

SOUTH OF JERICHO

Zhukov

A light rain fell as Ziki idled in line at Checkpoint Charlie. His radio picked up the Beach Boys singing “In My Room” in German. The sign in front of him acknowledged that this one link between East and West Berlin was least of all likely to be used by Germans:

“YOU ARE NOW LEAVING THE AMERICAN SECTOR,” it read, then “ВЫ ВЫЕЗЖАЕТЕ ИЗ АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ЗОНЫ,” and then, in interest of international amity, “VOUS SORTEZ DU SECTEUR AMERICAIN.” But no German translation at all.

Ziki wheeled his Mercedes around the final turn of the zigzag that led up to the guard house. The guard knocked on Ziki’s window with his gloved hand. Ziki rolled it down, letting in the misty rain and the Russian guard’s bad breath.

“*Ursprungland?*” asked the guard.

“*Kanada.*” Ziki answered. If anyone challenged in English, his accent could always be explained as some distant Canadian province. The guard nodded. No real reason to sneak in to East Germany, security was decidedly laxer in this direction, not like going the other way.

“*Bestimmungsort?*”

He was really headed for the Soviet Army Camp outside Ehrenswald, but answered, “Beeskow.”

“*Zer gut gehen zie durch*”

The guard waved him through. Ziki rolled up the window and pressed the accelerator. After passing a few well-maintained military buildings and entering into the heart of East Berlin, the difference between East and West, years under Soviet occupation and a handful of years after the construction of the wall, was striking. Even along the main thoroughfare of Friederichstraße, everything was drab and run-down. Much of the city had not yet been rebuilt from the combined devastation of allied bombing and the thirsty Soviet assault on the city.

The rain didn’t help.

The towering Brandenburg gate standing within a stone’s throw away from what was Hitler’s bunker complex underground, where the symbolic giant swastika was perched during the Nazis time, was gone, the Soviets dynamited it off.

He soon passed out of the downtown area, through the outlying residential suburbs, and into the Brandenburg countryside. It was once the heartland of the Prussian aristocracy, but now it found itself under the wheel of a car from Frankfurt driven by an Israeli on his way to turn over some of “*Germany’s finest*”, and most despicable, minds to the Russians who held East Germany under indefinite occupation behind the Iron Curtain.

Driving along the narrow, but unpopulated road, Ziki wondered if he would have done better to change cars in Berlin and obtain one of the small, boxy vehicles that seemed so prevalent. As the meeting neared, as usual, various doubts crossed his mind.

How expendable were the scientists to Zhukov? What else was in play? Yes, that was the big question—what else was in play? How far could Ziki push Zhukov?

The cargo plane they were on was rigged with explosives, but he could really only effectively hold the scientists themselves hostage in a crisis, he couldn't stare down an entire Soviet division.