.

“Well,” she stammered for effect, “Benedikt loaded Tadeáš into the hay in the back of the wagon and I comforted him on the way back to Dyslinka. He was in a bad way and was mumbling incoherently.”

“When did you encounter the Wehrmacht patrol?” the Gestapo man said, glancing at the file.

“It was at the crossroads of the Dyslinka and Sevaskine Roads.”

“And who did you cross paths with?”

“An armored car and a truck approached from the direction of Dyslinka. They stopped and blocked the road.”

“Continue.”

“A sergeant and a soldier got out of the truck and demanded to know why they were on the road. Benedikt told them that Tadeáš was hurt and needed a doctor.

“Didn’t you tell Feldwebel Riemann that your farm hand had fallen off a ladder.” Emília blanched.

“I thought it was more believable that the truth, and we needed to get Tadeáš to the doctor.”

Metzger made notes in the file. “Go on,” he said distractedly.

“The soldier examined Tadeáš and agreed that he needed urgent attention. The sergeant summoned some more soldiers with a stretcher.

“A Lieutenant emerged from the armored car and demanded to know what was happening. The sergeant told him about Tadeáš.”

“And what did Leutnant Jaeger do?”

“The Lieutenant questioned Benedikt about the shots. They had been coming to investigate them. The Lieutenant was suspicious, but he had his men load Tadeáš onto the back of the armored car and ordered me to follow in the wagon back to town. One of the soldiers rode with me.”

“And he sent your husband with the truck to investigate the farm.”

“Yes. That’s right.”

Metzger scribbled more notes in the file.

“When we arrived at the doctor’s office, she was not there, but her assistant was. Some soldiers went to find her while he,” she indicated toward the waiting room, “cleaned up the wounds.”



“You returned to the farm with Feldwebel Riemann, Herr Poláček?” Bartz asked.

“Yes, sir, I did. He rode in the front of the truck, and I was in the back with eight men.”

“And what did you find there?”

“I told the sergeant where the rifle was. A soldier collected it. They then searched the house and the basement. They brought Arnošt’s body out and loaded it on the truck. Then the sergeant left me there with two men and drove off toward Dyslinka.”

Metzger glanced at the file. “And what happened to Gefreiters Tetzlaff and Distler?” He looked up and stared coldly at Benedikt.

“A few minutes after the truck departed, the thing appeared at the far end of the clearing across from the basement door, and I got a good look at it. It was clearly about two and a half meters tall and covered in dirty burlap that kind of looked like camouflage.

“At the sight of the thing, I was paralyzed. It didn’t attack or approach me. It just looked at me and the two soldiers. When they pointed their rifles at it, it ran to them and slapped one of the soldiers with a backhand that carried him into the other soldier, and they both slumped to the ground. Their necks were broken. Then it lumbered off toward Dyslinka and I followed it.

“It was quick and quiet. I followed the thing down the road until I lost it in the foliage. I looked around and found the trail again and few minutes later. That’s when I found the carnage.”

“What did you see?” the Hauptsturmführer queried.

“I came into a clearing and saw the thing flip the truck on its side with its bare hands. The soldiers fell out of it, and all but one of them were dead. The survivor crawled away into cover. The thing then demolished the truck. It seemed to be searching for something.

“Eventually, it gave up and ran off toward Dyslinka. I found the last soldier, but he did not appear to be breathing, so I ran off after the thing. I never found it, but when I got to the village, I informed a sergeant at the garrison of the incident and accompanied them back to the site.”

“Where you found that Gefreiter Rödl was in fact, not dead,” Metzger stated.

“Yes. He wasn’t dead, but close to it. The Lieutenant sent him back to the village in one of the trucks while the soldiers examined the scene and combed the area for signs of the attacker.”

“And what did they find there?” Bartz asked.

“They found no trace of it all the way back to the farm.”

“Doctor Berger,” Bartz said conversationally, “Was Gefreiter…” he glanced at Metzger.

“Rödl,” he replied.

“Yes. Was Gefreiter Rödl brought to you?”

“Yes, Herr Hauptsturmführer.”

“And what condition was he in?” Bartz continued.

“The young man was seriously battered and bruised,” Monika said clinically. “He had several broken ribs, which had pierced his stomach and spleen. And several lacerations and contusions on his forehead.”

“What was his mental state?”

“The man was in shock, as would be expected after a serious trauma. He was conscious and making incoherent noises.”

“What kind of noises?” Bartz was insistent.

“At first I thought one of his lungs had been compromised, but he was breathing, albeit labored, and he was not coughing up blood. The sounds were nonsensical.”

“And what happened to Gefreiter Rödl?”

“I bandaged his wounds and stabilized him, but his Lieutenant insisted that he be taken to the hospital in Pilsen for ‘proper care’ as he put it. That was the last I saw of him.”

“Operations on Rödl resulted in the removal of his spleen and part of his stomach,” Metzger read from the file, “And then he was sent to Wewelsburg for study on the order of Reichsführer Himmler himself.”



“This is quite the fanciful tale,” Bartz said with a grin. “Wouldn’t you agree, Herr Metzger?”

“Almost unbelievable,” he replied.

“How long have you been married, Herr Poláček?”

“Emilia and I were wed in 1928,” he said, taking her hand in his.

