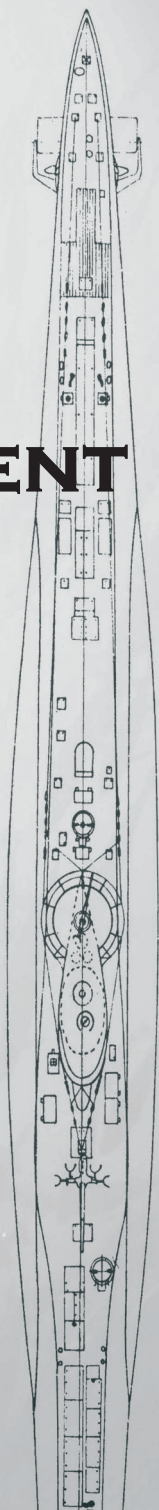




# **VERTICAL DESCENT**

**STEVE TURLEY**



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All the characters in this book are fictitious  
and any resemblance to actual persons,  
living or dead, is purely coincidental.

## Author's Note

U602 last made radio contact with UbD (U-boat Control Centre) from a position north of Oran, Algeria on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1943. Although there are many theories as to her eventual fate and final resting place, at the time of writing, she is still officially listed as missing in action.

This book is a work of fiction, and there is no suggestion that U602 was engaged in anything other than routine patrols at the time of her disappearance.

Diving, especially deep diving, can be a dangerous activity without correct training and competent supervision.

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guide visit: [VerticalDescent.co.uk](http://VerticalDescent.co.uk)*

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*For Cleo and Charley*

*An ocean of adventure awaits you!*

## Prologue

### Propriano, Corsica

**T**he tall German looked much like any of the other summer season tourists, but his reason for visiting this unglamorous quarter of Propriano was certainly not to discover its authentic suburban charm. If it had been, he would have been greatly disappointed.

Glancing down at the piece of paper in his hand, he compared the name written on it with the one that was painted in fading letters above the neglected bar which now stood in front of him. It was undoubtedly the one which he had been looking for. His discerning taste was more suited to the chic cocktail bars of Hamburg and the Côte d'Azur, but it was not for the purpose of entertainment that he was drawn towards this dismal establishment.

Ignoring the curious stares of two threadbare old men who were sitting at a plastic table outside, he pushed open a fingerprint smeared glass door and was met by the lingering odour of stale tobacco as a tinny chime announced his entrance. He felt his skin crawl as his eyes searched the solemn, dark interior before coming to rest on a serving counter at the rear. Behind it stood a surly looking man whose disapproving regard suggested that his intrusion was about as welcome as that of a penniless beggar. Ignoring the cold reception, the tall German walked confidently across the room towards him and stood next to the only other customer in the bar; a thin faced, sly looking character who was busily eyeing his diamond studded Cartier watch.

*'Bonjour Monsieur, un verre d'Armagnac s'il vous plait.'*

The thickly bearded proprietor gave the slightest of nods and began to serve him the glass of Armagnac which he'd asked for.

*'Putain, même les Boschés,'* muttered the gaunt man to his right. Having an excellent command of French, the German visitor understood the racist slur and struggled to control his anger. Not so very long ago, his father would have had a man shot for such a remark. He calmed himself as the proprietor pushed a glass containing a dark yellow spirit towards him.

*'Six euros.'*

The tall German looked up in surprise at the unusually high price and seemed ready to protest. Instead, he calmly pulled out a ten Euro note and appeared amused as he placed it beside the glass.

*'Gardez la monnaie - keep the change.'*

The surly proprietor raised his eyebrows, took the banknote without a word and turned towards the cash register.

*'You are Jean-Claude Santorini, are you not?'*

The proprietor froze and placed his hand over the pistol which he kept loaded and taped beneath the counter.

*'Who wants to know?'* he barked.

The tall German paused, enjoying the sudden psychological advantage which he had over the man in front of him.

*'Let us just say that a friend of yours is a friend of mine,'* he said with an enigmatic and self-assured smile. The proprietor eyed him warily.

*'What do you want here?'* he challenged.

The tall German visitor took a sip of Armagnac and carefully replaced the glass on the counter in front of him.

*'My contact has informed me that you and your associates are very knowledgeable about the coastline here and that you are also competent divers. Is that true?'*

The proprietor narrowed his eyes. The tall German seemed to know a little too much about his affairs for his liking.

*'You seem to be well informed. What interest would it be to you if we were?'*

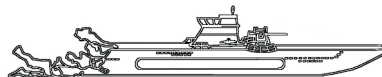
*'If what my contact tells me is true, then I have an interesting proposition for you,'* he said, looking directly into the proprietor's dark, intelligent eyes.

*'And what would that be?'*

The tall German motioned to the man standing to his right with a dismissive jerk of the head. *'Is he a close...how shall we say...comrade, of yours?'*

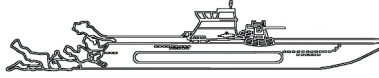
*'He can be trusted if that's what you mean,'* snapped the proprietor.

*'Good. Then let me get right to the point.'*









## 1

## Somewhere off the East Coast of Sardinia, April 1943

**K**apitänleutnant Rolf Sturmman, was in his private quarters. Not that there was anything particularly private about them, but then any concession to personal comfort was to be appreciated when living in the cramped interior of a 67 metre long steel tube. For Rolf was a U-boat Captain and although most *Kriegsmarine* officers preferred the command of vessels which remained on the surface, Rolf and his crew had learned to take comfort in the comradeship and bravery which bound them together beneath it.

At present Rolf was deep in thought, studying the progress of his vessel on his private chart in the hope that it would throw some light on recent events.

A little more than three weeks ago, he'd been on shore-leave on the west coast of France, after returning from a successful patrol of the Atlantic. Like the majority of *Kriegsmarine* officers, he had spent his time on shore celebrating in the lively bars and restaurants of the port of Lorient, while trying to resist the undoubted charms of its less reputable ladies. On the morning of his return to active duty, however, his mood of optimism quickly began to fade. Having reported, as usual, to the *Grossadmiral's* office at Lorient's Kéroman U-boat base, he had been fully expecting to re-join his colleagues of the Weddigen Wolf-Pack fleet out patrolling in the Atlantic, but the unusual presence of a *Brigadeführer* of the *Waffen SS* was the first sign that his new orders were unlikely to be routine.

Now, inexplicably, Rolf found himself consigned to the Mediterranean, expressly forbidden to engage the enemy and being treated more like the skipper of a supply vessel than an elite commander of a hunter killer submarine. He wondered what he and his crew had done to deserve such ill treatment.

