

One morning around seven Giorgio was awakened by the cries of the sailor guarding the hook. He got out and headed aft from where the cable had been dropped. At the side there were already several sailors, the boatswain and the Captain. It had bitten a huge eighteen feet shark struggling harpooned by the big hook it had swallowed. The animal must have had monstrous strength because the steel cable that was in tension rubbing on the bulwark, raised some sparks and with each tug of the animal a dull blow was heard that made it vibrate. There was immediately a kind of war council between the Captain, Giorgio and the boatswain, on what to do with that monster. It was definitely not edible. The Chinese ate only the lips and used the dried fin as an aphrodisiac. Nobody was interested in tasting its lips and there was no need for aphrodisiacs. Lifting him aboard would therefore have been useless as well as dangerous. An animal of that size could have survived for hours out of the water unless you shot it in the head immediately and no one was tempted to see it squirming on deck and maybe biting someone. As a trophy it would have been a clutter on board and would have required time and taxidermist expertise. The war council unanimously decided to free the prisoner. The boatswain asked everyone to move away at a safe distance and released the steel cable which, hissing and snaking dangerously through the air, disappeared into the sea together with the shark. The barrel that served as a  
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float was seen quickly moving away from the ship and then disappearing into the depths of the ocean.

All officers, at the table, avoided drinking mineral water to store it in case of emergency and many of them did not complain at all about the situation. The stock of wine ran out in ten days while that of beer was rationed and lasted twenty. They were about to affect the whiskey reserve when, to everyone's relief, the African coast loomed on the horizon. Dakar finally meant shower and fresh water at will, after a month of sailing in those conditions.

The repairs to the propeller shaft lasted two days and the Bayhorse resumed the sea in a southerly direction, skirting the African coast, cutting the Gulf of Guinea and resuming the coast of Africa, keeping further out along the dangerous Skeleton Coast of the Namibia. The First Assistant Engineer, who had sailed in those waters during the war, told that along that coast there was a secret base of German submarines, well protected from the continuous change of the seabed, so no submarine fighter ship dared to approach because of the dangers of the submerged dunes that changed shape quickly and that no nautical chart could report. Being stranded it meant losing the ship and the crew.

In that area the impetuous winds push the enormous sand dunes of the coast into the sea and then the current makes them fall, creating changing and insidious seabeds. In fact, the name of Skeleton Coast derives from the presence of thousands of shipwrecks that have been stranded over the centuries

in those dangerous waters. The Bushmen who live there, say their land was created by God when he was angry.

Beyond the Tropic of Capricorn the sea began to swell and, after 30 degrees latitude south, it unexpectedly reached strength 10/11 even though the weather reports had reported strength 7/8. Evidently the local weather reports was either not using the Beaufort scale or not as accurate as those of Malta Radio, thought Giorgio.

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Fortunately, the sea came from the south, almost forward, and the Bayhorse plunged into the gigantic waves almost halfway up the hull. A similar sea taken from the side would have caused the ship to overturn. The crests of the waves that passed along the edge reached almost the bearing compass bridge, the highest one. Giorgio estimated that they should be over thirty feet high and thought it was fortunate that the ship was loaded because when empty it would really be at the mercy of the waves.

The old hull vibrated and emitted sinister squeaks which were echoed by the rumble of water falling on the sheets of the deck. All the watertight doors were barred and only through the portholes one could witness the unfolding hell. The Captain and all the officers were on bridge watching the stormy sea. While the engine crew was all in the engine room ready to cope with any emergency.

When nature is unleashed in that way, it frightens but above all it fascinates and the amazement and wonder at seeing such a powerful spectacle prevails over the fear. Giorgio was reminded of the paralyzed mouse in front of the snake that is about to grab it. The wind whistling madly made the crests of the huge waves foaming, causing the hull to pitch with dangerous inclinations. When the bow plunged into the wave, the stern came completely out of the water. Engineers went crazy closing the steam when the free propeller threatened to reach an unsustainable number of revolutions, to reopen it immediately afterwards, when the propeller returned underwater.

The Captain, impassive, but pale in the face like everyone else, commented that in the Pacific, over 40 south latitude, he had seen waves more than forty feet high. All the other officers, also pale in the face, commented something by return, remaining impassive. The helmsman and the two sailors on the lookout threw furtive glances from time to time to see some signs of concern on the faces of the officers but could only notice calm and firmness that ensured them. The helmsman chosen from among the most experienced sailors had a delicate task at that juncture. He had to keep the bow at sea

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and continually correct without worrying too much about going off course. When he deviated by 5 degrees from the intended course he alerted the Captain who gave him further instructions. An anomalous wave, stronger than the others, hit the forward hold and caused the hatch covered by the waterproof

to collapse. There was a depression in the center which indicated that some of the heavy wooden planks had given way and most likely the hold was flooded. It was not possible to go and control the situation because the sea would have swept away any daredevils who dared to venture on deck. Hold number one was the smallest of the five and the hull could have floated even if completely flooded but, by leaning forward, the hull would have taken on even more water.

