

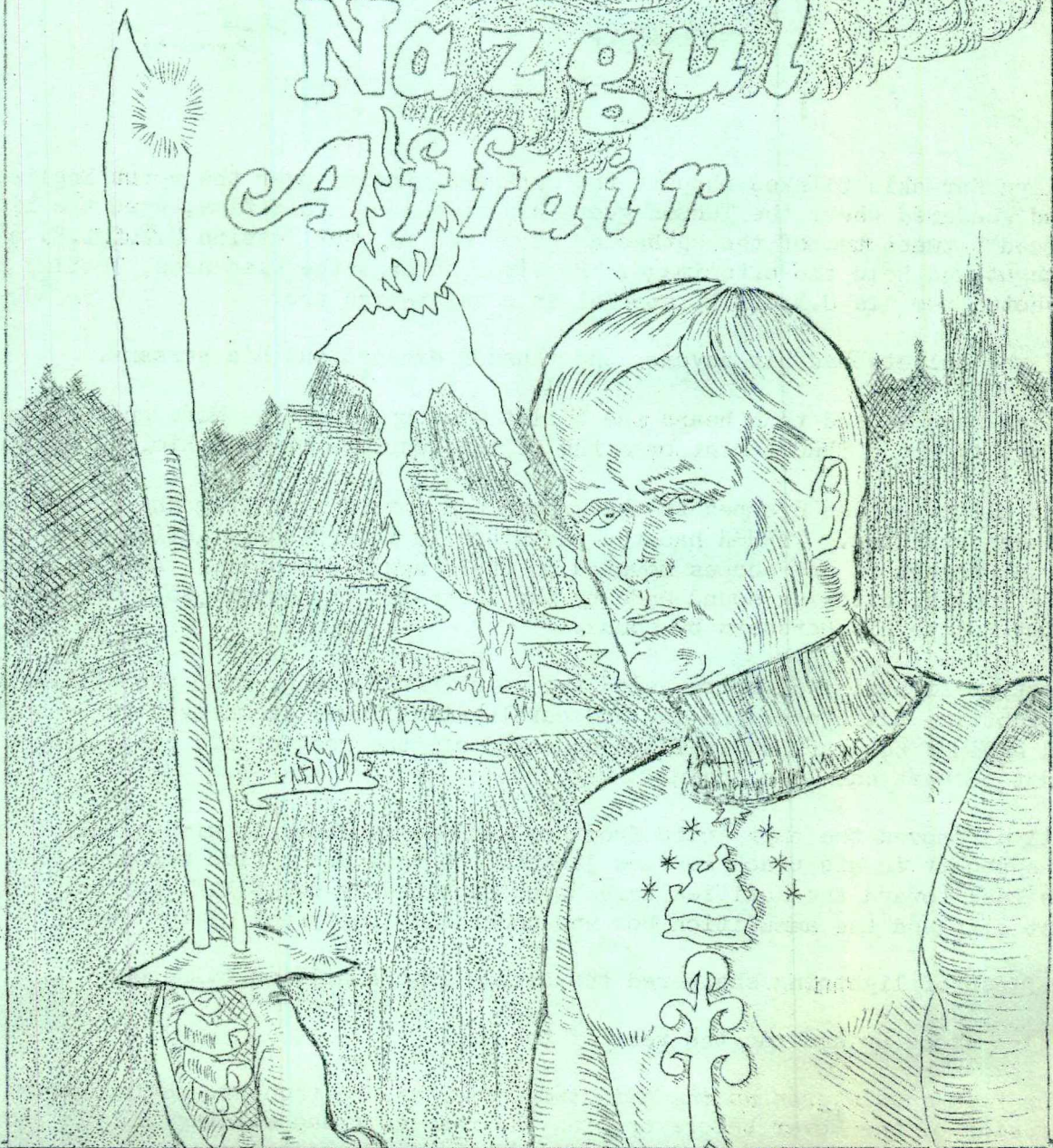
GONDOR

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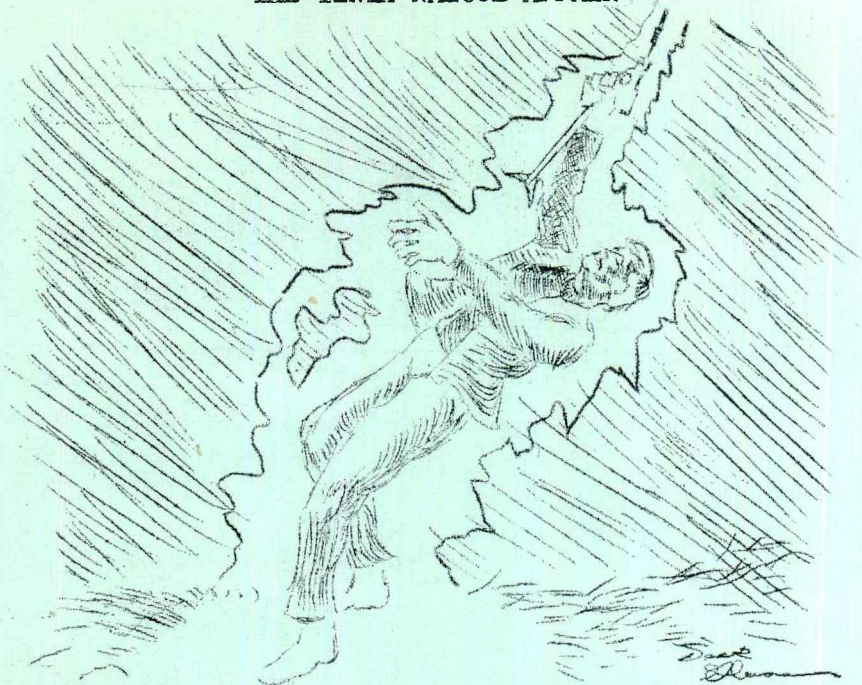


When a Shadow from the East again threatens
Gondor, Illya must invade Mordor in this new novel
by Bill Glass

The Tenth Nazgul Affair



THE TENTH NAZGUL AFFAIR



Illya Kuryakin blinked through the darkness hanging over the north English moor and wondered where the THRUSH guard had moved to. This time, when the lightning arced between two of the gathering storm clouds, the Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent's eyes caught and held the afterimage. He fired through the blackness, letting off a dozen shots from his U.N.C.L.E. special in a waist-high arc.