Rolf consoled himself with a sip of the precious supply of Calvados

which he kept hidden away in the wooden locker next to his bunk. As he breathed in the rich apple and oak infused vapours, he caught a glimpse of his piercing grey-blue eyes and finely chiselled features in the shaving mirror that was fixed to the opposite bulkhead. His dark, short cropped beard and unruly jet black hair were proof that the mirror rarely served its true purpose while at sea, but Rolf cut an imposing figure none the less. The *Grossadmiral* regarded him as something of a maverick; a dangerous individualist even, but the incontestable success of his unconventional approach had earned him both the admiration of his contemporaries and the unflinching loyalty of his crew. And yet three weeks ago, when he had reluctantly dismissed sixteen of his men and watched them trudge despondently back along the quays of the U-boat hangar, he had felt more like a traitor than a hero. It might have been easier if he could have given them a reasonable explanation for their dismissal; but he was just as mystified as they were. He recalled that there was a strange sense of foreboding amongst the remaining crew when he had finally ordered the moorings to be slipped and the sleek hull of the VIIC U-boat began to slice through the cold choppy waters of the Atlantic.

Rolf's musings were interrupted by a voice outside his quarters.

'Herr Kapitän?'

Rolf quickly hid his glass and pulled back the thick curtain which separated his quarters from the passageway outside. Berndt, the *Leitender Ingenieur*, stood before him with an apologetic look on his face. The Chief Engineer was a stout, hairy man with a bushy red beard and a gruff temperament which had earned him the nickname *Der Grizzlybär*.

'Ah Berndt, I haven't seen you since we left Tunis.'

'No sir. *Oberleutnant* Grünwald asked us to avoid disturbing you.'

Rolf nodded and smiled at the thoughtfulness of his Second in Command.

'There's no need to worry about that Berndt. I'm just trying to keep my head down at the moment.'

'That's understandable sir.'

Rolf tilted his head when he noticed that one of Berndt's dark brown eyes had distinctive black and yellow shading around it.

'Berndt, did you have an argument with someone by any chance?'

The Chief Engineer shuffled uncomfortably.

'Er, no sir – I was actually trying to break up a fight between one of our men and a *Wehrmacht* soldier while we were in port.'

'Oh really? And one of them hit you did he?'

'Well, yes sir. The soldier called me a *Kriegsmarine schwein* and I let loose and then his friends joined in and...well you can probably guess the rest.'

'Yes Berndt, I can well imagine. Now you know that I can't condone that sort of behaviour don't you?'

'Yes Captain, I - er - sorry sir.'

'That's fine Berndt...so did we at least give the *Wehrmacht* boys a good seeing to?' asked Rolf, breaking into a conspiratorial smile.

‘Oh yes sir,’ replied Berndt, with a broad grin. ‘We had them running through the streets of Tunis.’

‘Excellent! Now what can I do for you?’

The Chief Engineer screwed up his eyes and wrung his hands.

‘It’s that pig of an SS officer sir, if you’ll excuse me for saying so. I need to get access to the engine room to change the fuel filters, but he won’t let me past because he says that I’ve spent far too much time in there already today.’

Rolf sighed heavily. He had met *Oberführer* Blickmann for the first time only three days ago and like Berndt had disliked him almost immediately. The order to accommodate the *Waffen SS* Officer in the stern section of the U-boat along with a cargo of ammunition cases and five armed guards had consequently met with little enthusiasm.

‘Couldn’t you have changed them while we were in port Berndt?’ asked Rolf irritably.

‘Well, yes sir, but we were eager to have a look around Tunis while we had the chance. And of course I had no idea that we would have our access restricted when we got back on board.’

‘No, neither did I Berndt – nobody did. Can’t it wait a couple of days?’

‘I dare say that it can sir, but if we run out of power while we’ve got a Destroyer on our tail.’ Berndt left the statement hanging in the air.

Rolf scratched his coarse beard contemplatively.

‘Leave it with me Berndt; I’ll see what I can do.’

‘Very well sir,’ said Berndt, nodding curtly before dismissing himself.

Rolf was left wondering what Blickmann could be transporting in those damned ammunition cases to warrant such intense security. It had to be something vital to the war effort to justify the sacrifice of a U-boat so desperately needed in the battle for the control of the Atlantic. He stared wistfully at his chart, knowing that his command would never join her sister ships of the *Weddigen* fleet again. The powerful incoming currents at the Straits of Gibraltar would now condemn her to remain in the Mediterranean until the end of the war. And perhaps for all eternity.

He breathed a sigh of resignation and began to fold away his chart. As he was doing so, the Radio Operator came over from the communications area and coughed politely to gain his attention.

‘*Herr Kapitän*. I’m sorry to disturb you, but we have just received this message from U-boat Control.’ The young Radio Operator handed Rolf a sheet of paper printed with lines of coded script.

‘Thank you Johann. You may go.’

Frowning concernedly, Rolf went directly to the hidden Enigma decoder and began to decipher the encrypted transmission. As the original message began to emerge from the printer, Rolf could not believe what he was reading. Infuriated by its content, he exited the communications area, slipped horizontally through the forward hatch and stormed past the men who were on duty in the control room. Heads craned as he halted in front of the stern access hatch, hunched down next to it and calmly asked the guard on duty behind it to fetch *Oberführer* Blickmann. The stony-faced

soldier unhurriedly shouted to a colleague further back and a minute later *Oberführer* Blickmann's pink, bloated face appeared at the hatch, looking tired and irritable.

'What is it *Kapitän*?'

'I need to speak to you in private.'

Blickmann sighed wearily.

'Fine; where do you suggest?'

'We'll go aloft; I'll ask the men on watch to wait below decks.'

'Very well *Kapitän*. Lead the way.'

Rolf climbed the ladder to the bridge and emerged into the warmth of a late afternoon sun, with Blickmann following close behind. Once he had dismissed the Watchkeepers, Rolf closed the hatch without locking it and turned to face the cold grey eyes of the SS Officer.

'You told me that we were bound for La Spezia...Italy!'

'That is correct.'

'Then why have I just received the order to proceed to Toulon?'

'Ah yes,' said Blickmann with a condescending smile, 'I was expecting it.'

'You were expecting it! Then why in God's name wasn't I informed?' Rolf barked.

It was Blickmann's turn to be vexed.

'If you needed to be told then I would already have told you,' he said scathingly.

'Do you question my trust?' asked Rolf.

