

# **Destiny**

## **Nazis on the Moon**

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„Reichshygieneuntergefreiter Schmitz, report!“

„Yes, Sir!“ Walter rose, cursing under his breath when a thud and resulting pain reminded him that the toilet tank was right above his head. Rubbing the back of his head, he crawled backwards, away from the gap between toilet seat and wall, before standing up.

„Get a move on!“ The voice of his superior, Reichshygieneobergefreiter Kurt Barnitz, showed his impatience. Walter still took the time to button up his uniform

and to polish his boot tops against his pant legs before leaving the cubicle through the open metal door and stepping into the corridor.

„Respectfully reporting for duty!“ He raised his right arm, clicking his heels. Both was expected from Walter, despite the fact that no one else was present in the hygiene section of the S.S. FRANKFURT-ODER. *His superior insisted on observance of all regulations especially in times like these—as he repeated frequently—when negligence and lack of discipline lead to the downfall of the National-Socialistic order.*

Barnitz saluted back, remaining in that position as if he expected to have his photograph taken for a propaganda poster. It wouldn't have been the first time, as being tall, sturdy and blonde made him the perfect example of Aryan ideals.

*My contribution to the Third Reich*, had been written on a poster in the Antarctica station, *Reichshygiene wards as clean as a river in the mountains.*

The Reichspropaganda photographer had asked Barnitz for the photograph, not even considering Walter. Nobody wanted to see a small, chubby man whose hair had receded to a horseshoe-shaped fringe of dark hair, despite only being twenty seven years of age. He seemed like a typical loser; someone, who had been beaten down by life and was lying on the floor whining instead of putting up a fight. Everyone, including himself, saw that in him—his parents, his precious few friends and the women he tried to chat up after downing a few spirits. Walter Schmitz on a poster would have been depressing instead of motivating, he was sure of that.

Barnitz lowered his hand, inspecting Walter with cold blue eyes. „I'm waiting for your report, Untergefreiter,“ he said. The humming of the engines deep below the steel deck of the FRANKFURT-ODER forced him to speak louder than usual. „I have things to do.

*Like what? You're doing even less than me*, thought Walter, but didn't voice that opinion. He cleared his throat. „Yes, Herr Obergefreiter Barnitz. Reporting respectfully that Reichshygiene ward sector Matterhorn and sector Zugspitze have been thoroughly cleaned. Sector Watzmann still requires inspection.“

It had been Barnitz' idea to divide the toilet wing into sectors. *That way we don't run around unnecessarily and always know exactly, which part of the wing we are talking about*, he had declared. Oberst Lauterbach had congratulated him on his organization skills, but Walter had noticed the twitching in the corner of Lauterbach's mouth. Walter still wondered whether the leader of operation Lebensraum (habitat) would agree with him that Barnitz was a complete and utter idiot.

Barnitz took the clipboard that he always carried around tucked under his arm like a marshal baton, and pulled a ball pen out of its holder. He always had at least three pens, in case one of them wouldn't work.

*Good lord, how I hate him*, Walter thought, following Barnitz into sector Matterhorn. Neon lights illuminated steel wash basins, gleaming mirrors and the open wooden doors of ten cubicles. Walter had scrubbed and polished the wing since he started his shift seven hours ago, but he was convinced that he had done something wrong. He always did something wrong.

Barnitz stepped up to each and every toilet as if he was a general and they were his soldiers in formation in front of him. He regarded his reflection in the steel

wash basins, bent down and stuck his head in the toilet bowl. Walter heard him inhale sharply, mumbling to himself. He straightened up again, ticking some check points on his list. „You followed my advice,“ he stated, leaving the ninth cubicle.