The storm lasted about 12 hours with the only damage to the bow hold, then the sea calmed down, albeit relatively and dropped to force 8, nothing compared to the previous power. The Bayhorse returned to course and navigation resumed regular. The boatswain sent sailors to the bow hold who confirmed a partial flooding whereby the water had mixed with the fertilizer creating a gray slime that would have made it unusable. The hatch boards and the damaged tarpaulin were replaced.

Rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the ship veered north-east to pass east of Madagascar and avoid the counter current of the Mozambique channel which flows southwards. After passing Madagascar, she turned her bow towards the Horn of Africa and the island of Socotra. The island, semi-deserted in those years, was a well-known refuge for Somali pirates who tried to board passing ships, get on board and steal everything they found usable or resalable. At night they often turned off the coastal lighthouse, in the hope that some ship ran aground on the coasts in order to plunder it. They weren't very dangerous as they weren't well armed and preferably mostly with machetes and some guns, but some caution was still necessary because if they were able to get on board they could create serious problems. As they approached Socotra,

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which they would have left to the west, the Captain had all the sailors come on deck and placed them along both sides of the ship and two for each bridge wing on lookout with binoculars. The sea was calm and flat and one could have noticed a boat, even a small one, at a considerable distance.

A sailor on guard on the left wing signaled the presence of a small sailing boat that looked like a fishing boat and was following a course parallel to the Bayhorse a couple of miles away. Giorgio pointed his binoculars from the bridge and saw that, having lowered the sail and forcing the engine, it had set off on an interception course with the Bayhorse that was already sailing with the engine at full speed.

The Captain knew about it and after telling the officers, that he knew they was armed, not to fire without his specific order, he ordered the boatswain to have six fire hoses connected to the port side of the ship. He called the engine room and ordered them to steam the deck hoses. Giorgio at that time did not understand the intentions of the Captain, who asked the first and second mates to join the sailors at the hoses. The Second Mate taken from his warlike nature deriving from his Serbian ancestors who had gutted the invading Turkish Muslims

for centuries, before going down from the bridge he approached Giorgio and whispered:

"Come down as soon as you can, we let them hook the stairs and while they go up we shoot them in the mouth".

In fact the Captain was right, his best strategy was to not let them get on board and avoid a shooting range that would surely have caused many victims. The six hoses could launch steam of over 400 °F at a distance of 20 or 30 yards and, whoever was in the jet, would be left without skin.

The false fisher men's boat was fast approaching followed by another one that appeared out of nowhere at a distance of half a mile. Arriving a hundred yards from the ship, the Captain gave orders to the officers on deck to open the hoses by pointing them upwards as a demonstration. Giorgio took a look at his S & W 38 special that he wore in the holster under his armpit, checked if the drum was fully loaded and mixed with his hand the thirty bullets he had in his pocket. He

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was a bit tense but the contact of the weapon under the armpit reassured him.

The boat seemed to slow down its run but not having given back with the engine it arrived at about thirty yards from the Bayhorse. The Captain then gave orders to point all six hoses on their bow. The jets of steam were unable to fully take the boat due to the distance at the limit of range, but the pirate who was standing on the prow let out a horrifying scream and fell backwards. Their engine was heard roaring to give it all astern and they veered hard left to get away, but they could not avoid a second jet of steam on the stern which caused another equally gruesome scream. They quickly moved away preceded by the second boat which, having seen the scene, had veered even before. The Captain approached the mouthpiece for the engine room and after a laconic

"You can turn off steam"

he went back to his cabin.

Beyond Socotra the Bayhorse turned its bow to the east, skirting the Arabian peninsula several tens of miles away and then veering south towards Bombay. They were about 100 miles from Bombay when Giorgio, from the bridge wing, noticed a strange smell in the air. In the open sea, the air normally smells of brackish, but that smell was indefinable and very unpleasant. He asked the Captain who was on guard on the bridge:

"Captain, do you feel this stench too?"

And he replied smiling:

"It stinks of Bombay, Mr. Relli, you will see, it will be even worse in the city. But don't worry because after a couple of days you get used to it and doesn't feel it anymore."

Giorgio frowned and hoped fervently that the Captain was right about the couple of days.