'The *Waffen* SS trusts no one outside of its highest ranks. It was as important for you to believe that we were going to La Spezia as it was for our enemies. On your present course even a second rate Navigator could guess at your intended destination.' Rolf was taken aback.

'Do you seriously believe that there could be a traitor amongst my crew?'

'*Kapitän*, with the sensitive nature of this operation, we are not prepared to take any risks. And if that means keeping a few ragged looking sailors in the dark for a few days, then that is what we will do. Now are you going to take this vessel to Toulon or do I have to relieve you of your command and find someone who will?'

Rolf seethed, but was forced to hold his tongue. Blickmann outranked him. And he could see from the set of his jaw that he was clearly prepared to carry out his threat.

'Well my Chief Engineer is certainly no traitor and if you don't allow him to change the fuel filters this very evening, I give you no guarantee that we will make it to Toulon.'

Blickmann snorted, studying Rolf from head to toe.

'Very well *Kapitän*. If you are so very concerned, I will allow your engineer a further hour to complete his work.'

It was a minor victory, but Rolf was not prepared to stand idly by while the reputation of his crew was brought into question.

'In that case I will order a change of course. If all goes well we should reach the French Coast by tomorrow evening.'

‘Excellent, keep me informed of our progress.’

Rolf nodded curtly and gestured to Blickmann to descend. There was an uneasy silence in the control room as Blickmann returned aft and Rolf walked stiffly away in the opposite direction. Once through the forward hatch, Rolf went directly to the navigation room and unfurled a small scale chart of the Mediterranean. He spread it out on the table in front of him and studied it intently. After a moment his fist suddenly came down hard beside it.

‘*Natürlich!* – Of course!’ he bellowed. The young Navigator, who had stepped aside to accommodate Rolf, flinched nervously, feeling decidedly uncomfortable in the confined space along with his Commanding Officer. Rolf turned towards the young man and put him at ease with a rakish smile.

‘It’s an old trick Gustav. Whatever we are carrying, they must be very afraid of losing it to the Allies.’

‘*Herr Kapitän?*’

‘Never mind Gustav; you may retire for the evening; I’ll take over from here.’

‘Very good sir,’ stuttered the young Navigator, confusion clouding his face.

When Rolf was alone, he returned his attention to the chart. It was now strikingly obvious to him why he’d received the new orders; it was a tactical diversion. If anyone had been planning to intercept them on their present course, then the logical place to do so would be in the narrowing passage of the Tyrrhenian Sea between Corsica and the Italian mainland. But since their new course obliged them to pass through the Straits of Bonifacio, they would now be able to slip quietly away into the relative safety of the Balearic Basin. Rolf smiled at the ruse as he modified his course to pass west between the *Arcipelago Della Maddalena* and the *Iles Lavezzi* which spread across the entrance to the straits.

Two hours later, Rolf was out on the bridge, surveying the passage ahead. Night had fallen, yet the two groups of islands were still clearly visible, bathed in moonlight, like ghostly icebergs floating menacingly on the horizon. Rolf ordered a minor course correction and glanced skyward as the U-boat sliced quietly through the glistening surface of a gently undulating sea. The stars shimmered brilliantly from between high cirrus clouds and Rolf picked out the major constellations while enjoying the sweetness of the cool evening air; so invigorating after the dank fetidness which lingered below decks.

An hour passed by and the dangers of the notorious Lavezzi Islands were at last behind them. Rolf breathed a sigh of relief, mindful of the long list of vessels which had met an untimely end there. Cape Pertusato now lay ahead of them and beyond it Bonifacio, the lights of which were visible, high amongst the ancient buildings which perched precariously on the edge of vertical sea cliffs. As they passed Cape Feno and advanced northwards along the coast of Corsica, the view of the moonlit mountains to the east was breath-taking. Inspired by the perfect conditions, Rolf modified his course to bring the U-boat closer to shore; an indulgence for

which he felt no guilt after the way he had been treated. Staring down from the bridge, he noticed tiny electric-blue sparks of bioluminescence lighting up the sides of the dark hull below the waterline. It gave the whole scene a surreal quality as the glow of the tiny organisms danced amongst the dazzling pinpricks of starlight which reflected from the oily surface of the sea. Rolf smiled to himself, thinking that this unexpected detour towards the French Coast might not be so unpleasant after all. But his optimism was about to prove unfounded.

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The skies were clear apart from a scattering of feathery clouds which caught the moonlight like frosted webs on a winter's morning. The sea, far below, was gently ruffled by the sweeping approaches of a light north westerly breeze.

Since leaving the air base in Malta, they had kept well south of the island of Sicily, skirted around the southern tip of Sardinia and then followed a wide arc out into the Balearic Basin. After failing to locate a target and drawing close to the limits of their fuel range, they had decided to call it a day and head east towards the coast of Corsica. Half an hour later, a high mountain range came into view.

Wing Commander John Rossland pulled the joystick to the right and settled the Wellington Night Bomber onto a southerly heading, running parallel to the coast.

To his left, Smithy, the Navigator, was studying the coastline and attempting to relate it to his charts.

'Are you sure that you've got the right island there Smithy?' asked John.

'Of course I have Skip, look it's written here on the chart: Corsica.'

'I was actually referring to that big mountainous thing on your left.'

'Oh that! Yes, I suppose so.'

'Now you're sure aren't you, because I'm really not too keen on Italian food.'

'Don't worry Skip, if we land in enemy territory, I promise I'll go to the local chippy for you.'

'What? You mean one of those world renowned Italian fish and chips shops?'

'Of course Skip. After all, it's a country renowned for its culture is Italy.'

'You're such a Philistine Smithy.'

'Thank you sir.' Smithy grinned as he glanced out of the cockpit window and watched a ribbon of moonlight race over the sea ahead. On the coast below he spotted a long, white stretch of beach and wondered if it would look quite so tempting by the light of day. As his eyes flicked lazily back to the thin band of moonlit sea, a smooth, dark object suddenly cut across it at speed and the unmistakable shape of a turret was momentarily cast into silhouette.

'Shit...shit! U-boat Skip....just went by on the port flank, heading north.'

'Are you sure?'

'I'm positive.'

'OK, battle positions everyone,' shouted John, while gently pushing the joystick to the right. His instincts immediately kicked in as he banked sharply to starboard and planned an arc in his head which would bring them around and onto an attacking approach from the sea.

'Smithy did you get a visual reference – anything at all?'

'Yes Skip, there was a long stretch of beach with an odd looking outcrop next to it.'

'Good, we'll come in low against the moonlight. See if you can spot them again.'