If the bullets had hit anyone, the thunder drowned out his screams.

Illya more sensed than heard the bullet snap by his ear. More guards must be moving out from the THRUSH mint over the hill to capture or kill him. Good.

The blond Russian dropped to the ground and wormed away from the spot where he had been standing. THRUSH had the advantage in this night fighting with those infra-red projectors and scopes mounted on their semi-automatics. And the thunder hid that humming/clicking sound made by the infra-red projectors so that Illya could not locate his pursuers by sound.

Another lightning flash revealed two more THRUSH moving over the hill. Knowing their nighttime advantage, the two had carelessly allowed themselves to be spotlighted against the dark sky. Illya squeezed off the rest of his clip. These two would not be that careless again. Ever.

Illya removed the empty clip from his gun and replaced it with a full clip drawn from one pocket in his black leather jacket. It took about five seconds. He started to move back toward the Modified Land Rover supplied by U.N.C.L.E. London. This was his last clip and the ammunition box was under the front seat of the car.

A flash of lightning shattered the clouds into a billion raindrops.

Illya stood up and ran the rest of the way.

The rain should even up the situation somewhat, he thought, moving around to the far side of the Rover before opening the rear door and sliding in. It should render their infra-red projectors ineffective, putting both them and me in the dark.

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He reached under the seat, dragged out the ammunition box, and crammed clips into all of his jacket pockets--he might need them. He rolled the rear windows halfway down. He sat, his U.N.C.L.E. special ready, peering into the darkness, waiting.

So far his diversionary tactics seemed quite successful. He only hoped that Napoleon was doing as well, infiltrating into the mint itself. He remembered what his teammate had asked after briefing in Mr. Waverly's office: "Why is it that I always get stuck with, ah, all the hard work?"

Illya brushed a dripping shock of blond hair out of his eyes and squeezed off another burst. A dreadful waste of ammunition, true; but it did keep the four THRUSH out their on their toes.

All the hard work, indeed. At least Napoleon could see whom he was shooting at. What was taking him so long?

A bullet swanged off the door in front of Illya. A burst of shots pockmarked the rear, bullet-proof window. They were closing in. Illya emptied his gun out the window, changed to a new clip, rolled over into the front seat, and shot up the night on the other side of the Rover.

At first he thought that lightning had struck close by. But the light on the far side of the hill stayed, grew and billowed upwards. Shouts pushed through the rain. The drops scattered the light from the fire into a red glow through which forms moved. Illya slipped from the car and followed like a dark wraith.

Shots came from ahead. Moving in a fast crouch around the side of the hill, Illya could see the four THRUSH guards. Three crouched, shooting at the man dodging away from the brightly burning building. The fourth man, watching behind for the other U.N.C.L.E. agent he knew to be out in the night, saw Illya and fired.

Illya jumped to the right, firing as he moved. The burst from the THRUSH gun bore past him into the rain.

The guard screamed as he fell, alerting the others. They scrambled up and ran around like cockroaches looking for something to crawl under. Cockroaches with machine guns. But they had no chance in the crossfire from two U.N.C.L.E. specials. In a moment all three were down.

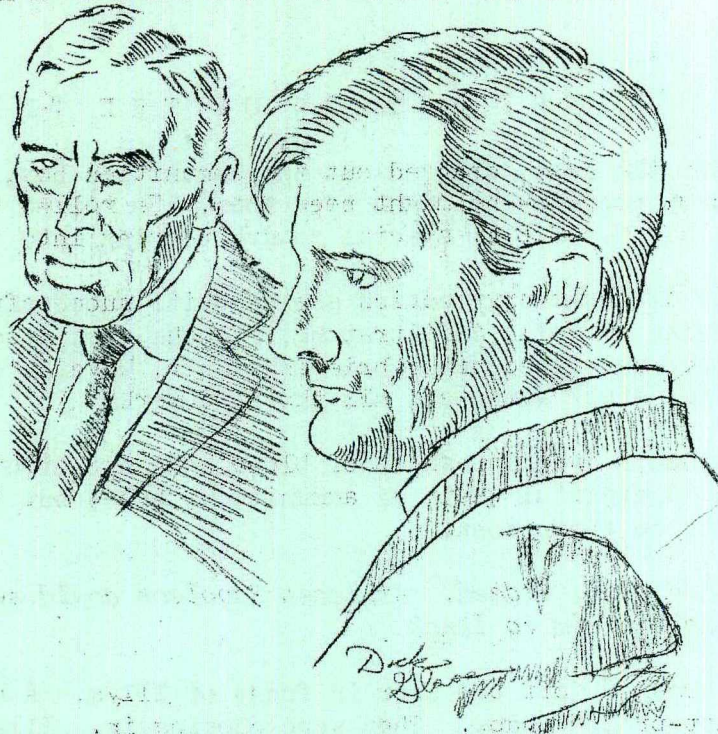
I hope Napoleon was using darts so we could take a prisoner. Just on general principles, Illya thought.

Now to move whatever gold Napoleon recovered, he thought.

"Over here, Napoleon," shouted Illya, waving his long barreled U.N.C.L.E. gun above his head.

His world vanished in a timeless sheet of light.

THE RETURN OF THE THING



SECTION I: THE RETURN OF THE THING

Chapter 1: "The Departure of Illya"

"Nothing, Mr. - uh - Solo?" Mr. Waverly asked, looking up from the report. The head of U.N.C.L.E.'s western hemisphere operations looked shocked as he repeated, "nothing?"

"Ah, yes, sir," Napoleon answered. "There were no traces found of Illya's body after the lightning struck. Not even any bone ash or slag from the gun."

Mr. Waverly looked as if he wanted to say something. Instead, he placed a brown attache case on the round table and revolved the table top until the case was before the top agent of section II: U.N.C.L.E.'s Operations and Enforcement or section. The attache case had what looked like a handcuff worked into the handle.

"Right now, Mr. Solo, we have a simple courier assignment for you. This case must be delivered to our Oslo office by this time tomorrow. With the time differential, you should be there if you leave immediately. The office there is compiling some data to return to us here. You may have to stay in Oslo for--uh--a few days."

Good thing, Mr. Waverly thought, watching Napoleon Solo leave, for the lad to have some vacation. He should not be allowed to stay around the New York office and grieve. No sense taking a chance on impairing Mr. Solo's efficiency by letting him become morbid over Mr. Kuryakin's death.