The Bayhorse docked at a peripheral dock, far from the commercial port and, from the mooring point, you could see in the distance some very high warehouses with corrugated

metal roofs. There were no other ships nearby and no suction  
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equipment for unloading or silos for storage. Giorgio thought that certainly the unloading operations would take a long time and immediately packed a suitcase to settle in a hotel with air conditioning, as the ship was heating up in the sun and he had nothing to do on board.

He greeted the Captain who, with a nod in response, added:

"When in town, pay attention to M-F-S: Misery, Flies and Shit and let me know where you are staying that I will come to see you tonight."

Giorgio got into the cab he had called, a black righthand drive Fiat 1100, with a yellow roof and also quite dented. Later he discovered that all Bombay cabs were of the same model and color and almost all in the same condition but with very clean interiors full of various junk, hung everywhere according to the driver's tastes.

He was taken to the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel which was a huge 5-storey building by the sea, surmounted by a dome that looked like St. Peter's in Rome. In evident Old English style, it was very luxurious and sumptuously furnished. He was given a huge room larger than the Bayhorse bridge, the Captain's cabin, his cabin and the radio station all put together and with delightful air conditioning. Giorgio phoned on board and informed the Captain of where he was, then he emptied his suitcase and lay down on the bed to enjoy the air conditioner. He woke up around 7 pm, took a shower and went down to the hotel bar.

In the Indian state of Maharashtra of which Bombay was the capital, prohibition was in force for alcohol, but in practice it was only valid for Indians. Foreigners in luxury hotels were controlled by the police and could drink moderately while Indians were forbidden. The result was that there were thousands of clandestine bars in the city, mostly frequented by Indians.

In hotel bars where a policeman sat at a desk stationed at the entrance, an Indian ordered a whiskey for the policeman  
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and then could drink without limits. The foreigners did the same. Obviously, no policeman was able to drink the hundreds of whiskeys that were offered to him every evening so, once he drank his dose, he was reimbursed in rupees by the bartender for the amount of glasses offered and not drunk. Obviously the bartender reserved a percentage with the consent of the policeman and everything worked perfectly.

When Giorgio sat at the bar counter and ordered a Vodka Martini, the barman took care to inform him of the custom for which he paid for a whiskey and glanced at the seated policeman he had not noticed upon entering and received a broad smile in return. He was about to decide to go to the restaurant when the Captain emerged at the entrance who, upon entering, turned a look of disgust at the policeman and reached Giorgio with:

"What the fuck is that doing here?"

Giorgio explained the Indian custom to him and they went to the restaurant together.

After dinner the Captain had desire to have fun and proposed to George to try some Indian girls. They got into a cab, that was a black Fiat 1100E with a yellow roof and the captain muttered something in the driver's ear who, with a skillful slalom to avoid the bodies of those who were already sleeping on the street, took them to the Paradise Hotel. The tempting name didn't exactly match the reality of the place. It wasn't a hotel but a fairly decently maintained brothel. The two new customers were greeted in the lobby by an individual dressed in luxurious Indian clothes and seated, obviously in the Indian style, on a kind of cylindrical platform three feet above the floor. He was avidly smoking a long homemade cigarette, with who knows what crap, kept between ring finger and little finger, sucking it from the closed fist.

At the sight of the two foreigners, he promptly gave the order to an attendant, with the shrill voice of a eunuch, to have them sit in the private sitting room. They sat down on a long sofa and a few minutes later the parade of girls began. Giorgio

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was not particularly horny like the Captain but he told himself that it was time to relax with an Indian girl.

While waiting, the Captain told him:

"Mr. Relli, let me advise you, choose one of those who suffer a lot of tickling because they are the better in bed."

And when the girls arrived, he got up and tickled everyone.

He chose for him a curvy woman, in her early twenties, who could not stand still under her manual works. He continued the search undeterred since Giorgio, feeling himself a bit ridiculous to tickle whores in a brothel, had not got up from the sofa. The search ended to the great satisfaction of the Captain who pushed on the sofa a very young girl with her black eyes wide open in amazement and a bit of fear, saying to Giorgio: "This is even better than mine, have fun!"

And he disappeared into a room with her girlfriend in tow.

Giorgio spent most of the night with the girl chosen by the Captain and found her delicious and very sweet. She had to be a beginner as a prostitute because she looked like a girl who wanted to make love rather than work. She was very shy and let him do everything he wanted with her but she prevented him, with an unexpected modesty, from looking at her naked out of bed. That made Giorgio smile but he respected, even if reluctantly, that unusual modesty.

He returned to the Taj Mahal around five in the morning and immediately fell asleep. Around eleven he went down to the bar and sat down at a table in the inner garden, ordering some Italian-style coffee. The waiter, very attentive, nodded and returned with a bowl full of coffee which was not bad after all. He was sipping his XXL coffee when he caught a glimpse of a silhouette dressed in white who said to him:

"Good morning Mr. Relli, well up, did you sleep well after the hard work at the Paradise Hotel?"