The wind whistled against the canvas fuselage as the Wellington levelled out and hurtled back towards the coast.

'There's the beach,' shouted Smithy, pointing, 'and the promontory to the right of it.'

'Well spotted. Dropping down to attack altitude.'

John's eyes burned with concentration as he scanned the sea in front of him, but it was Mitch, manning the guns in the front turret who was the first to spot the target.

'I see her Skip, go right,' he shouted. John nudged the joystick to starboard and then back again.

'She's dead ahead.'

Smithy pulled a pair of binoculars away from his eyes and pointed.

'There Skip do you see her?'

'Yes, I'm going in! Select torpedoes and stand by with charges.'

'Aye Captain,' called Billy, the Bomb Aimer, lying prostrate on the bombing couch. 'Doors open, target sighted, go left-left....steady....right.' There was a sudden deafening rattle from below as Mitch opened fire with tracer bullets. John gritted his teeth and levelled out at 65 feet – a dangerously low but essential manoeuvre for effective aerial torpedo attacks.

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Rolf was in the control room, speaking with his Second in Command, *Oberleutnant* Grünwald, when he heard the shout from above.

'*Flug! Flug!*'

'Stop the engines!' Rolf shouted, aware that their foaming bow wave would be highly conspicuous under such calm conditions. He bolted up the ladder and emerged from the hatch in time to see the dark underside of an aircraft flash past on the port side.

'Was it ours?' asked one of the Watchkeepers anxiously.

'I don't know,' replied Rolf, 'I didn't get a good enough look at it. Man the anti-aircraft guns and keep a silent watch.'

The two men quickly took up their positions and strained their ears in silent concentration as the distant drone receded to the south. Rolf winced as the sound of Blickmann's angry voice cut through the quiet in the control room below.

‘Was passiert? Antworten Sie mich! – What’s happening? Answer me!’

‘Silence down there!’ Rolf shouted through the hatch. In the control room below he heard *Oberleutnant* Grünwald arguing with Blickmann and attempting to prevent him from mounting the ladder.

‘Scheiße!’ Rolf swore as his Second in Command’s warnings went unheeded and Blickmann’s swollen face appeared at the hatch.

‘Please *Oberführer*, you cannot come up here, it is not allowed...it is not safe,’ he implored.

‘Nonsense!’ countered Blickmann, pushing himself defiantly to his feet.

‘It’s coming back *Kapitän*; there at 8 o’clock,’ shouted the younger of the two Watchkeepers from his gun post. Rolf saw a glint of moonlight reflected from the cockpit of the incoming aircraft and felt a sudden surge of adrenaline course through his body. ‘Fire when ready!’ he ordered before dropping to one knee and screaming down the hatch. ‘We’re under attack; full speed ahead. Inform U-boat Control.’

‘Why do you not give the order to dive *Kapitän*?’ asked Blickmann, his eyes wide with concern.

‘I would have done if you’d remained below decks,’ said Rolf through gritted teeth, ‘Their depth charges would blow us from the sea if we tried to dive now.’

‘Torpedoes in the water!’ came a sudden shout from below. A second later the U-boat’s 2cm and 3.7cm automatic anti-aircraft guns burst into life, drowning out any further conversation. Rolf climbed midway down the control room access ladder.

‘Hard rudder to port!’ he bawled, over the deafening rattle from above. The Helmsman responded swiftly and the U-boat slowly swung through the water to face the direction of the oncoming torpedoes.

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John kept one eye trained unerringly on his altimeter as he corrected for turbulence and responded to Billy’s heading corrections. There was a tinkling of glass as bullets streamed around the cockpit, tearing holes through the flimsy skin which covered the wings and fuselage. He steeled himself, bravely ignoring the imminent mortal danger to himself and his crew as he advanced towards his target. Billy, sighting along the drift wires pressed the bomb release at a range of 800 metres. ‘Torpedoes away!’ he shouted.

‘Pulling out!’ John yelled as he eased the joystick back and to the right. The Wellington banked into a tight rising arc, exposing its underbelly momentarily. A stream of bullets passed clean through the tail section but she was soon moving too fast for the U-boat’s anti-aircraft guns to track her. John levelled out along the coast and then banked again to starboard to bring them back onto an attack heading.

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Rolf saw the bomber begin to bank away as the last rounds of tracer fire ricocheted off the steel hull. It was the moment which he'd been waiting for.

'*Tauchen!* – Dive!' he shouted through the hatch. The two Watchkeepers immediately left their gun posts and slid expertly down the ladder into the control room below. Rolf heard the hiss of air boiling out of the ballast tanks seconds before two huge towers of water shot up from the sea 50 meters behind the U-boat's stern; confirmation that his evasive tactics had been a success. He stumbled as the force of the detonating torpedoes shook the hull, but swiftly regained his footing, knowing that each passing second was now critical. Searching desperately for Blickmann, he found him kneeling beneath the rails of the turret, dazed and frozen to the spot.

'You must descend now!' Rolf shouted, pointing resolutely towards the open hatch. There was no movement from Blickmann.

'If you don't come this instant, I swear I will leave you here to drown.' Blickmann hesitated and then in a sudden flurry of activity, scrambled clumsily towards the hatch. As he dropped into the ladder well his gun holster caught on the lip of the hatch and Rolf agonised as precious seconds were wasted. In growing frustration he kicked the holster free and pushed down forcefully on Blickmann's shoulders.

'*Unten!* – Get down!' he shouted angrily.

The decks were now completely submerged and the sea was lapping hungrily at the base of the conning tower. Rolf flinched when he heard the sound of renewed tracer fire; they had been spotted and it was too late to do anything about it. He cursed his misfortune and jumped down the ladder well, landing hard on Blickmann's arm in the process. The SS Officer's scream rang out, but was almost immediately stifled as water swamped the bridge and began to surge down into the ladder well. Rolf quickly dragged the hatch cover down and turned the locking wheel, sealing it against the inrushing torrent.

'I fear that we may have cut it a little fine this time *Kapitän*,' said *Oberleutnant* Grünwald from his position by the periscope.

'Our only mistake was to carry out our orders,' Rolf replied flatly as he stepped from the ladder and stared gloomily at the needle of the depth gauge. Blickmann was left rolling around in agony, swearing profusely as he cradled his injured arm.

'You imbecile!' he shouted, as he rolled onto his knees and pushed himself to his feet. Rolf ignored the insults and walked towards the hydrophone listening post. The tension in the air was palpable as he ordered the watertight hatches to be closed and sealed.