Mr. Waverly started to pull out a standard U.N.C.L.E. next-of-kin notification form. He then crumpled it in disgust and brought out a sheet of his personal stationary. He stared at the blank paper for almost a minute before he realized there was no one to whom he could write. He sat for the next hour alone with his cold pipe and his thoughts.

A Siamese cat walked across the telegram and folder lying on the desk in the

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Victorian-style sitting room. The balding man apologetically brushed the cat aside, picked up the folder, and read the card stapled to the front:

KURYAKIN, ILLYA NICKOVETCH was lettered across the top line. The man's eyes skimmed across the statistics and comments typed on the standard form below the name.

HEIGHT: 5'8" WEIGHT: Ten Stone HAIR COLOR: Blond EYE COLOR: Blue-green
NATIONALITY: Russian REMARKS: Kuryakin is an adept make-up artist; do not rely upon physical characteristics for identification. (see attached photographs). Kuryakin, possessing an almost eidetic memory, is also an accomplished linguist. He is conversant to varying degrees of fluency in Russian, German, French, English, Hungarian..."

The man passed over the list of languages and dialects, to the comment: "His father, apparently disturbed by certain of Stalin's policies, instilled in young Kuryakin a distrust of the later 'degenerate interpretations of Communism' by more modern party leaders. So, while ideologically a Communist, Kuryakin owes little loyalty to his homeland or its allies."

Opening the folder, he skip-read the covering thumbnail biographical sheet:

"Born 22 Sept., 1933, in Stalingrad, U.S.S.R....in the early part of November 1942, his father, Nickolai Ivanovitch Kuryakin, disappeared, presumed killed in the fighting. Early December 1942, his mother, Maria, died of tuberculosis complicated by malnutrition....Placed into State Orphanage, Stalingrad, February 1946....Served in Siberia with Army of Soviet Socialist Republic 1950-52....Accepted into MVD, June 4, 1953....Sent to Budapest in October 1956. 9 December, contacted U.N.C.L.E. 3 January, 1957, accepted into U.N.C.L.E., smuggled to America. 1957-1960, undergoes U.N.C.L.E. training. (see Report #1794:63 U.N.C.L.E. TRAINING CURRICULAE AND ADVANCEMENT SCHEDULE)...c. June, 1961 received first section II assignment from U.N.C.L.E. 2 July 1961, kills THRUSH agent V. M. Smith in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A....c. February 1962, teamed with Napoleon Solo (see File #II-13039)....for complete list and details of operations, see OPERATIONS: COMPLETE LIST AND DETAILS attached below."

The man riffled through the thick sheaf, frowning when his eyes caught the names of operations involving himself. He apparently took some satisfaction in stamping DECEASED across the cover card and laying the file to one side.

Then he picked up and re-read the telegram:

THRUSH CENTRAL #A-193741-23:: WARD BALDWIN--WESCOSOP--SANFRANCISCO SATRAP
MENT NORTH ENGLAND. TEAMAGENT NAPOLEON SOLO TARGET REMOVAL. COUNCIL ADVISES ALL
SATRAPs: IF CONTACT DURING OPERATION, KILL SOLO. -END.

COUNCIL MEMBER "A" FOR THRUSH

#A-193741: COPIES ALL LEVEL I, II, III SATRAPs

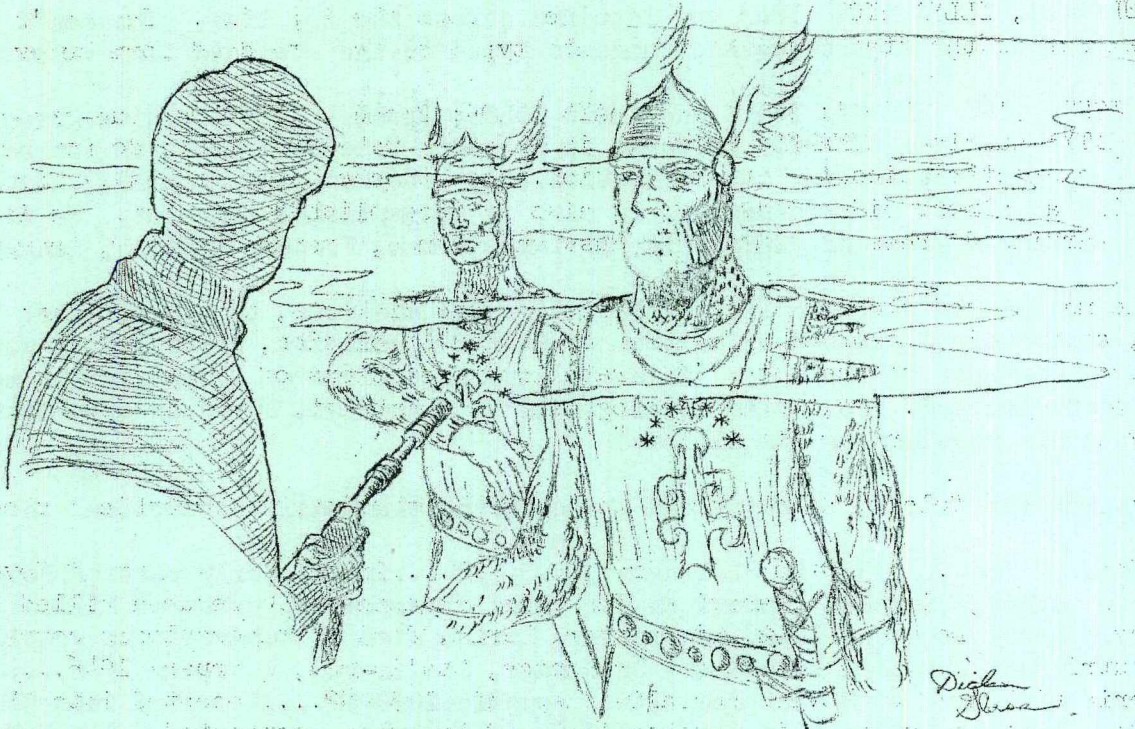
"Irene," Ward Baldwin called to his wife, "would you please put Mr. Kuryakin's dossier in the morgue file for me?"

"It is almost a shame he was killed," she said, taking the file into the adjoining room. "He was quite pleasant during his stay here while working on that D.A.G.G.E.R. business. What about Mr. Solo, dear?"