Walter nodded. „Yes, Herr Obergefreiter. Some vinegar with a drop of schnaps to clean the basins.“

„It’s a little too much schnaps, but you’re getting there, Schmitz. If you continue to fulfill your duties with such diligence, we will make a decent soldier...“

Barnitz’ voice trailed off as he glanced into the last cubicle. „What the...? You can’t be serious?“

*I knew it, Walter thought. He always finds something.*

With an uneasy feeling in his stomach he watched Barnitz entering the cubicle, holding up a toilet roll with an accusing expression on his face. „What do the regulations concerning hygiene paper state?“

Walter stood to attention. „The biggest service we can do our fatherland during the initial phase of operation Lebensraum is frugality,“ he recited. „Per Reichshygiene cubicle one brush—requisition number WC-53638—and one roll of grey hygiene paper—requisition number WC-86374—may be issued. Replacements will be made as and when required. Should this case arise more than once within sixty hours, the immediate superior must be informed.“

Barnitz took one step towards him, still holding the toilet paper roll like an attorney would present a piece of evidence. „Obviously, you know the regulations, Untergefreiter Schmitz, so I’m sure you will be able to explain the presence of two rolls of hygiene paper in this cubicle.“

„Yes. Cubicle then in section Matterhorn is the preferred toilet...“

„What?“

Walter grimaced. It had escaped his mind that this word derived from the arch enemy; therefore, it was forbidden to use it in official conversations. „My apologies. Cubicle ten is the preferred hygiene compartment of Oberst Lauterbach. I assumed he would appreciate finding an amount of hygiene paper pertinent to his rank.“

„If thinking was your strong point, Schmitz,“ said Barnitz, „would you still be Untergefreiter after six years service to the fatherland?“

Walter gulped. „No, Herr Obergefreiter, probably not.“

Barnitz fixed his eyes on Walter for a while. „Unlike you, Oberst Lauterbach’s presence on this Reichsflugscheibe is due to his competence. Destiny may have played its part, but favoritism and connections had nothing to do with that fact.“

He lowered the hygiene roll. „I don’t expect that someone like you understands how a man of honor thinks, but rest assured that Oberst Lauterbach puts personal preferences and comforts aside where the good of the fatherland is concerned. He wants to be treated like everyone else aboard, officer or soldier. Is that understood?“

„Yes, Herr Obergefreiter.“ In truth, Walter didn’t believe a word Barnitz had just said. If Lauterbach really was one of them, why didn’t he, Doktor Stoiber and several high-ranking officers eat in the mess, but in his private quarters instead, where no one could see what they were being served? And why did he have private quarters in the first place, and didn’t sleep in one of the large dormitories like

most of the others? Still, he considered it unwise to ask these questions. Barnitz was right in one aspect: Walter hadn't belonged to the station in Antarctica from where they had departed, nor did he belong on this flying disk. His father had called in every favor anyone owed him; otherwise, Walter would probably be dead by now.

„And don't you forget it.“ Barnitz wanted to turn away, but the ship's tannoy started crackling.

„Attention,“ a tinny voice said. „We will land at the destination of operation Schwarze Sonne in thirty minutes. Proceed to your assigned distribution station to receive your space suits.“

Walter felt a pinch in his stomach. *It's happening*, he thought.

„What are you waiting for, Schmitz?“ Barnitz turned around, and then noticed that he was still holding the toilet paper roll. Cursing quietly, he placed it on one of the basins. It slid over the edge and dropped to the floor. Ignoring it, he strode down the corridor.

Walter followed him, but he attempt not to catch up with him. He remembered his father's words. Erwin Schmitz had been one of the founding members of the NSDAP. When Walter had entered his office with his draft, he assured his son *Don't worry, my boy. I will make sure that they keep you far, far away from the front. You will not even hear a shot, let alone fire one.*

That way, Walter had ended up in Antarctica as a guard of the secret research station Neu Schwabenland. Everyone knew to whom he owed his position. At least, they had respected his father's wishes, even when the question arose, who would be allowed to travel to the moon in one of the eighteen flying disks in order to ensure the survival of the Aryan race. Unfortunately, Erwin Schmitz had erred. Walter had not only heard shots during that last night before they departed, he also had to fire shots when the civilians, who didn't have a place on the flying disks, were executed. The allies must not find out about operation Lebensraum and the mad plan, to establish a base on the moon.

I fired my first shot when the war had been long lost, thought Walter, and not even at the enemy but at my own people.