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'Target in range!' shouted Billy as John fought to level the Wellington. 'She's diving,' shouted Smithy, squinting through binoculars at the dark shape in the sea ahead.

'Perfect!' smiled John. 'Select the Torpex charges and activate for 5

metres.'

'Aye Skip,' acknowledged Billy, as two towering white columns rose skyward, just beyond the stricken vessel. The sound of the double detonation hit them a fraction of a second later.

'Damn it!' cursed Smithy, we'd have had them with sonic torpedoes.'

'We'll have them yet,' roared Billy from the bombing couch, lining up the guide wires again.

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Blickmann pushed his way towards Rolf, his face burning with outrage. 'You nearly broke my arm, you *arschlocke!*'

'You are fortunate that I didn't leave you up there to die,' replied Rolf unperturbed.

Incensed, Blickmann drew a handgun and pointed it at Rolf's chest.

'I am a senior officer of the *Waffen SS* and I will not...' Before he could finish his sentence, the Hydrophone Operator suddenly turned around and with terror in his eyes shouted, '*wasserbomben!* – depth charges!'

Rolf and his crew instinctively grabbed the nearest hand holds, seconds before a powerful detonation sent the vessel reeling. There were yells of pain as the men were thrown around the cramped interior, crashing into instruments and stumbling against one another. Most of Rolf's crew managed to regain their footing as the violent shuddering began to ease, but it was of little consequence when a second, more powerful explosion tore deep into the hull, sending debris hurtling across the control room and plunging the whole vessel into darkness.

Torn cables spat and hissed like angry snakes, intermittently lighting up the destruction that was all around them. Creaking and crashing sounds reverberated eerily through the length of the hull before the emergency lights finally flickered on. Rolf opened his eyes to find himself lying on his side, light-headed and with the taste of blood in his mouth. His clothes were sodden and there was the disconcerting sensation of cold water creeping around his body. Half choking on the acrid smoke, he staggered to his feet and suddenly became aware of the carnage that surrounded him. Trails of dark fluid trickled from the ears and noses of motionless bodies and mixed with rising seawater.

Amongst the ragged remains of bodies, Rolf spotted Blickmann, sprawled awkwardly on his side, his hair matted with blood, but took no pleasure in seeing the dark wetness that oozed from a crushed eye socket. Spray from a powerful jet of water spewing out from the base of the conning tower hit Rolf in the face and brought some measure of lucidity to his mind. Now standing knee deep in water, he realised that he and anyone else who might still be alive in there would have only the briefest of reprieves unless the U-boat surfaced immediately. Stepping over a naked, headless torso, he reached for a hand-set and made a call to the engine room. To his immense relief the call was answered and with undisguised anguish in his voice, he screamed the order to surface. At the other end of

the line, Berndt, the Chief Engineer acknowledged the request in a rasping voice.

‘I’ll do my best sir, but there’s a fire raging back here.’

Deafened by the blast, Rolf could make no sense of the answer.

‘I can’t hear you,’ he shouted in desperation. ‘For God’s sake surface or we’ll all drown!’

A moment later, Rolf was standing waist deep in water, consoling a dying member of his crew, when he felt the vessel suddenly lurch forwards and break surface. The jet of water streaming from the gash in the conning tower eased to a steady trickle and Rolf silently thanked whoever had answered his desperate plea in the engine room. Sensing that salvation was near, he climbed the bridge ladder and attempted to open the hatch, only to find that the locking wheel had seized. As he was fighting to free it, a huge explosion ripped into the U-boat’s stern, sending Rolf hurtling back into the water again. He groped his way to the surface through the mass of floating bodies and emerged, winded and gasping for air. There was a terrible creaking and cracking sound as the bulkhead opposite began to rise up and over him. As he began to realise the full horror of what was happening, the emergency lights flickered and then failed altogether. He lunged for the ladder in desperation, his outstretched fingers helplessly flailing the air. Once more, a torrent of water began to blast in through the hole at the base of the conning tower, swamping out the screaming and banging sounds that were coming from behind the forward hatch. Rolf began to choke as he struggled to keep his head above the surface of the rising water. Groping blindly for a way out in the darkness, he began to reach the limits of his endurance. He cried out in angry frustration, defiant in the face of death, but his screams were lost in the swirling turmoil. He inhaled water deep into his lungs and after a final desperate struggle to escape his fate, a strange calm suddenly came over him. Floating in the silence of a dark emptiness, he found himself once again at the bridge of the VIIC U-boat, surrounded by his loyal crew and advancing victoriously towards an ocean of liquid light.

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John passed directly over the disturbed patch of sea where the U-boat had been sighted just seconds earlier. He felt the Wellington lift as the charges were released and then he pulled clear, climbing steeply up towards the coast. Four white plumes rose up vertically behind him and moments later the surface of the sea began to boil. He banked to port high over the barren hills beyond the coast and then back out to sea again, returning to the point where the charges had detonated.

‘Look Skip, she’s surfacing; she’s been hit,’ shouted Smithy, excitedly.

John eased the nose of the Wellington down and began to circle the stricken U-boat.

‘It looks like we’ve crippled her,’ agreed John, ‘I can’t see any sign of surrender though.’

‘We should finish her off,’ proposed Smithy.

‘We couldn’t even if we tried. We’re out of ordnance. Besides I don’t think we should risk staying around here any longer; we’ll just make a note of her position and report...’

Before John could finish his sentence, a huge explosion erupted from the stern of the U-boat and a ball of orange flames leapt high into the air.

‘Bloody hell! Looks like we got her after all,’ said Smithy, grinning.

‘Nice work Billy,’ yelled John. ‘That was probably her munitions going off. She’ll drop like a stone now.’

‘Yep, she’s already going,’ said Smithy. ‘I still can’t see anyone on deck though; they must all be trapped inside, poor bastards. Better them than me.’

‘Quite!’ agreed John as he watched the U-boat slip back into the dark embrace of the sea, surrounded by a funeral wreath of white foaming water.

‘Nice bit of flying that Skip,’ commented Smithy as John banked away and continued south along his original heading. ‘I think I’ll treat you to a nice Italian meal when we get back.’

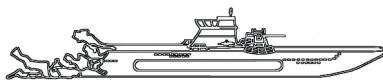
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On a barren coastal hillside, three drunken old men stood in the middle of the road, arguing excitedly amongst themselves as they pointed towards the bomber that was circling the bay.