"The Council thinks it advisable that we kill Mr. Solo next we meet."

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"It should be much easier now," she called back while sliding shut the "K" drawer of the morgue file, "should it not?"



Chapter 2: "Many Meetings"

The wind waved the cold grey veil of mist across Illya's upturned face. His lips pursed. Small shivers rippled along his body. His right hand closed convulsively around the grip of his U.N.C.L.E. special.

Then, with a spasmodic jerk so sudden it hurt, he was standing, gun at ready. His head buzzed. It seemed near dawn. He was surrounded by heavy mist. Where was Napoléon.

He had half turned around when he remembered the lightning. He remembered the cold paralysis he had not had time to feel. He remembered the unbearable light that almost had time to crawl up his optic nerve into his brain. He remembered thinking that death should have more of a feeling of sundering disintegration....

Voices came through the mist: "...Someone outside the wall, Bergil."

"Why so uneasy, Gandimir." None will menace Minas Tirith from the north. The destruction of the Dark Lord may not have brought instant peace; but Gondor and Arnor are quiet realms once again, thanks to Aragorn Telcontar, King Elessar."

At any other time, Illya might have dropped to the ground, rolled aside, and quietly waited, ready to warn, injure or kill as the situation developed. But a strange sense of out-of-place wrongness filled him. His instinctive reactions would not be suited for this misty morning's meetings. So he stood, his U.N.C.L.E. special swinging tensely by his right thigh, and watched as two shapes came out through the shadowshape of a gate and solidified through the mist.

They carried swords and wore coats of mail. Over the mail lay green surcoats on which was woven a silver tree surmounted by seven silver stars. Their thighs

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were wrapped in leather. Mist condensed in rivulets along the polished silver gull wings on their helmets.

I hope I am not staring at them as foolishly as they at me, Illya thought.

The shorter of the two began to slide his sword from its scabbard. Illya countered by vaguely allowing the barrel of his U.N.C.L.E. special to point at a spot midway between the two men. The taller soldier placed a restraining hand on his companion's arm. "Wait, Gandimir," Gandimir let the sword slide back, but kept his hand on the hilt. The other turned to Illya.

"Stranger, you approach from the north and resemble the fair-horsemen of Rohan. But you come on foot and in strange clothes, and you look prepared to fight us with that thing. And you look like a man lost and full of questions. But first I have a few questions for you. Who are you, and what is your business here?"

Illya somehow felt it best to be frank and honest.

"I am Illya Kuryakin, an agent of the U.N.C.L.E.: Uncle: The United Network Command for Law--"

Illya realized for the first time that he was not thinking in English, as he had grown accustomed during his decade with U.N.C.L.E.; neither the acronym nor any of its parts fit one another. The language felt different from any of the languages he knew.

"and Enforcement. As to what my business is here, I can not answer not knowing how I came here. Or, even, where I am."

"An introduction as confusing as your appearance, Illya Kuryakin," laughed the taller soldier. "I am Bergil son of Beregon, the Warder of the Ramas Echor, the outwall of Minas Tirith. You are between the eastern and of the White Mountains and wide Anduin who flows south to the sea. North are the green fields of Rohan. East lies the dark land Mordor, whose name is still not spoken too loudly or often in the lands of Middle Earth."

Illya had always been confident in his ability to adjust to any situation; to evaluate it, then equal or master it. But now he felt closer to despair and panic than he had been since that winter in Stalingrad when parents, ideals and childhood had all been taken away from him. Now his whole world and time were gone.

He struggled to keep what friend Napoleon would call his cool. What had and what was happening was obviously impossible. But it was just as obviously happening. Illya stretched to accept it; and gave himself a goal: get back to his own world.

His inner control somewhat restored, Illya turned his attention outward to the two soldiers. Gandimir was stage-whispering, "Trust him or not; at least take that weapon from him and find out what it is."

Illya grinned. "This, gentlemen, is a custom-made weapon issued to Section II agents of the United Network Command. Basically it is an automatic 38 pistol with the following modifications: a wire skeleton stock, a barrel extension with silencer, and a special adaptor on the grip enabling the gun to handle a clip holding twenty rounds--"

and I have a dozen or so more clips still in my pockets, Illya thought, continuing the memorized training lecture hoping to put the soldiers in a similar state of confusion as he had.

"--It fires anesthetic darts and incendiary

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soft-nosed, or armor-piercing bullets. It is now loaded with the last mentioned. As to how it works...."

Illywa was surprised at how fast the swords rasped out of their sheaths.

He looked for a target. The mist had lifted so that it hung as a red-tinged ceiling above their heads. A short distance away a fifteen foot high stone wall curved away to the left and right. His eyes settled on a redish stone surrounded by smaller grey stones. He raised the gun, sighted, squeezed.

Cough!

The rock had a crater in it that Bergil could rest his fist in.

The two soldiers were impressed. Gandimir looked sorry that he had brought up the subject at all and was determined not to say any more, not another word. Bergil stepped forward, doing his best to smile.

"Friend Illya, I think you would like to see King Elessar to tell him your story. However, to show your good faith, I think it would be best if you relinquished your weapon into my care. The King would be less sympathetic to your cause if you entered his presence armed."

Illya flicked on the safety and handed over his U.N.C.L.E. special. "Even in my world, Bergil, the wishes of kings are still respected."

Bergil turned to his companion. "Gandimir, you should be able to hold the gate until the Morning Watch arrives. I will take Illya Kuryakin before King Elessar, and will have need of your horse. I shall turn him over to the Watch to be returned to you when they come. Come with me, Illya."

Bergil led and Gandimir followed Illya through the gate. There, Bergil handed the gun to Gandimir and went into the walled shelter to the left of the gate. Gandimir tried firing the gun at the wall as he had seen Illya do. Nothing happened. He looked at Illya with more than a touch of fear.

Bergil led two horses, one grey, one burnt sienna, out from the shelter. He gave the reins of the brown to Illya. "This is Gandimir's horse, Harod. Ride him with skill and confidence and he will bear you well." He himself swung up into the saddle of the grey with an all too casual motion calculated to impress. "This is Felarof, named after the Father of Horses. He is as strong-willed and swift as a *mearas* of Rohan, as a royal horse who will allow himself to be ridden only by kings."

Illya could see Bergil placed a high value on both the horse and himself. With an exaggerated air of competence, Illya mounted Harod. He quieted the nervous horse, leaning forward and whispering a few low words in arabic while caressing the horse's neck.