“And where was this?” Benedikt started to speak, but Metzger interrupted. “What kind of ceremony was it? What was the name of the church? Who officiated?” He smiled triumphantly. “You cannot answer these questions because you, Doctor Berger, and Herr Smid have been in this village less than one week!”

“That is nonsense,” Benedikt protested.

“Silence!” Bartz shouted.

“Tadeáš Pavlíček discovered that his fellow ‘farm hand’ Arnošt Sedlák was in fact an informant,” Metzger said. “He shot him. Then, together, you,” he pointed to Benedikt, “and your accomplices subdued Sedlák and mutilated his body to validate your story.”

“That is not true,” Emilia cried.

“Pavlíček was also wounded in the fight, and you did indeed load him into your wagon to bring him to Doctor Berger. Leutnant Jaeger suspected you, especially since he was headed to your farm to investigate the gunshots.

“Foolishly, he split his patrol and came back with your man himself, sending his subordinate with some men to investigate the farm. After the majority of the patrol left, you, Herr Poláček, killed Gefreiters Tetzlaff and Distler.

“You then rendezvoused with some resistance fighters and staged the attack on the road. Did Feldwebel Riemann find something at your farm that you did not want revealed? A cache of weapons perhaps. It matters not. You are all under arrest.”

“Herr Hauptsturmführer,” Monika asked with urgency as the others were cuffed, “am I under arrest as well?”

“You were are possession of Jewish paraphernalia,” Bartz replied. “You will accompany us to Prague for further questioning.” He waved off the approaching soldier. “But there is no need to restrain you. After all, you have been of assistance to the Reich.”

Benedikt was taken to the rear of one truck. Emilia and Vojtěch were taken to the other.

Metzger brought Monika to his staff car, but Bartz stopped him. “Doctor Berger will ride with me.”

“As you wish, Herr Hauptsturmführer,” Metzger said and handed her over to one of Bartz’s guards.



Once the convoy was in motion, Bartz said, “We have many things to discuss, you and I, starting with this box.” He held the gold box out to her. Monika reached for it, but the German pulled it away with a teasing smirk.

“What can you tell me about this?” he said conversationally.

Monika’s tone was confident when she said, “The inscription is 14th century Aramaic. I suspect that there is the control device for a golem inside.”

“Precisely. And where is the key?” He indicated the six-pointed-star-shaped keyhole.

“We never found it.”

“And you came all this way for this?” the German said with mock sympathy.

Monika turned to face him with a smirk of her own and said, “No, Herr Hauptsturmführer. We came for you, the reclusive amateur occultist and would-be sorcerer. How better to get to you than with a monster from Jewish folklore?”

Suddenly something struck the hood of the staff car. The front of the vehicle was driven into the ground as the car was struck from behind by the other staff car. The driver flew through the windshield. Monika had been expecting the attack, so she had braced herself, but Bartz slammed into the partition between the front and rear seats. He rose with a gash on his head and blood flowing into his left eye.

Monika had retrieved the gold box and clutched it her chest just as the roof was torn off the car and massive stone hands pulled Bartz out. She looked up to see the massive stone figure, as tall as the trucks, crush the Hauptsturmführer in its hands. There was a sickening cracking sound, and then the man landed on the ground next to rear door of the car, which had come off in the impact.

Automatic gunfire erupted from behind her as the soldiers from the truck opened fire on the golem. A cloud of clay dust erupted with each hit. Monika slipped from the car and crawled to lifeless form of Bartz. But before she reached it, she was grabbed by the hair and pulled to her feet.

Metzger had an expression of rage, accented by the blood flowing from his nose and the two black eyes. He raised his other hand to strike her when his head suddenly exploded. As the Gestapo man slumped to the ground, Karol came into view, a smoking pistol in his hand.

“You’re late,” Monika said, wiping bits of gore from her face.

“Radio interference with the Lysander,” Karol replied.

“And their reinforcements?”

“The road from Dyslinka is blocked by some fallen trees. It should buy us twenty minutes or so.”

“Then let’s get going.”

The sounds of battle had stopped. Monika scanned the scene. The golem decimated the soldiers and disappeared. She searched Bartz and found the notebook they had come for. She put it and the gold box into a rucksack and slung it over her shoulder.

Benedikt was waiting by the rearmost truck, which was not damaged. The American had managed to salvage a complete uniform from the fallen soldiers. "Let's get out of here," he said.

"I would have preferred a staff car," Monika said with a grin. Karol helped her into the back of the truck and closed the canvas cover behind him.

Emilia lay on one of the benches. She had had several cuts and bruises that Vojtěch had dressed. The truck lurched forward to meet the plane to take them back to England.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joab Stieglitz was born and raised in Warren, New Jersey. He is an Application Consultant for a software company. He has also worked as a software trainer, a network engineer, a project manager, and a technical writer over his 30-year career. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

Joab is an avid tabletop RPG player and game master of horror, espionage, fantasy, and science fiction genres, including Savage Worlds (Mars, Deadlands, Agents of Oblivion, Apocalypse Prevention Inc, Herald: Tesla and Lovecraft, Thrilling Tales, and others), Call of Cthulhu, Lamentations of the Flame Princess, Pugmire, and Pathfinder.

Joab channeled his role-playing experiences in the Utgarda Series, which are pulp adventure novels with Lovecraftian influences set in the 1920's.

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Book One of the Utgarda Trilogy

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