‘*Je vous l’avais dit; c’est les Britanniques* - I told you so; it’s the British,’ cried one of them in triumph, as it roared past overhead. He waved his cloth cap above his head and shouted encouragement to its crew as the bomber banked and headed out to sea again. Moments later there was a sharp intake of breath as a huge explosion lit up the sea, revealing the dark silhouette of a sleek hulled vessel.

‘*Un sous-marin!* - A submarine!’ they gasped, in astonishment.

The three men began to cheer and slap each other on the back as they watched towering flames rise high above the stricken vessel only to die down and disappear again as the submarine upended and slipped back into the sea. Suitably entertained, they stumbled back to the bar, laughing and joking and needing little excuse to share the exaggerated details of their story with anyone foolish enough to provide them with an audience.



## 2

## Southern Corsica, present day

It was one of those beautifully calm, warm summer days, typical of the Western Mediterranean. The rustling sea breeze brought with it the heady fragrances of tree heather, rock rose and wild mint which grew in profusion along the rugged coastline of the island. The cries of animals, insects and birds filled the air, as they gathered in the abundant natural harvest and competed tirelessly for the attention of mates, while in the silence of the background, the shimmering blue Mediterranean was awesome in its immensity and seeming impenetrability.

Mike Summers was blissfully reclined in a hammock, staring out to sea and feeling at one with the beauty of his surroundings. His head nodded gently to the suitably laid-back tune that was drifting through the earphones of his iPod while he sipped freshly squeezed orange juice from a tall glass. Beneath his shades, his eyes were hazel-green and his finely chiselled nose and full lips were framed by a firm jaw line. The rugged nature of his looks was enhanced by the deep bronze tones of his skin, which like the golden streaks etched into the locks of his naturally light brown hair, were the result of frequent exposure to the sun.

Mike was no stranger to exotic settings and a carefree lifestyle, having spent most of his professional life working as a SCUBA Instructor in the popular resorts of Asia, the Caribbean and the Middle-East.

His adventure started ten years ago, when disillusioned by his timid commuter lifestyle, he had walked into a travel agent after a particularly stressful day at work, booked a ticket to Australia and handed in his notice the following day. Less than a month later, he'd found himself standing at Gatwick's departure terminal, armed with a credit card, a work visa and the bare bones of a plan.

Mike had always wanted to learn to dive and Australia seemed like the perfect place to learn. It had the world's largest reef system, huge expanses of warm, tropical waters and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of gorgeous women. It ticked just about every box that he could think of.

After landing in Sydney, Mike found work and digs at an upmarket

hotel in Manley Beach, overlooking the Tasman Sea. Over the next six weeks he spent all of his spare time and much of his hard earned cash learning the basics of diving at a local SCUBA centre. Once his newly acquired skills had been honed, he headed north to Queensland and the diving Mecca of Cairns. And it was there, in between late nights working and partying in the local bars and early mornings spent loading cylinders onto trucks, that he worked his way up through the ranks until he reached the level of guide. After three months, he was penniless and utterly exhausted, but proudly working as a Dive Guide, leading tours out to the world famous Barrier Reef.

One evening, encouraged by a stunning sunset and the contents of several cans of Victoria Bitter, he threw his return ticket into the embers of an impromptu barbecue and vowed never to return to his former life again. Consequently, when his visa expired a few months later, he left Australia with a heavy heart, but armed with the knowledge and experience that would allow him to work his way around the diving hot spots of the world.

Since that time, Mike's semi-nomadic existence had by no means made him wealthy, but in terms of fulfilment, he'd lived a life that many would envy. What is more, he was totally dedicated to his chosen profession and to the protection of the fragile undersea world which he had grown to love.

From the Kitchen of the pretty stone-faced villa he heard the distant clattering of dishes as his friend Thomas rifled through the cupboards in search of clean crockery. He winced and removed his headphones, resigned to the fact that his peaceful start to the morning was over.

Thomas walked out onto the white and grey tiled terrace wearing an old pair of boxer shorts, carrying a cereal bowl full of coffee in one hand and a chunk of *baguette* in the other. He tilted his rounded face up towards the sun and grunted, his striking blue eyes squinting at the intensity of the light.

'Couldn't you find a cup?' asked Mike, with a disapproving glance.

'What do you mean? This is a cup; it's just missing a handle,' protested Thomas. 'Anyway, the others are all dirty.'

Mike rolled his eyes and turned to face the sea again.

'The views from this place are amazing aren't they?'

'Yeah, I have to say that the old lady had pretty good taste.'

Mike watched Thomas dunk bread into his coffee.

'Shame it doesn't run in the family.'

Thomas flicked an index finger at him without raising his head.

'I don't want to sound callous, with your Gran having just passed away and everything, but we were pretty fortunate to get this place.'

'I'm still surprised that my mother let us stay here,' said Thomas, slurping noisily from his bowl. 'I've a strong suspicion that it's so she can keep her eye on me.'

'I can quite understand her concerns,' said Mike, watching him spill coffee onto the terrace table. 'How long did you say we can stay here for?'

'As long as we like; but we'll have to do a bit of work on the place in return.' Thomas reflected on his words and screwed his face up. 'Actually,

what I meant to say was, *you'll* have to do a bit of work on the place. I'm not really suited to manual labour.'

'I don't think you're really suited to any kind of labour.'

'True...which is probably why I decided to become a SCUBA Instructor,' said Thomas, grinning.

'And you never know; one day you might actually find something that you're good at.'

Thomas had grown up with the Mediterranean on his doorstep. His parents were both French, his mother being a native of Corsica and his father a mainlander from Marseille. Thomas grew up in *La Pointe Rouge*; the picturesque coastal district on the eastern outskirts of Marseille and spent his teenage years exploring the rich marine environment for which the islands and *calanques* of the area are famous. When he turned 18, he was posted to the diplomatic corps in Amman, Jordan, to complete his military service. The consular work was tedious, but every weekend, he and his colleagues would make the six hour journey south, through dramatic desert landscapes to dive over the pristine corals of the Red Sea's Gulf of Aquaba. Thomas was already an accomplished skin-diver and with his natural underwater ability he took to compressed air diving with ease. By the time that his military service had ended, Thomas was himself a qualified Dive Guide and when an offer of work was put forward by the diving centre which had nurtured his talent, he had no hesitation in agreeing to extend his stay. It was to prove the start of an eventful career that would take him to some of the most challenging and exciting diving destinations in the world.

Thomas and Mike's paths crossed in Dahab; a relaxed Egyptian Red Sea resort on the eastern coast of the Sinai Peninsular. Dahab was considered the Goa of the Middle East, and like it's counterpart in India, was an obligatory stop on the backpacker trail. It was renowned for its Bedouin style charm, cheap food and lodging, a relaxed attitude towards marijuana and some spectacular deep diving. It was a place where you worked and partied in equal amounts.