Illya turned to Bergil who had retrieved the gun from the nervous Gandimir. "You also seem to be a good horseman, Illya Kuryakin," Bergil said. The two men smiled at one another.

"I am many things, Bergil son of Beregond."

The two cantered side by side along the road from the Wall to the Great Gate.

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The mist was well above them now and thinning to translucency. Green fields and small huts flanked the road. Ahead, still obscured by the mists, rose the dark shapes of the mountains. The dew-embossed grass was beginning to ripple over the roots of the mountains when Illya noticed the low, stark, naked mound of black earth.

Bergil noticed his charge's interest. "These are the Fields of Pelannor. Here, twenty-three years ago was fought the siege of Minas Tirith. There--" he pointed at the dead mound, "the Nazgul King slew Theoden, King of the Mark; and was in turn slain by Theoden's sister-daughter Eowyn and the Halfling Prince who had taken service as Rohan's King's squire.

"And there--" Bergil pointed toward a spot southward, near a turn in the river, "Rohan's new king, Eomer, and Gondor's returned king met in friendship against our foes as Aragorn himself had promised: 'Though all the hosts of Mordor lay between us.' I wager the King will wish he had had a few weapons such as yours at the time he fought here."

Illya rode on in silence wondering what great conflict had brought kings here to fight and die.

The mist was absorbed by the morning sky. The sun cast everything into sharp three dimensional reality. Where there had been dark shapes, now appeared mountains in white silhouette against the cobalt sky. Whiter than the Ered Nimras was the city carved into and built out from those mountains. Seven-leveled and seven-walled, it rose like a mountain pruned by a hard race of men to a place to live. It reminded Illya of medieval fortress towns he had seen in Italy; but harsher, stronger, as if its people had more to fear than warring princes confined to secular greeds.

"Minas Tirith."

On the seventh level stood a defiant tower of silver and pearl. More than a hundred feet it rose clean into the sky. From its battlements flew the flag of tree and stars, with a crown.

"That is the Tower of Ecthelion, our goal. There Aragorn Telcontar holds court."

The Great Gate to Minas Tirith was on the eastern face of the wall surrounding the city proper. An eastern thrusting ridge of stone divided all levels, save the first, into two halves, so the route to the seventh level swung south and north, each time passing through a narrow arched tunnel pushed through the natural barrier.

Finally Bergil led Illya out of the last of the shadows and reined in before the seventh gate. Bergil dismounted to meet the black surcoated guard who stepped forward. While his escort discussed the disposition of the horses, Illya swung off Harod's back and looked through the high arch with its royal visaged keystone. Bergil swept by, caught Illya's arm and led him across the white flagging of the courtyard.

The Russian was fascinated by a small grass park with fountain in the center of the paving stones. By the fountain grew an adolescent tree, silver leaved and green, with a crown of white blossoms ruffled by the morning breeze. The tree seemed odd amid the ancient architecture surrounding it.

Two more black cloaked guards swung open the tower doors. Bergil and Illya brushed through and down a long passageway. Bergil slipped inside the tall polished

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metal door at the passage's end. Interminable minutes passed. Illya and the guard of the door stared at one another. Finally Bergil pulled open the door.

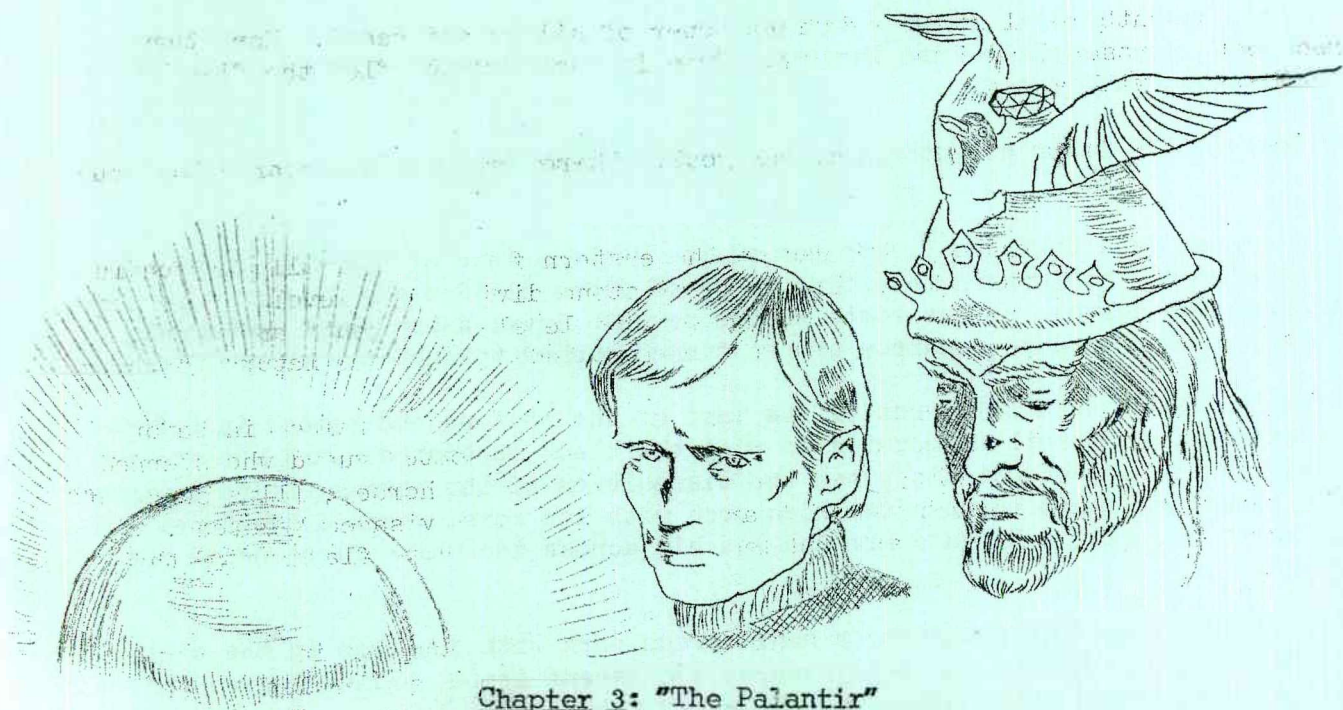
"King Elessar has been awake all this past night looking into the palantir. A threat to the two realms has appeared in the East, and he has been seeking aid through the seeing stone. He thinks you may be that help come to Gondor. Follow me; the King waits."