Giorgio looked up and gasped, risking spilling coffee on his white linen suit and stammered:

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"Very well, thank you!"

And he added, composing himself

"Isn't you following me by chance?"

"Let's say we care a lot about our collaborators and always check their safety, Bombay can be dangerous at night"

replied the green-eyed blonde with a smile. Giorgio

thought of his S&W that he had left in his room after taking it off with the holster on his return to the hotel and that he would do well to keep it always with him or put it in the safe.

"Don't worry, I know how to take care of myself and sometimes of others as well"

he answered smiling. The blonde kindly asked permission to sit at his table and before getting it she sat down nicely saying:

"It is time for me to answer some of the questions you have been asking for a few months"

and lowering her voice even though the garden was completely deserted, she continued:

"You see, I represent an organization, a kind of supranational club, that have interests all over the world with practically unlimited resources. All members united together can influence any event on the planet, from politics to the stock market and can even influence currencies around the world as they please."

She stopped waiting for Giorgio's reaction, who impassively asked:

"OK, understood, the club of the very rich is not new.

What I did not understand is why they seek my collaboration and it will certainly not be to save money"

he finished with a smirk.

A slight smile appeared on her face and she said:

"Not for sure, but you see you are the ideal collaborator for us. They examined everything about you, character, reliability, political ideas, ability to react, coldness when needed, so they can predict any behavior of you in any eventuality.

Furthermore, you are easily controllable both on board and on shore. Our control and communication systems are much more advanced than your shortwave transmitters. Finally, you have

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the ability to transfer confidential items from one part of the world to another with absolute discretion and security."

Giorgio nodded and added:

"Please tell me about the item I gave you in Miami"

She became serious and said:

"We know you opened it and examined it. We also have video recordings of you looking for it in the First Aid room and what you did in the storage room. You were supposed to open it even though you stopped at the sphere and that was appreciated.

The sphere can self-destruct if clumsily forced. I am authorized to assure you that the object is not intended to harm anyone but is only a container of information. I am not authorized to give you further details for now."

Giorgio replied with an ironic smile:

"Well Miss Mystery, I wanted to know above all about the harmlessness of the object. Welcome me aboard the club and tell me what will happen after Bombay."

"For the moment I have no other information to give you"

she answered and added smiling and opening those green eyes in which Giorgio feared to sink:

"Tomorrow an Indian police officer will come aboard to collect the object that you did not open this time... good boy."

Giorgio nodded his head and threw her a:

"Why don't you stop for lunch with me?"

"I would do it very willingly."

She said in a tone that seemed sincere,

"but unfortunately I have a binding commitment with very important people and it is not the case that I postpone the appointment."

She greeted Giorgio with a gracious smile and left.

The day passed between boredom and relaxation until dinner when the Captain reappeared and they sat down at the usual restaurant table. Arriving at the coffee and digestive, the Captain proposed:

"What about the Paradise Hotel?"

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Giorgio agreed, thinking that he would gladly see the girl with the shy black eyes again. When they entered, the eunuch removed the closed fist from which he was sucking the cigarette and gave them a dazzling smile. He shouted some orders in Hindi and after a while he asked Giorgio to take the room 5 and the Captain the 7.

The girl wore for him a delightful sari interwoven with gold threads and stood beside her bed. As she saw him coming in, she stared her eyes wide from her joy and threw her arms around his neck holding him and hiding her face against his shoulder. She was even sweeter and more shy than the previous time and she gave herself to him with an even more intense passion.

The next day around noon, he was chatting with the Captain on the bridge wing and commenting with disapproval on the rudimentary way of unloading the holds. A truck was positioned under alongside while the loaders in the hold filled rectangular pots, six feet long and three wide, with shovels. Once filled, they were hooked to the ship's crane and lifted spreading a cloud of fine dust and then tipped into the truck body which had sides no higher than three feet, spreading clouds of dust again. The truck then wobbled away, losing dust from the unsteady banks and creating more clouds along the way. After a few days the dock had risen by about four inches due to the layer of fertilizer spread.



An officer of the Indian police, on board, greeted Giorgio and in perfect English similar to what Giorgio now knew, said to him:

"Mr. Relli? I'm here for the retreat."

Giorgio returned the greeting and asked him to wait a moment. He went up to the First Aid room and took the object, after putting it in a canvas bag, he went back down and handed it to the officer who greeted him with a nod of his head, turned his heels and left at a slow and martial pace without uttering a word.

