

BEGINNERS

A NOVEL BY ANDREAS INGO



BEGINNERS

A NOVEL BY ANDREAS INGO

HITLER GERMANY

It was the two of us. Reinhardt and me. We were playing chess. This extraordinary game of many clever tricks and developments. My name was Ronald Eisenberg. I was a middle-age man with a happy face. Reinhardt and I (that was a bit younger than me) were playing chess in a basement. Below the city surface. In the central parts of Berlin.

Reinhardt was a partly silent man. So different from me that eagerly had many comments regarding the game. Regarding chess strategy and tactics. Piece development and other things. We were playing ordinary games and fast games. To unveil the secrets of the game. Still we were not especially good at it.

In an early October morning we met an American that was something of a master player. On a cafe when the morning light came shining into the windows of the building. He had many comments regarding our weaknesses as chess players. And he told us that the game unveiled secrets towards living a happy life. Even outside the game.

“See here how you both are thinking.” He said, “That you mix up strategy and tactics. That your thinking is imprecise. And that you think the game is something reserved for middle-age players.”

“We are just a relaxed couple of friends.” I said.

“You seem to be so.” Travis said, “But the game gets more interesting in time.”

We offered Travis a lemon juice drink and kept talking about many subjects. It turned out that this American was a soldier and he talked about military operations in Europe. A war machine building power in several countries. It was a scary time. A time were many people were reflecting on the first world war and that it was time to wake up to global events. Leading many to assume hard times would emerge on the European continent.

“Why do you say this?” I asked the American soldier, “Is it not better to assume a positive outlook on the world? And to get more basic?”

The American soldier didn't answer to this. With a grinning face. We were offered free drinks in return and we had some coffee too.

“Troubled times?” I thought to myself.

2

FISHING

I kept to myself a great deal of time. Going around in a fishing boat to catch some fish I would prepare for dinner. The lake was a smoky stage of a low mist surrounding the lake containing islands. I was a happy man but I had several problems. The game of chess was fun but it was only chess after all.

Earlier I had had some soup, shampoo and a shower. After a good aftershave I used some perfume to make myself fit for female encounters. But the countless tries to cause attraction had been problematic. It happened that I came to wonder how anyone could succeed in getting interest from the opposite sex.

Reinhardt and I were two lonely men using chess as a good distractor. To escape the burdens of life just a little bit. To test our minds using fun problems in order to melt together with the conscious streams of thoughts in the front part of the brain. Yeah, we were a bit crazy. Sometimes I talked a lot. I used old clothing creating a soft feeling. We were not ordinary players. Sometimes we joined another party to cultivate our minds with younger players.

And sometimes they won.

A day later I walked the city streets of Berlin to watch huge posters hanging upon the walls of central buildings. A man called Adolf Hitler had prepared a political arrangement in the central parts of the city. He was well spoken, well dressed. Using language to wake interest for change in these troubled times. I enjoyed his talk too. Still a vague sensation of turmoil kept turning within my heart. That this Hitler was a man of action. Of heroism and a promoter of a higher form of culture. Still I couldn't formulate a good opinion of him.

I felt distressed.

3

AT A RESTAURANT

I had a dinner at a central restaurant where I ordered fish and some potatoes. A dish with a sauce that kept me thinking that ordinary food was a good option. The potatoes with the fish and some brown sauce. A Swedish dish that tasted comfortable. Using codfish from Bothnia.

I kept wondering and dreaming. About conquests in chess, about the strange proclamations by the national socialist group.

The first world war had been devastating for the German people. Loosing the first world war to France primarily. The prices had gone up. Some people were starving. And I had some money from relatives living closer to the south border. There were talks about the politics of the national socialist group. A group of political thinkers inspired by fascism.

I ate my dinner and a female servant came forward to ask me for payment. I paid for the dinner and also asked if there were available work known by her. In the restaurant or in other places.

“Why so?” She asked me. “Hitler will see to it that people like you get work in time.”

I didn't know what to say about this. I didn't know much of the roots of the national socialist group. But they talked about the necessity for political change. Equipping all citizens with job opportunities. Demanding a good contribution in turn but still being just to the ones supporting the state.

It seemed needed.

4

IN A SMOKY ATTIC

Reinhardt and I were playing again. We were playing a fast game with time constraints. I pushed my knight upon the third rank followed by two pawns and a Bishop to create a solid centre structure. Reinhardt had counter-measures to these moves. It was a solid opening but later a bad defeat as my chess opening theory had holes in it.

“You pushed one of your pawns forward too fast in the game.” He said to me, “Moving the same pawn twice you see.”

“I didn't have time to think about it.” I said, “But I can see your point yes.”

“The best players move in other directions.”

We went silent and had cigars creating a smoky stage. The smoke created variations of shadows making the attic light bend. It was a silent moment. A time where Reinhardt opened up just a bit.

“You see this Hitler is a good man.” He said to me, “He understands the factor of unemployment. Still I can’t formulate a good opinion about the national socialist group he represents.”

“I don’t know about politics.” I said and looked down upon the board.

“The country needs a better economy.” Reinhardt said.

We took a couple of more puffs on our cigars and comfortably looked down upon the pieces on the board. We liked the game as it presented opportunities to analyse and think in new directions. Still we couldn’t see the connection to real life as the American player had suggested.

Weeks later I was driving my green Mercedes along the Berlin tarmac leading to the countryside. It was raining. The radio of the car received music content from a close by radio tower. I started to see a procession of walkers that had posters depicting Hitler and the new national socialist party.

They had smiling faces. Young people walked with older ones. And they were coming together to push for a larger cause.