He pushed the memories aside. The past was behind them, just like Earth. The future—and the moon—was awaiting him. The idea still seemed mad, and it was easy to forget where he was while cleaning hygiene cubicles. The wings looked hardly different from the ones on the research station, and the stench was identical. Merely the humming of the engines betrayed his presence aboard a flying disk.

Walter entered the mess hall, which was being used as a distribution station for space suits. Men crowded the back of the room in front of the small portholes. A grey, crater-strewn landscape unfolded before their eyes. The sight took Walter's breath away for a moment. Suddenly, he realized the extent of the entire operation. Never before had a human set foot on the moon. They were pioneers.

Barnitz is wrong, thought Walter. Destiny did not only bring Lauterbach here, but all of us. We are the chosen.

Two soldiers helped him into his space suit. It consisted of eight padded and isolated layers made of various materials that had been tried and tested in

Antarctica. Walter was wrapped into leather, downs, wool and oilskins. The respirator was in a backpack, and its weight almost brought him to his knees.

„Don't worry,“ said one of the soldiers, handing him a helmet. He spoke with a Rhenish accent. „Out there you're going to be almost weightless. You will hardly feel it.“

Walter hoped fervently, that he was right. He took the helmet and queued up, moving towards the cargo hold that served as gathering point for the clearance unit. Barnitz had volunteered, and that, of course, included his subordinates. Their task was to clear the landing area of rocks and to prepare it for the builders who would erect the provisional quarters. At the same time, the search for Helium 3 would begin. Like most people on board, Walter didn't know, how long the fuel reserves for the life support systems that would have to sustain the living quarters soon, were going to last. He didn't think much of the rumors that they wouldn't last longer than three weeks. Whenever information was withheld from people, they tended to assume the worst.

The floor beneath Walter's feet vibrated, and metal grated. The disk decelerated and tilted. The cargo hold doors opened in front of him. Soldiers, who had already fastened their helmets, beckoned the waiting men. Inside, nets had been attached to the walls in order to support the men.

„Hurry up,“ said a voice over the helm radio. „Touchdown in five minutes.“

Walter's mouth dried up. He wished, he had taken a sip of water, but now it was too late. His hands trembled as he pulled the helmet over his head and fastened it. Finally, he opened the valve for the air supply as they had showed him previously. The mixture of oxygen and nitrogen smelled metallic and tasted like blood, as if he had bitten his tongue. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. When he turned his head, he saw a black mirrored helmet. The name tag on the outer layer of the dark space suit told him, who stood there: Barnitz.

Walter rolled his eyes, knowing that no one could see him. He bent his head until his and Barnitz' helmets touched. Radio silence had been ordered until touchdown, but the glass vibrations carried the sound.

„Your orders, Obergefreiter?“

„Stay close to me, Schmitz, and do as I say. And I mean do *nothing* unless I tell you to.“

„Yes.“

The flying disk beneath him suddenly bucked like a young horse.

„Touchdown,“ the voice in his helmet stated. Walter wondered how the officer managed to sound so calm.

There was a huge crash. The disk dipped to one side. Walter grabbed hold of the net, but it was difficult to bend his fingers in the thick gloves. Not far from him, a man lost his balance and hit the floor hard. With every movement of the disk, he slid from one side to the other, banging against crates or walls.

The cargo hold had no windows, but Walter felt as if the disk was jumping across the surface like a stone across water. Engines howled, crackling and banging noises sounded everywhere, and it seemed as if fists were hammering against the floor from underneath the disk.

Suddenly, the disk stood still.

The officer, a young lieutenant by the name of Steiner, stepped back from the net and walked towards the back of the cargo hold and the huge steel door that served as a loading ramp.

„Get ready to disembark,“ he ordered. The men obeyed, but they seemed dazed and had problems to line up properly. Steiner didn't reprimand any of them, permitting them to take their time. Walter was grateful for that. Finally, the lieutenant pressed a large, round button next to the steel door. An alarm sounded, and the emergency lights flickered when the life support was switched off. The door opened, and air escaped with a hissing noise.

First, Walter only saw a starry night sky. When the gap increased, he also noticed grey mountains and a grey, jagged landscape. Suddenly, his body felt strangely light, and his breath caught. It seemed to him as if only his heavy iron soles stopped him from being whisked away to the stars.