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Giorgio told himself that it was necessary to see the blonde again and get more information. Apart from the mysterious object, there were other things that left him perplexed.

Even assuming they had unlimited resources, how did they manage to control him on board in real time as she claimed?

How could they send information and even videos if it took him hours from the Indian Ocean to send a simple telegram to Radio Rome? Not to mention all the other extraordinary control abilities scattered around the world. They had to have a powerful organization but also a technology still unknown. He remembered the perfect construction of the object he had opened. The mechanics and the materials that made it up were simply amazing. Could they be aliens? Giorgio wondered for a moment, but he smiled to himself and rejected the hypothesis.

Another thing that was not at all clear to him was the intentions of this organization, only commercial or even political? Did they have the goal of controlling the world? Or maybe they were already doing it... Having no answers at the moment he promised himself to look for the blonde even if he didn't know how. Until now she had always found him.

The problem solved itself. A sailor joined him in the cabin where he was looking for clothes to take to the hotel and told him that someone were looking for him on the landline phone. The blonde's voice again caused the usual tingling.

"Good morning Mr. Relli, if you still have that idea, I would gladly have dinner with you at the Taj Mahal tonight at 8 pm."

Giorgio under the effect of the tingling in the back of his neck and looking for a demeanor so as not to let the emotion show, he answered after some seconds:

"But certainly, very willingly"

"Well, tonight then"

she put it back in his usual sensual voice and hung up.

He returned to the hotel and spent all the time listing the questions he would have liked to ask her. He repeated the list many times until he knew it perfectly by heart, even in reverse order.

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He was at the hotel bar at 7:45 p.m. with a Vodka Martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other when she came in, casually looking around. She was gorgeous, she wore a delightful pearl gray evening dress that left her shoulders bare

highlighting her swollen breasts and accentuating her short, cheeky blonde hair. She looked like a brat, but classy. When she saw him she approached him smiling and said:

"Good evening, I don't have time for aperitifs I'm very hungry!"

Giorgio smiled back. He finished his Vodka Martini with a sip, stubbed out his cigarette and, taking her gently under her arm, piloted her to the restaurant. As they passed between the tables, almost all the males present turned to admire her and to look at him with undisguised envy. Those who did not it faced with a consort who stared at them with menacing eyes.

After ordering dinner from a waiter who seemed to be moving on roller skates, Giorgio turned to her with a smile:

"Do you want us to talk after dinner or don't you mind starting right away? I have a lot of questions to ask you"

"I don't mind eating and talking, so we can start right away"

she said, smiling back. Giorgio had millions of questions but he forced himself to be rational and to start with the most important ones.

"First I would like to know the aims and intentions of this organization. I do not hide the fact that I would not be willing to pretend for my personal economic advantages and if I were not in line with their intentions I would immediately stop the collaboration. Then, I'd be curious to get my nose into your technology. From what I imagine you should have a private place where it was developed and where you made those marvels of objects that I have examined. This aspect, even if secondary to the first one I told you, interests me a lot."

He spoke in one breath and waited for the answer with some apprehension. He would have been sorry not to see her again. She replied immediately, lowering her voice just a little:

"You see, Mr. Relli, you were chosen after a careful analysis made by experts, so I have no doubt that you agree  
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with what I am about to tell you. The organization which has been given a very fascinating name, The Phoenix, has mainly economic purposes as it aims to achieve the well-being of all the inhabitants of the planet, but by checking that development is balanced and gradual. In this sense, The Phoenix must necessarily deal with politics as well. We are convinced that the best way, for an optimal coexistence between human beings, is not capitalism or liberalism and not even the communist ideas of Marx that irrationally put classes in conflict with each other. A supranational leadership is needed that deals with the interests of all social classes and harmonizes their mutual collaboration. In other words, the entrepreneur must pay the right salary to the worker who in return must offer him his work with an adequate collaborative commitment. Rights and duties must be well defined and harmonized. The freedom of an individual cannot be unlimited because this would mean prevarication for others, but it must end where the freedom of the other begins. All this must take place without partisan or

ideological conflicts and under the control of an impartial organization that aims at the global collective good. It will take several generations before reaching the final goal, after having overcome all partisan interests and the various political factions in conflict, but we are working leisurely with very clear ideas. Maybe neither you nor I will see the final result but it will surely be there. Our scientists, who work on predictions based on precise estimates and analyzes, predict that the new global system will begin to bear fruit after 2060, in almost 100 years."