By then, both Mike and Thomas were highly qualified instructors and had accumulated a wealth of experience between them. Mike had specialised as a Technical Cave Diving Instructor during an extended stay in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsular and Thomas had qualified as an Advanced Trimix Instructor while working in the prestigious resorts of Micronesia. For the past year, they had been working at the same diving centre and become inseparable friends. They often spent their evenings together, sipping Bedouin tea and smoking sweet-smelling shisha pipes while discussing the pros and cons of running their own diving business, but the talking really only became serious when Thomas' grandmother suddenly passed away, leaving her villa in Corsica to his parents.

When Thomas told Mike about the unspoilt natural beauty of Corsica, with its deep crystalline waters and unique fauna and flora protected by marine national parks, he was naturally intrigued. One evening as they sat on Bedouin rugs, staring out towards the moonlit coast of Saudi Arabia,

they agreed to take a few months out to visit Corsica and research the practicalities of setting up a technical diving facility there. The following month, much to their own surprise, their bags were packed and they were boarding a Corsair flight to Ajaccio.

They had now been on the island for two days.

Mike sat across the table from Thomas and began to flick through the pages of a guide book.

'Well I suppose that we ought to do a bit of exploring now that we're here. How about taking a look at the Lavezzi Islands?'

'We may as well start with the best,' agreed Thomas. 'I want to test my rebreather out anyway.'

'There's a list of some dive centres in Bonifacio here. Athena in the harbour area sound OK. They run dives out to the island and according to this they've got nitrox facilities too.'

'Sounds perfect,' agreed Thomas. 'We could go down there this morning and get my cylinder filled.'

'That did cross my mind. I'd better give them a call though, just to make sure that they can do that. Shall I book us in for the Lavezzi too?'

'Yeah, go ahead. And then I'll show you around Bonifacio; maybe we can have a beer by the harbour too.'

'But of course my chubby friend, just as long as you're sure that it won't be too much exercise for you all in one day.'

'The day that beer drinking becomes exercise, I'll join a gym.'

Mike laughed and pulled out his mobile phone. He called Athena and attempted to explain his request in French, but found his vocabulary lacking. He gave up and spoke English, but even this proved difficult, mainly due to the fact that there was a demented Frenchman standing in front of him, wearing his boxer shorts on his head and playing air guitar to a highly appreciative, but imaginary audience.

By late morning they had loaded their hire car and were bouncing their way up the rough access track to the point where it joined the busy main road. They took a right turn and settled down for the 20 minute drive along the coast towards Bonifacio.

Mike was starting to realise that in Corsica, stunning views were a normal part of the scenery. From the high mountain ridges in the centre of the island to the wide valleys which plunged directly into the sea, there was a certain raw beauty about the place which Mike found captivating. Even after they had left the coastline behind and entered the historic town of Bonifacio, Mike was surprised to discover that the dramatic scenery did not stop there. He opened his window and craned his neck to get a better view of the Medieval Genoese citadel, perched imposingly above the steep sided inlet which forms Bonifacio's natural harbour.

'What an amazing place. You've been hiding this from me haven't you?'

'I take it you approve then?'

'Oh yes,' replied Mike as he watched a pretty girl cross the road. 'It all looks pretty stunning from where I'm sitting.'

'There's the dive shop,' said Thomas with a jerk of the head. 'We'll, leave



the car outside.'

Located right on the harbour front, Athena was a slick and professional outfit. Mike and Thomas stepped inside and were immediately greeted by a cheerful young counter assistant who took charge of the rebreather cylinder and helped them to complete the formalities for the following day's dive. Once the paperwork was complete, they decided to take a stroll along the harbour quays, admiring the rows of brightly painted fishing boats that were swaying gently on their moorings.

'Shall we go and visit the citadel now?' asked Thomas.

'Sure, but I think I'll grab something to eat first, just in case you get us lost up there.'

'It's nice to see that you have such faith in me...now where did I put that map?'

Mike spotted a local bakery and bought a Corsican *Libecciu* sandwich, which he despatched hungrily while Thomas led them up the Montée St-Roch to the Port de Gênes; the impressive carved stone entrance gate to the old town within the citadel walls. Once inside, they ambled along one of the many narrow roads which thread their way through the citadel's interior. After passing a succession of historic churches, ancient workshops and terracotta tiled dwellings they arrived at the impressive Place de la Manichella, perched high above sheer limestone sea cliffs. From their elevated vantage point they admired the stunning views over the Bouches de Bonifacio, the straits which separate Corsica from Sardinia, 12 kilometres to the south.

'Wow! Well that was definitely worth the walk,' enthused Mike.

'Yeah, it's a little bit better than Fulham isn't it?' said Thomas with a grin.

Mike stared down the near vertical cliffs to the crashing waves below and let his eyes roam across the vastness of the open space in front of him.

'I've never seen anything like this. Look at those buildings; they're literally hanging over the edge of a precipice.'

'Yeah, you wouldn't want to be a window cleaner around here would you?' chuckled Thomas. 'We could get a better view of the straits from Pertusato Lighthouse; it's about an hour's walk that way,' said Thomas pointing into the distance. 'Of course, if you're not feeling quite so energetic, we could just go and get ourselves a beer by the marina.'

Mike peered into the distance and then turned to face Thomas.

'It would be a shame to try to see everything all at once wouldn't it?'

'You are a very uncultured, but wise person,' smirked Thomas. 'I'll lead the way.'

They retraced their steps back down to the harbour and found a café-bar with a terrace overlooking the quays. On Thomas' advice they each ordered a bottle of the local Serena beer.

'It has quite a strange taste to it,' Mike remarked.

'That's because it's made from chestnut flour.'

'Really?' Mike picked up the bottle to check the ingredients and noticed the unusual design of a black prisoner's head on the label.

‘So it does. Weird label too.’

The waiter placed a saucer of mixed olives on the table along with the bill. Mike decided to try a word of Corsican on the waiter.

‘*Grazie* - thank you’. To his surprise and embarrassment, the waiter replied pointedly in French;

‘*Je vous en prie monsieur* – you’re welcome sir.’

‘You’re wasting your time trying to speak Corsican, just stick to French,’ advised Thomas after the waiter had departed.

‘Why’s that?’

‘It’s hard to explain, but just try to imagine going to Wales and trying to speak Welsh with the locals. They’d think you were taking the piss. Anyway they’re a bit stubborn here, like all islanders, a bit like you British in fact.’