Soundlessly, the ramp touched the ground. Dust welled up and floated idly through the vacuum. None of the men moved. Just like Walter, they all stared through their mirrored helmets out into the barren wasteland.

*Our new home*, Walter mused. The mere thought made him dizzy.

„Forward march!“ The lieutenant's voice jerked him from his dizziness. Walter joined the other men and took one of the pickaxes from the large crates next to the ramp.

„Radio silence has now been lifted,“ Steiner continued. „Switch to your assigned channels. Unusual incidents should be reported on channel one.“

Walter switched the radio dangling from his belt to channel seven. Everything felt light. Even the pickax in his hand didn't seem to have any weight. Slowly he left the flying disk, stepping out onto the moon. His boots sank a few centimeters into the dust. Below, he sensed rock. He knew that the cold could kill him within minutes; yet he didn't feel it in his space suit. Apparently, Doktor Stoiber had picked suitable materials.

His helmet radio crackled. „Obergefreiter Barnitz,“ said Steiner. „You and Schmitz will divide the area into sectors. I have been told, you are particularly good at that.“

„Yes, Herr Leutnant,“ answered Barnitz in that overzealous tone of voice that Walter hated so much. Obviously, Barnitz didn't hear the sarcasm in Steiner's voice.

Walter followed Barnitz who spurred him on with hectic gestures. „Come on, Schmitz. We will start at the rock over there. First, we will examine the nature of the stone to find out, which tools are best suited for the division.“

Walter didn't listen to him. His gaze drifted to the bright stars. He imagined them to look down on him favorably, not as coldly as in Antarctica. He wasn't sure, why he believed that, but it was a comforting, soothing feeling.

*Everything will be alright*, he thought when he discovered a minute speck in the sky.

„Good grief, Schmitz,“ Barnitz snapped at him via the intercom. He stood next to a waist-high, pockmarked rock and was about to start working on it with his pickax. „Why are you staring into thin air? Don't you understand that we are fighting for our survival here?“

The speck increased in size. Walter stayed where he was.

„Schmitz, if you don't move your ass right now, I will make sure that you...“

Suddenly, something impacted right in front of him on the moon's surface. The ground shook heavily, and Walter lost his balance hitting the ground hard. A cloud of dust floated around him. Instinctively, he began coughing although his helmet protected him. When the dust lifted, Walter staggered to his feet, looking around. Several other soldiers had noticed the impact and hesitated, obviously not knowing what to do.

Walter turned around facing the area where he had last seen Barnitz, but there was nothing. Even the rock had gone, as well as the entire landscape within several meters. Something inside of the crater, that the meteorite had left, glistened. Waves idly swashed against the stones around its edge.

*Waves?*

Carefully, Walter approached the crater. Starlight reflected from a colorless, oily liquid. He had been on guard duty many times in Doktor Stoiber's office and knew instantly what the meteorite had revealed. Without taking his eyes off the lake in front of him, he fumbled for his radio, switching it to channel one.

„Untergefreiter Schmitz reporting the discovery of an underground lake of Helium 3.“

„What?“ That was not the lieutenant's voice, but Oberst Lauterbach's. „Repeat that report, Schmitz.“

„The meteorite has exposed a lake of Helium 3, Herr Oberst.“

Lauterbach laughed. He sounded so relieved that Walter believed for the first time that their fuel resources would have lasted only three weeks after all. But all those worries were over. The amount of Helium 3 swashing before him, would last for years if not decades.

„You don't make a good soldier,“ said Lauterbach after a while, „but as a mascot you're unbeatable. Congratulations, *Obergefreiter* Schmitz. Thanks to your discovery, operation Lebensraum is a complete success. Your name will always be remembered.“

„Thank you, Herr Oberst.“

Walter heard the men cheer. Lauterbach had spoken his words on an open channel. He switched off his radio and watched the lake. Something floated in there. It was as long as his index finger and had been distorted by the heat of the impact. He recognized a ball pen.

For the first time in ages, Walter smiled. *Destiny can be such a bitch sometimes*, he thought.