She paused as the waiter served dinner and looked him in the eyes with a look that showed her total belief in what she had just told him. When the waiter had gone away, Giorgio replied:

"It is certainly a tempting goal and, as his expert had predicted, I agree perfectly. Tell me about your technology that intrigues me very much"

She smiled at him and continued:

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"This curiosity of yours was also expected, given the calculations you made to understand if the sphere was full or empty"

and continued serious:

"Have you ever heard about Area 51, in the US?"

"Of course" answered Giorgio with a frown

"from what I know it is a secret military base in Nevada where people say they are also studying aliens. But what does it have to do with The Phoenix?"

The blonde lowered her voice even more and stopping in midair her fork, where a bite of chicken curry was skewered, bending slightly forward towards him, she said:

"We do not depend on any government even if some collaborate with us without knowing it. We have nothing to do with the Area 51 military base, but thanks to our highly placed and very discreet friends, several years ago we established our base 120 feet below the military base and remained completely independent and self-sufficient. Basically we are top secret below and we are top secret even for our neighbors upstairs. Nobody knows of our existence in Area 51 so the confidentiality is almost total. If someone decided to make our presence public there, it would only feed another unproven and unverifiable legend such as that of the aliens and other mysteries linked to Area 51, that the public is greedy of, without causing us any damage."

Giorgio nodded. waiting for more interesting revelations and she went on:

"I am not able to give you technical details about our technology but I assure you it is science fiction turned to reality. Many scientists, who have inexplicably disappeared over the years, work for us and many others collaborate in secret. They do it willingly not only for the economic advantages that derive from it but also because they have enormous resources and equipment at their disposal, unthinkable in other research

laboratories, even the most advanced. The laboratories in area 51 are playgrounds compared to ours"

and she continued smiling

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"in the area 51 they are perfecting spy planes while our scientists are working on a design for an engine for an interstellar spaceship. We are a few hundred years ahead of them.

Finally I must tell you that our safety and also that of external collaborators is guaranteed by super-trained personnel equipped with weapons that are unimaginable for you. Your S&W 38 is a toy by comparison. They are not killers, even if they would not hesitate to kill a human being if ordered to them, but they operate strictly following the orders received without moral or sentimental conditioning. They are something like very efficient and well-programmed robots."

She stopped and Giorgio was silent for a few minutes to process all that information, while she silently watched him.

They finished dinner and Giorgio asked her:

"Why did you choose this restaurant?"

"It's simple..."

She answered with a smile,

"it's more comfortable for you and for me also, since I am staying here too, so you don't have to worry about deciding whether to ask me to accompany me or not, as you were already thinking"

and emphasized the smile maliciously. Giorgio returned the smile but remained imperturbable. He liked the blonde very much but he didn't want to force events with inappropriate phrases. He wanted her to make the first move in that direction so he went back to the previous topic.

"You already know the destination of the Bayhorse right?"

"No, you are wrong, but I will certainly know before departure and after they have processed the information contained in the object you brought. The Bayhorse, in practice, sails for us without the knowledge of the owner and crew, apart from you. We organize trips by arranging chartering contracts to places where the presence of the object is useful. The owner, unaware, is happy to enter into profitable contracts with companies that are always different even if they are always controlled by us and from which it is impossible to trace

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The Phoenix. By the way, the object has a name, we call it Flier"

"Flier?... A flier... that carries news around... interesting"  
Giorgio replied.

"Yes, exactly but I am not yet authorized to tell you anything else about its functioning and its content, also because I know very little about it"

she said, getting up from the table and added

"you must excuse me but I have to retire, I need to sleep a lot because awaits an important mission. You stay here please and don't worry about the bill that had already been

paid even before my arrival"

Giorgio stood up and stay at the table as she walked away waving at him without turning. He followed her with his eyes and with a:

"See you tomorrow..."

She stopped for a moment, turned her head and smiled at him over her shoulder, then went straight on and left the restaurant among the admiring glances of the few males left unattended.

Giorgio had no desire to go up to his sumptuous room, He called a cab and was taken to the Paradise hotel. The girl with the big eyes was waiting for him near the bed in a refined sari, this time quilted in silver. As she saw him at the door she took off the top of her sari and with a very quick movement she dropped everything to the ground remaining completely naked, standing in front of him.

One morning, passing through the hall and on his way to the dining room for breakfast, a concierge stopped him haughtily and handed him an envelope addressed to him. Giorgio, a little surprised, put it in his jacket pocket and went to his table. After ordering a hearty breakfast, he took the envelope out of his pocket. It bore the name of the Bombay Presidency Golf Club and contained an invitation to the party that was to be held three days later, at 6pm. It recommended the evening dress and the presentation at the entrance of the invitation that

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was personally made out to him. Giorgio, about golf, only knew that it was played with clubs and that a ball had to be hit and he imagined that such an invitation had to do with the blonde and The Phoenix. He did not have a suitable evening suit so he tracked down the concierge and asked him where he could get a tuxedo quickly. The very helpful concierge and up to his mission, proposed two solutions. The first was to rent one and Giorgio was not very keen on wearing a used suit in India. The second was the tailor Gigi.