‘No, that’s not true; we like everyone to speak English.’

‘Yeah, but given that it’s the only language you *can* speak, that’s not really surprising. Anyway, the point is that the mentality is a bit different here and you’ll need to learn how to approach the locals without offending them.’

‘Jeez, it sounds just like dealing with women.’

‘It will require even more of your limited talent for diplomacy my dear friend. You see it’s all about honour here; in fact the Corsican clans have a reputation second only to the Sicilians for violent vendettas. That’s probably because most of them are descended from powerful Italian families.’

‘Wow, maybe I’ll stick to French in future then.’ Mike took a sip of beer and frowned as a thought crossed his mind. ‘Is this vendetta thing likely to be a problem for our business?’

‘I doubt that,’ replied Thomas. ‘There is still some organised crime here, but it’s marginal. Most of the gangs these days operate on the mainland where the money is. Of course, the locals are a bit wary of foreign investment, but as long as we don’t step on anyone’s toes, we’ll be fine.’

‘But you’re almost a local aren’t you?’

‘No, I’m from the mainland and that makes me a *Pinzuti*.’

‘I take it they aren’t very keen on the mainland French then?’

‘Not really.’

‘Excellent! Now I’m starting to warm to them.’ Mike smiled smugly at his jibe and changed the subject before Thomas could retaliate.

‘Hey look they have boats for hire over there. We should rent one out and do a couple of dives near the villa. What do you think?’

‘Yeah, I suppose we could, but it’s quite a long way to the villa from here; do you know how to handle a RIB?’

‘Of course,’ replied Mike, ‘I’ve got a power boat licence. We could pick one up tomorrow after the dive, then I can take the boat back while you return by car.’

‘But where will you keep it?’

‘Hmm, good point. The shoreline’s a bit rocky where we are; I’d have to dive down and tie a mooring...or, what about that bay we passed on the way down from Ajaccio - the one just up the road from the villa?’

'You mean Roccapina? Yeah, I suppose that's a possibility. There are usually one or two boats moored up there during the summer. It's a really nice place too. If you like we could go there and check it out.'

'That sounds like a good idea; let's do it now before we start to lose the light.'

They drained their glasses, left their payment plus a generous tip on the table and headed for the car. Half an hour later they were exiting the main road and carefully avoiding the worst of the potholes as they negotiated the winding track which led down to the stunning turquoise waters below.

'This place looks perfect,' beamed Mike, as they stepped out into the car park. 'Let's climb that headland so we can get a better view.'

'The promontory? That's where the lion rock is; at least the tourist's seem to think it looks like a lion. Personally I think it looks like a rock.'

'What's that tower I saw up there?'

'It's an old watchtower. There are quite a few of them dotted around the coast here.'

'Who were they expecting?'

'Probably an invasion of English tourists.'

'Yeah! No doubt they were afraid we'd steal their women.'

'I think they'd have been more worried about their men,' smirked Thomas.

They set off walking towards the promontory and after several minutes of puffing and panting, arrived at the top, gasping for breath between hoots of delight at the sight of the pure white beaches and stunning, crystal clear bays which lay to either side of them.

'Man, look at the clarity of those shallows down there; they're just perfect for us.'

'It's even better than I remember it,' said Thomas nodding.

'Well I certainly shouldn't have any problems spotting that watchtower from the sea. It makes a perfect navigational reference...which is pretty ironic really.'

'I wonder how deep it is out there,' mused Thomas, staring at the sea beyond.

'According to my chart, you get anything between 18 to 200 metres off the western shore. And in this area right in front of us, there's a relatively shallow shelf which extends way out to a small chain of islands called *Les Moines*. There's definitely plenty of scope for exploration.'

'I can't wait to get started.'

They sat down on the edge of the promontory and watched the sun gradually drop towards the horizon, casting a purple hue across the mackerel skies which were drifting high above them. In the gradually darkening waters below, shoals of mullet and salema meandered about in the shallows, searching for one last meal before being forced to seek refuge against the predators of the night.

'I'm starting to get a really good feeling about this place,' said Mike, while chewing reflectively on a long stalk of grass.

'Yeah, Corsica is like that; it grows on you.'

‘I’m starting to understand why the Corsicans are so reluctant to share their island with outsiders...I mean, just look at it! No wonder they call it *l’Isle de Beauté*.’

As they stared out to sea, wondering what adventures might lie in store for them, they were unaware that hidden within its depths lay a secret which was about to tear their lives apart.

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*Le Bar des Chasseurs* was quiet that morning. A handful of locals stood at the bar sipping strong espressos to shake off the last vestiges of sleep before reluctantly trudging off to work, while those who had less pressing concerns, sat around reading the morning papers while discussing betting prospects for the day’s big races. Jean-Claude Santorini stood behind the serving counter, wiping away coffee stains with a grimy cloth and stacking empty cups into the sink. He was portly, thickly bearded and crowned with a mop of coarse black hair. Under his thick-set brow, his shifting brown eyes surveyed the clientele, with the same indifference as the wild boar, deer and mountain goat whose heads hung lifelessly from the yellowing walls.

*Le Bar des Chasseurs* was a bar for Corsicans, or more precisely, Corsican men, and Santorini went out of his way to ensure that it stayed that way. The few outsiders unfortunate enough to stumble across it by accident, were quickly made aware that their custom was tolerated rather than welcomed and invariably left after their first drink. There was no pleasure for Santorini in running the bar and the paltry profits which it generated barely justified the effort that he put into it. In fact the only reason why he continued to do so, was that it served as an effective front for a far more insidious and lucrative operation.

Santorini was a fervent supporter of the separatist cause and held a deep rooted hatred for the French bureaucrats who ran the island. He’d been a member of the armed political wing of the *Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse* since its formation in 1976 and over the years his dedication and allegiance to the FLNC had led him to become a trusted and powerful senior figure. The security services had long suspected his involvement in the organisation of high profile political assassinations and terrorist bombings, both in Corsica and on the mainland, but had never been able to bring a successful conviction against him. The Gendarmes had met with similar frustration in their attempts to link him to the murder of several local businessmen. Santorini’s blatant lack of concern at the attempts of the authorities to bring him to justice led many people to believe that his political connections afforded him protection. It would perhaps have been no surprise for them to learn that apart from being an effective money laundering operation, *Le Bar des Chasseurs* served as a refuge for fellow separatists on the run and a place where arms and messages could be safely deposited and retrieved.

Over recent years, Santorini had become increasingly disenchanted