This procession of walkers made a bold imprint upon my mind. My mind educated in chess and some form of human connection. That these people had something to build against. A larger power. A sense of direction I surely lacked as I missed good opportunities. A chance for work. A chance for a good woman. Something eerie and peculiar was felt in the air.

I was thinking about starting a chess competition with other players.

INTERROGATED

As it turned out Reinhardt and I got to create a local event for chess players in the close by area. Different forms of people attended the event. There were younger players, some older ones and also female players that attended the event due to their newfound interest in chess games.

Reinhardt and I were a little bit surprised by this fact. We played against one of them and one woman beat me by a good margin. As if she understood chess theory and practise much more in depth compared to me.

After the actual games we had some snacks and a couple of drinks where I hesitantly confronted this woman.

“What did you do that made you advance beyond my pawn structure?” I asked the woman.

“I put much more effort in tactics compared to strategy.” She said, “You male players think too much in terms of strategy.”

The woman was a young player with a white dress and a nice haircut. Resembling something of a Parisian beauty model. I was really impressed by her comment and not a little bit scared too.

“Yes.” I continued, “We male players tend to get a little bit too abstract.”

As the evening progressed new games were played and some of the old ones got tired from the game. A door was opened and a group of police officers came into the building. Using firearms and huge poles to search for Reinhardt and me.

“What do you want?” I asked one of them.

“We have heard that this event have captured the interest of political dissidents.” The male police officer said. “You are taken for arrest.”

When we arrived at the police station we saw huge posters containing images of Hitler and the Swastika. A turbulent atmosphere of dogs barking, people running around shouting orders and others standing in line became threatening to me. We hadn't done anything and as we explained we were just ordinary chess players.

“Chess players!” I said for effect.

But I was put to silence by threatening remarks.

“You can't play chess in suspected buildings.” The police officer said, “Free-thinkers, suspicious game players and other dissidents can't be tolerated under national socialism. You can have a job though.”

Reinhardt and I were put under interrogation. And it was a long procedure where we had to explain why we played the game and why American soldiers had joined the game temporarily.

Foreign people could only be tolerated with a civil stance.

The police officers soon had to accept our explanations. That we even thought Hitler was a good man. That the party offered good solutions to the unemployment. The threat from other countries and so on.

Days later we were on our own again.

6

WORK

We didn't know about Hitler. We didn't know the intricate work of politics, warfare and national economics. But we needed work. We needed time to immerse ourselves in life beyond the game. Meeting women, making contacts. Making our presence felt by employees in the Berlin region.

Still we had trouble finding work on our own. As things developed though jobs were offered to us from the national socialist party.

It was work in a cloth factory that made uniforms suitable for soldiers fighting for Hitler as a matter of national security. We were introduced to the jobs. Were presented before our employer beside the fact that we were nervous. Uncanny. Not adept to work in ways suitable for the national socialist party.

In breaks between gruelling work hours we had a chance to play chess with other workers but were put down by security police that had detected a certain sense of deviance in the way we spoke to others. That we had some experience but had to tone down the intricate notions about the game.

"It is free-thinking." They said, "It is better to have faith in the party and to work along others. And feeling happy in a national socialist state."

"We will." Reinhardt said.

At home I went up to the attic to have a couple of cigars, some cognac and a couple of cigarettes to add to that. Smoking was not prohibited by the regime. Drinking was allowed. So was singing (singing songs to build morale) and listen to composers such as Richard Wagner.

Art was allowed. Chess playing was allowed. But not the dissident structure of our own temperament.

We had to ease down. Assume responsibility of not thinking for ourselves.

Politics was a subject related to politicians of the party. War intel was for higher ranked military officers. And the people just had to work. Join the social welfare of the state, meeting women and having babies.

The doctrine of the national socialist party described humans as intelligent animals. They lived to survive and to reproduce. Describing the aim to human life to survive and reproduce and to serve the state for its own good. In time though this policy became too hard for Reinhardt and me to muster. We lived for free thought.

Free spirits digesting international press in order to inform ourselves of both sides of the conflict. It was peace time but the regime were building tanks for war. Educating the young ones. To advance for a better position to survive the hard times from the past.

People had to work. We had to comply. And chess was too difficult of a game to support believers.

Or so the employer of the work force said.

7

A FIRM GRIP ON THE GUN

I had a gun in a drawer in my bedroom. It was a black gun. A model suitable for detective work, or for a police officer walking the streets of Berlin needing personal safety. The gun had a bad mechanism. I oiled it. I took care of it to shoot a couple of shots in the peasant region away from Berlin.

I shot on targets. Pushing my weak heart to accept the notion of a possible getaway. Freedom was something related to the past. Reinhardt joined me. He had a large knife and a shotgun used for hunting. We took those weapons and dragged my green Mercedes out from my garage the next night.

It was a silent night of evil and wonder. A gruelling trajectory to a foreign country. But we were intercepted by a lone police officer watching our home from the comfort of a house nearby.

He went upon us. Took up his pistol to shoot a couple of shots. He missed my ankle but hit the green Mercedes instead. We ran for him. I emptied my lonely gun into the black haze of night. Hitting him in the shoulder.

Reinhardt ran against him with his knife as the police officer reached for his radio. Reinhardt had to use his rifle. He shot a couple of shots with the rifle and put the police officer lying on the ground.

I closed up upon him. To shot a killing shot in his head.

But the police officer was moving. He took up a knife to throw it into my direction. And with a pained expression I held up the gun, pushed force to the trigger and emptied my pistol upon the young man's head.

We left the place and drove along the night to the French border. Where we were checked for anomalies but the guns had been thrown out along the way.

We left Germany as ordinary German citizens.

Leaving Germany.

Leaving imprisonment.

To find shelter in an alien country unknown by us.

It was payday.