Light dropped through high windows into the long hall. No wall hangings absorbed the light as it splashed around the tall monolithic pillars of black marble and warmed the somber statues of former kings who watched from between the high columns. Footsteps echoed off the walls to be lost on their way to the dark ceiling.

First Illya noticed the low black stone chair on which sat a middle-aged warrior. Across his knees lay the U.N.C.L.E. special. In his right hand he held a white, golden-knobbed staff. Then Illya looked at the marble canopied dias behind the stone chair. Under the canopy was the high throne. On the throne sat a man.

On the man's weary head was a crown of silver with pearl wings, with seven diamonds set in the circlet, and with one flame-like jewel at its summit. The man's forearms rested on his knees. His hands cradled a dark crystal sphere. He looked deep into the stone at the glow in its elusive heart.

The warrior rose from the stone chair at the foot of the dias and stopped Bergil with the knob of his staff. Illya walked forward, up the step, onto the dias. The King's face turned upward. The eyes of Illya Kuryakin, section II agent for the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement met the eyes of Aragorn Telcontar, King Elessar of Arnor and Gondor.



Chapter 3: "The Palantir"

The face was that of a man in his forties; the eyes of a man twice that age. The eyes examined Illya's clothes, his poise, his face, and seemed to bore into his mind.

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Chapter 3: "The Palantir"

Illya is questioned by Aragorn. Asked just what it was he did in his own world, Illya replies with a brief history of THRUSH and the U.N.C.L.E.-THRUSH conflict (for those readers who don't know from U.N.C.L.E.). The explanation is in simplistic terms that Illya feels the King will understand. (see McDaniel's *DAGGER AFFAIR*, pp. 87-91)

It seems a century ago in the great western nation of England, one called The Professor* arose to turn his genius to spreading a net of evil across that nation and the neighboring western lands. The Professor was to turn his attention to the new world across the western seas when one rose to oppose him. Through sheer will power, the other thwarted the Professor's schemes. Finally the two met in mortal combat and, by the narrowest margin, the Professor was thrown down.

But the lieutenants of evil he had created lived on after him. They set up THRUSH to enslave the world. Many conflicts at the turn of the century hid THRUSH's early activities as it quietly grew in strength and extended its power. Only a few men realized that a metanational force threatened the world. They too recruited and worked in secret, planning a great counter-strategy network to preserve law and order. After a second global conflict, these men came into the open as the U.N.C.L.E. Twenty years of secret conflict has served only to create a balance of power. U.N.C.L.E., which had the disadvantage of starting on the defensive, is slowly tipping the scales of history its way. And Illya is a soldier in this behind the scenes war, hidden from the majority of the peoples of the world.

Aragorn understands all too enthusiastically for Illya's taste. Aragorn is sure Illya is the one sent by the Valar (?) to help The Two Kingdoms, to save all that is fair in Middle Earth from falling into unrelieved darkness. Illya, who was looking for help himself, is put off by this. He doesn't know what Aragorn is talking about when he says Illya is like the hobbits were in the War of the Ring. (The parallel being Illya's innocence [in Middle Earth terms], his inner strength, and the fact he is an uncalculated factor in the struggle.

Aragorn hands Illya the palantir:

"The unexpected weight drew Illya's eyes down into the stone. It seemed as if the great hall around him was dissolving into sheets of upward rushing blue. An elusive spark pulled Illya ever deeper into the stone, falling ahead of him through matrices of blue-, indigo-, violet-crystal until it struck bottom, splashing outward in a spray of light, of lines that fell back upon themselves to form a face.

"The face was old and exhausted beyond age and belief. It belonged to a race that could have been gods had it not chosen to accept the responsibility of the agencies of younger races that followed it; the youngest of all, the one blessed by death, that knew itself as men.

"Illya passed through the merging grey-blue eyes with the ease of light slipping into clear water. And something in Illya twisted, became a bubble of Olorin's thought. A bubble on whose surface was played a charade of history; a drama of emotions--of hope and despair--that is usually fettered in dead details."

What follows is a running synopsis of LotR told from Gandalf's point of view. Simultaneously, with flow of information from Gandalf to Illya, some of Illya's memories leak the other way. Interleaved with the Ring synopsis is a story of Illya's childhood. Starting with the repeated cry of AWAKE! FEAR! FIRE! FOES! AWAKE! we cut to July 1941 and a village less than 100 miles from Stalingrad awaiting the Germans. Illya's father goes off to Stalingrad. The Germans come. Winter comes. His mother dies (and Gandalf dies). Illya tries to trek across the Russian

*Professor, with its implication of knowledge of and mastery of natural law, comes across as warlock or male witch.

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winter country in search of his father. The Russians are beginning to break through into Stalingrad. Illya, hungry, wrapped in a greatcoat taken from a dead German, fatigued, faints in the snow. As the eagles--and a peasant family finds the half-dead Illya and tells him the Russians are chasing the Germans away--Illya slumps unconscious to the floor of the great throne hall in Minas Tirith.*

For background, see Alexander Werth's *Russia at War 1914- 1945*. Part five deals with the Battle of Stalingrad. Of particular interest are pages 484-89 of the chapter of "Stalingrad Close-Ups." (Reference to the Avon edition)

*Illya's failure to reach his father was due largely to lack of preparation. The guilt he felt was one of the reasons he became determined to master any situation he might find himself in. It is a memory he keeps to himself.

Chapter 4: "The Council of Aragorn"

Illya wakes in an apartment in the citadel. Bergil, who has been detailed to guard and guide Illya, tells him that the King is holding council, waiting only Illya's presence to start.

Aragorn, Faramir, Eomer, and old Beregond are the chief personages present at the council. Meriadoc Brandbuck, present in Minas Tirith on a visit with the King, is not told of the council. The king does not want the news he is to reveal to get back to the Shire. It might make Sam feel that the entire Quest with Frodo had been meaningless.

Beregond is first to speak. He tells how, not many days before, along the road from Minas Tirith to Osgiliath, rode a warder of Ithilien lashed to his horse. The man was dead from torture and morgul-blade wound. Burnt onto the skin of his beast was a message, a challenge.