After half an hour, while he was sitting in the garden, the tailor Gigi arrived. He was a short, stout little man, dapper with a parting in the middle of his straight black hair and, to Giorgio's surprise, he spoke Italian fairly correctly. The efficiency of the concierge was immediately revealed when the tailor Gigi took some fabric samples from the bag he had with him. Giorgio chose a light, iron gray silk fabric and black satin for the lapels.

"I know that you are in a certain hurry"

said the tailor Gigi and continued

"if we take the measurements immediately, tomorrow I will be back for the first test and the day after tomorrow it will be ready"

Giorgio agreed and, unsolicited, handed him a \$ 20 bill, telling him with a smile

"It will definitely be ready for the day after tomorrow, right?"

"Certainly sir"

assured the tailor Gigi.

On the evening of the party Giorgio, in his elegant tuxedo, reached the Presidency Golf Club by cab, having the driver calculate that he would be at his destination at exactly 6 pm and not earlier. On the way they passed a sign with the inscription Tailoring and outside the door under the sign several half-naked individuals sat on the sidewalk, but with turbans on their heads, sewing clothes keeping the fabric taut with their

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dirty bare toes. Giorgio hoped that they weren't those employed by the tailor Gigi.

The Presidency Golf Club was the most prestigious in Bombay and was founded by the British during the occupation. Finding an 18-hole club in the city was a rare thing, thought Giorgio. At the entrance he showed the invitation and the man in charge of the control with extreme deference addressed him in a low voice:

"Welcome Mr. Relli, I will immediately accompany you to the reserved area."

He was accompanied, by a young trotting waiter, to an area of the playing field, at hole 4, which had been specially fenced and where a huge gazebo with sofas, chairs and tables had been set up. In the center of the gazebo stood a superb buffet that could have fed all the Bayhorse crew for a month. The place was splendid, surrounded by greenery and secluded. Ideal for confidential interviews as Giorgio expected. Evidently it was too early for the reserved area to come alive so he got a Vodka Martini from the well-stocked bar set up next to the buffet, he chose a corner table and waited.

It was almost 7pm and he was sipping his second Vodka Martini when he heard a noise from the sky that made him think of a helicopter. After some minutes, a few hundred yards from the gazebo, a big helicopter appeared from the treetops and landed gently on the grass. When the huge propeller stopped, two small vehicles appeared from the thicket of the trees surrounding the clearing, traveling close to the lawn without touching it.

Giorgio had already seen the hover crafts that crossed in the English Channel between France and England but he was amazed to find them there and above all so silent. Five men and a woman got off the helicopter ladder and took their places on the hovercraft. While he was watching the approaching vehicles, he noticed that other guests were coming from the club and took their places at the tables so the gazebo began to come alive. The vehicles stopped about ten yards from the gazebo and the passengers, except for the blonde

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who walked towards him, took their places at the large low rectangular table placed in front of the buffet, surrounded by elegant white Chesterfield armchairs.

Giorgio was not at all surprised to find her there and he greeted her politely as if he were seeing her for the first time. He had decided to keep a detached demeanor. She approached

him saying:

"Welcome Mr. Relli, soon I will introduce you to a very important person who wants to meet you"

and with a smile she walked away towards the other tables that were filling up. Giorgio looked at the people who were talking sitting on the armchairs around the table. One in particular struck him. He had a very tall slender figure that was noticeable even when seated. With Caucasian features, he wore very white, wavy, rather long hair and was apparently the oldest and perhaps the most important since all the others turned to him when they spoke and one could see him nod or answer briefly. Giorgio decided he was the boss. But what amazed him most was the fact that he could hear nothing of their conversation, not even an incomprehensible buzz as he managed, with his trained hearing, to pick up conversations from much more distant tables.

He was pondering this when the blonde approached him again and sat down at her table.

"In a short time I will accompany you to that table that you have certainly noticed but before I must warn you not to be surprised when you enter the acoustic dome."

"Acoustic dome?"

Giorgio repeated.

"Yes, you see that table is located under a special dome thanks to which all the sounds produced inside cannot go beyond the invisible walls of the dome. When you'll enter, you'll hear only a very brief buzz and then nothing more from the outside"

she looked at him to make sure he understood.

"This is the explanation for the strangeness that I had noticed earlier and that amazed me. Who is that old man with white hair?"

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He asked

"He is the person who wants to meet you. He will tell you himself"

she replied smiling.

The tables under the gazebo were all occupied and many had dishes from the buffet in front of them that looked delicious.

The blonde accompanied him near the special table and passing Giorgio heard the loud voices coming from the numerous tables around him. She stopped and motioned him to continue. Giorgio felt for half a second the buzz she had announced to him and then nothing more. He entered a hushed atmosphere where no noise was heard. The other participants had left and the white-haired gentleman was sitting alone in his armchair on the short side of the table. He stared at him with disconcerting eyes, which Giorgio had never seen before, of a very light gray color, almost white, and pointed with his hand to the armchair next to him,, telling in a tone of voice that seemed authoritarian and cordial in the same time:

"Please take a seat, Mr. Relli. You will have been amazed by several things, I imagine, starting with our acoustic

dome that allows us to converse with confidence even in a crowd. Do you know we also have an individual portable version?"

"Sir, I am no longer surprised at anything"

Giorgio said with a smile

"since the young lady mentioned the technologies used by The Phoenix."

"Ah, the young lady you mean is the Duchess Alexandra von Hohenstaufen, descended from an officially extinct dynasty but which actually still exists and has been part of The Phoenix for many years. She is one of our most precious collaborators" and after a short pause he continued in a friendly but firm tone that sounded like an order disguised as advice:

"I would propose to avoid the gentleman formal terms in our conversations so they will be leaner. I will call you Giorgio and you will call me Morgan and we will continue this

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way as all the other members do. Giorgio agreed as he was not very interested in the definition of the formalities in use and asked:

"Listen Morgan, can I ask you some questions?"

And at his nod he went on

"On the acoustic dome I have nothing to ask you because it is simply amazing and the technical details would be beyond my understanding, but I would like to ask you about the hover crafts I noticed upon your arrival. They have an electric motor right?"

Morgan just smiled and replied nonchalantly

"Oh those... are electric toys that we need to test a new type of batteries that we are developing. You think that one of those vehicles can definitely run for a year with the newly developed batteries it has on board. We discreetly place them in suitable places just to test battery life. Some of our designers say the lifespan could be up to two years and we are checking it out. But I must tell you that you have deceived yourself by calling them hovercraft. They actually have a propeller on the bottom but it only serves to make it pass for a hovercraft and avoid indiscreet questions. In reality those vehicles travel on a magnetic cushion that keeps them off the ground".

For Giorgio such batteries were unimaginable and amazed him much more than the acoustic dome, while for Morgan they were both curious toys. He didn't ask for more about the magnetic propulsion system to avoid migraines. It was already too much for him to imagine those fantastic batteries.

"Well..."

Morgan said with a smile

"now it's my turn to ask questions"

and becoming serious he began:

"You have shown Alexandra your identity of views with the final objective that The Phoenix intends to pursue. But you did not do it regarding the means by which we intend to reach it"

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he paused and staring at him with his light gray eyes



continued:

"Our experts who have carefully examined your behavior have already given me an answer but I would like to hear from your voice how far you are willing to go to collaborate with us."

Giorgio stared into his eyes and replied:

"Before I answer you, let me ask you if your interest in me is a prelude to a closer collaboration with The Phoenix and some assignment you has in mind to assign me."

Morgan, impassive, assented with a nod of the head and Giorgio continued

"I want to be honest with you as is my habit especially when it comes to important topics. I fully agree with the objective of the Phoenix and I consider it the only possible solution to create a balanced civilization that spreads well-being among all the inhabitants of the planet. I am also sure that the path will be very difficult because we will be in conflict with mainly economic interests but also with political and power interests that will oppose by any means. Precisely for this reason I would have no scruples in acting with such determination. Sacrificing a few to save many can be considered ruthless on a moral level but it is the most logical and pragmatic solution that can be adopted to achieve the intended purpose" he stopped and waited for his interlocutor to speak who was staring at an indefinite point beyond the gazebo . After a couple of minutes, Morgan spoke again:

"Well, Giorgio, that was what I wanted to hear from you to confirm the information already in my possession. We will meet again in a few months when you will visit our base in the US." He slowly got up from his chair as if absorbed in who knows what thoughts, greeted absently with a short wave of his hand and headed out of the gazebo towards one of those vehicles that looked like hovercraft. Giorgio returned to his table and shortly after he heard the sound of the helicopter engine taking off. He stayed at the table for almost an hour, delighting himself with the buffet dishes and reflecting on the interview, while the other tables were slowly emptying. He

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looked around for Alexandra but didn't see her, so he went back into the club building and asked to call a cab. That evening he didn't go to the Paradise hotel but stayed in the hotel bar until late, rearranging his thoughts over a couple of Old Fitzgerald glasses.