Beregond brought the body to Faramir, who sent a messenger to Rohan, to Edoras and King Eomer. Faramir and Beregond brought the body to Minas Tirith. Eomer galloped into the city the following night.

The challenge was to Aragorn. In mocking tones, it recalled the Challenge of the Witch King to Earnur that resulted in that King's death and the start of the rule of the Stewards in the South. This, too, was a challenge to single combat between King Elessar Telcontar and the one who signs himself The Dark Wraith. The combat to take place "by the inland sea" the following March on the anniversary of the supposed downfall of the Dark Lord, Sauron.

Illya sees the note as some kind of scare propaganda but is disturbed by its implications. The King is all for going to the combat. The others advise against it; Faramir having no desire to re-establish the rule of the Stewards. Illya suggests a scouting expedition to discover just what is happening, and to discover the identity of the Dark Wraith.

After much discussion, the idea is approved. Illya and Bergil are to ride off into the East, discover the nature of the threat, and report back to Minas Tirith by January. (It is now early October, the close of Indian summer.) Since it is assumed the threat lies in Mordor, and the sea mentioned is dark Nurnen hid deep within two files of guardian mountains deep within the slaggy guts of Mordor, Bergil and Illya will be, in part, re-tracing the steps of Frodo and Sam's Quest.

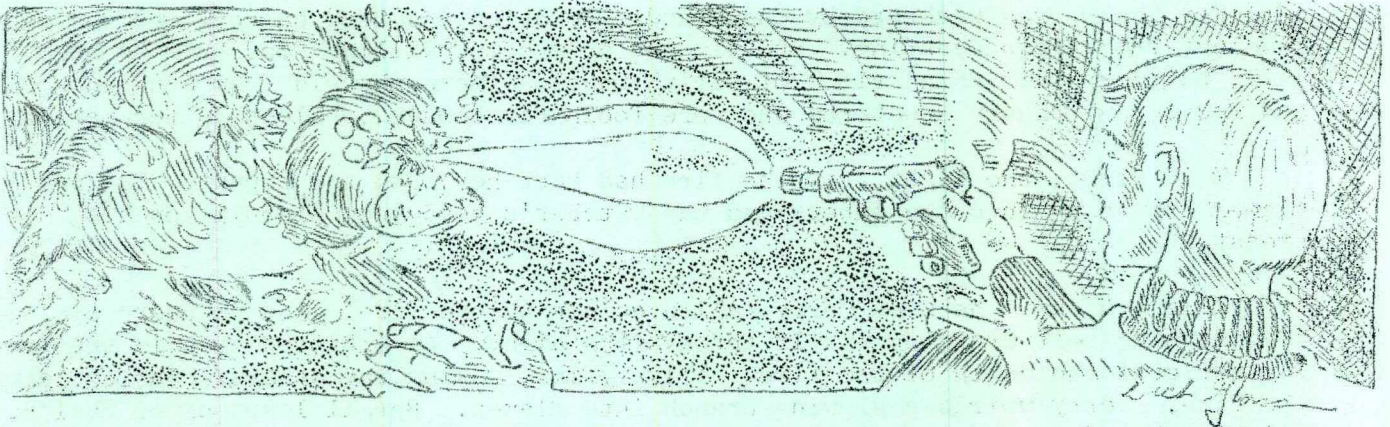
Two mornings later, the two men from Gondor ride northward on the road. As the day grows old and they near Osgiliath, fog begins to cover them. They set up a damp

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gray camp on the island. As they fix dinner, they hear furtive cloppings of a horse whose rider is sneaking close upon their trail. Illya crouches out of sight with his U.N.C.L.E. special, Bergil pretending to be a simple King's messenger.

As the figure on horseback draws near, he hails Illya and Bergil by name. It is Meriadoc, who laughs at the two men's fear of him, remembering back when he frightened Frodo and Sam and Farmer Maggot. He heard about the Quest and wants to see Mordor for himself. He is welcomed into the company.

SECTION II: THE TWO POWERS



Chapter 5: "The Flight to the Fjord"

Meanwhile Napoleon Solo is over the pole on his way to Oslo as an U.N.C.L.E. courier. He has the window seat. Seated next to him is an old man, who has fallen asleep. Napoleon can't sleep; Illya's death is still gnawing at his mind. Besides he has to go the john, but doesn't want to wake up the old man, who showed a remarkable tendency earlier to run off at the mouth with a candor and a monotony Solo does not want to start again. Finally he gives in. The old man wakes and mutters indelicate comments at Solo's back as he goes down the aisle. As the passengers all wake and stare at him, Napoleon tries to keep his cool by thinking to himself: *After all, I am a secret agent. I could be going there to send a secret message that would save the world.*

Making sure that Napoleon has entered the john, the old man seems to fall back asleep. Actually he sends a little electronic signal that discharges the gas pellet he had previously planted in the head. The gas gives Napoleon the symptoms of a stroke. The old man then tells THRUSH Central NW Europe that phase one of plan to capture the Oslo courier is complete; to have the ambulance and doctors waiting.

He then requests a few guards, just in case. The plan has netted THRUSH a bonus--and quite a feather for the Oslo satrapy's cap--Napoleon Solo.

Chapter 6: "Shelob's Lair"

The small company sets out early the next day toward Mordor. At the close of the second day, they come to Cirith Ungol and the Mordor end of the Morgul vale. It is a landmark, a sight and perhaps a clue can be found to the new activities of the Dark Wraith. The decision is made to camp in Cirith Ungol for the night.

The tremblings that caused cave-ins throughout the circuitous crypts of Shelob's domain no more killed her than did the near mortal thrust of Sting. She was a

endurable evil; she who in ages past escaped the drowning of the elf lands. She dwelt and swelled in darkness across the centuries, feeding on orcs and men brought from nearby Cirith Ungol. But then Mount Doom loosed its fires and the land trembled and the Dark Lord was thrown down at his moment of triumph. And no more food was thrown into Shelob's lair.

Finally, desperate, she who hated the sun and moon ventured forth one overcast moonless night in search of food. She was attracted to the tower where some scattered chaff of Sauron's forces had encamped. Two, the lucky ones, died; others were paralyzed with the spider's venom and kept to assuage later hunger; one fled to the roof where he starved in fearful madness.

For Shelob was weakened by the wound from Sting and from hunger, and was made indolent from fresh feasting. She did not drag her unwilling food back to her lair; but deep into foundations of Cirith Ungol. There she hid from Sun and Moon and fed on any unwary creatures who were foolhardy enough to sleep in her parlor.

This night, the light from the fire had kept her from her repast. But now flames drew back into the embers and the watcher's head fell sleeping on his breast.

Illya awakens. He sees Merry fallen asleep by the fire. And he hears the sound of something soft dragging itself through the night. An orbit of eyes in the doorway reflects the death of the fire. Illya yells, waking the others. Shelob leaps the fire. Merry whirls a glowing branch into flames. Bergil leaps after Shelob, pricking her from the rear to draw her away from Illya. Bergil drops to the side. Shelob jumps at Merry. He throws the burning brand at her eyes. She lands in the embers, scattering them about the hall.

A false dawn starts to grow in the East. Shapes and shadows feint and fade in the half light as Illya grabs up his U.N.C.L.E. special and waits for a clear shot. Finally the moment comes. Armour-piercing bullets tear through her eyes, ripping the bloated sack of her body. This time Shelob is dead.

But as the three companions stagger from the stench of the hall into first glow of true dawn, Bergil spots a high, silent-flying, black-winged shape.

Chapter 7: "The Plateau of Gorgoroth"

Illya, Bergil and Merry press on into Mordor, heading southeast across the plateau of Gorgoroth, past the corpse of Mount Doom. As they trek across the lava flows, the mix-mastered geology of Mordor, they notice the silent high-flying shapes pacing them day by day. It seems too easy, too pat to Illya. Because the last threat came from Mordor, it was assumed that "the inland sea" in the challenge referred to the Sea of Murnen in Mordor. Yet it could also refer to the Sea of Rhun, northeast of Mordor. The message was intentionally misleading. Once any advance force was sent out, a second, more clearly worded message would draw the King, unguarded, into the Wraith's trap. And Illya's party is being deliberately herded southward, away from their real goal.

Chapter 8: "The Black Gate Closes"

The three walked about face and head north, hoping to leave through the now shattered Black Gate. They find a large force of men and orcs (alerted by the high flyers) waiting for them. Illya's discourteous guerrilla tactics and his U.N.C.L.E. special give the walkers a slight edge. The battle is finished hand-to-hand, and

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the walkers carry the day. They find, about the neck of the leader of the scouting band, a brass collar on which is crudely embossed a circle and the words: *One Ring to rule them all!*

Book Three: "THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE WING"

Chapter 9: "Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire"

Meanwhile, back in Oslo, Napoleon Solo is having fun eluding the THRUSH people trying to kill him. He is, at the end of the chapter, overcome by superior minds and captured.

Chapter 10: "The Road to Rhun"

Meriadoc is sent back to tell Aragorn what information has been gleaned to this point. Illya and Bergil don the accoutrements of two of the slain Orc soldiers and continue northward to the Sea of Rhun. They meet another band of marauding Orcs, blend themselves in, slay them one-by-one in a long night march, then question the survivor.

Chapter 11: "The Gathering of the Clouds"

Illya and Bergil force the surviving Orc to take them directly to the Wraith's camp. They come out upon the western shore of the Sea of Rhun. They see on the eastern shore high cliffs dropping almost directly to shore. Using his telescopic sight, Illya scans the far shore. At the top of the cliffs are great A-frames from which hang heavy weights. Next to the A-frames are winch structures for winding the weight back up to the top of the cliffs. Leading back from the frames are long, slotted ramps. On the ramps, dragon-like gliders, gravity launched from the cliffs to catch the updrafts from the Sea.

Chapter 12: "A Conspiracy Unmasked"

In trying to get to the gliders, Illya and Bergil are captured. They are taken before the Wraith.

The Wraith's story: As Barad-Dur fell and Mordor shook, one lone orc soldier was separated from his band. For days he wandered, eating plants and what carrion meat he could find. He stumbled across one of the lava flows from Mount Doom. There he found a melted lozenge of gold: THE ONE RING! The Ring whose sole purpose is to protect itself. The Ring, which drained the power from all other rings into itself in an effort to survive, and almost succeeded. Not knowing why, the orc dug out the melted lump and hung it on a chain about his neck.

The Ring forced him to travel out of Mordor into the wooded northeast where the orc could survive. The Ring drew enough power from the life-force of the orc to draw back to itself the weak and impotent shadow of Sauron. For years now, Sauron has grown stronger. He has planned and built. Had the dragons lived, he could have still won The War. Now he is ready to unleash his new secret weapon of Air Power and bring the lands of the West under his dominion.

THE HABIT

Book Four: "THE HABIT--or--THERE AND BACK AGAIN"

Chapter 13: "A Shot in the Dark"

Napoleon Solo awakens in a basement storage room with a gun-wielding woman standing over him. She has two large toughs with her. He is very tied up, very weak from both drugs and physical punishment; he is most completely trapped by THRUSH. His witty sayings and masculine charm avail him nothing. There is no way he can be rescued. The woman has him kneel in front of her. The sound of a shot fills the room.

Chapter 14: "The Departure of Sauron"

The imprinting of middle earth history on Illya's mind was more than it seemed. He has been possessed by Gandalf. From out of Illya rises Gandalf, from out of the orc rises Sauron. The two battle pyrotechnically. (As they battle, the gliders are launched.) Gandalf wins, dispersing Sauron. Illya concludes his hand-to-hand-with the orc. Gandalf orders Illya to take the ring; he is innocent in this world and will not be harmed by the short exposure.

Chapter 15: "The Clouds Burst"

Now all Illya has to do is take the one glider Bergil prevented from being launched to keep the Dark Air Force from reaching the West. Some he shoots down, but he is wasting shells. He maneuvers the rest into the rising thunderheads. But he himself flies too close and is trapped within the thunder. Whirled down toward certain death, he passes once more through a blast of white lightning.

Chapter 16: "The Scouring of the Satrap"

Illya awakens behind a crate in the shadows of the basement in Oslo. He reorients himself, listening to the exchange between Solo and THRUSH agents. As the THRUSH agent is about to execute Solo, Illya rises from behind the crate and fires. Solo faints.

Solo awakens, sees Illya's face bending over him. "You were dead, you know," Solo says accusingly. Illya has no answer to this.

"Where the hell have you *been*?"

"There and back again."

Solo digests that for a moment, realizing he will never know more. "Don't make a habit of it," he says, and lapses back into unconsciousness.

-----the end-----