



## The Conspiration



fficer Carlo Orrei walked slowly into Borgia's apartment. There Generalissimo Leo Bruno, head in chief of the Vatican army, the *Divine Force*, was waiting for him. The blinds of the hall were closed, yet a yellow and orange light, faint artificial, spread from every corner. Bruno was sitting on a golden throne in Egyptian style, floating six feet high in the air. Over it, scenes of Pinturicchio frescos sparkling in thousands of colors, enlightened by a bioluminescent paint, harmless for parget and color. All around, butterflies of any kind and shape were flying with soft and delicate dances, moths as *atlas* and *grelsiaes isabellae*, the metal-blue winged diurnal *morphos* and the iridescent *uranidaes*, maybe excited by the wonderful scent emanating from the walls of the ancient apartment.

The soldier finally arrived in front of his superior. Orrei looked young and well-built in his military outfit, a luxurious variation of an old Swiss guard uniform, while the Generalissimo was naked, except for a scarlet loincloth and a white mantle, which made him appear just a bit older than an adolescent. Surely his musculature was sturdy, that of a warrior. But his face was angel-like, and surrounded by golden curls. The look in his eyes was as blue as the sky and charming. It was impossible to stare at him without falling into a hypnotic state. There was a ruby clustered in a sapphire, shining between his extremely long and thin eyebrows. This combination of gems was called Ajna Ein Sof using a refined mixture of language and tradition.

It was said that the jewel made his telepathic powers even more effective and could expand every extrasensory ability of his mind. Nothing, in beauty and splendor, compared to the emerald lace around his neck. The jewel stood out on his tanned and bright skin. It had the shape of a sword, from whose blade a tree sprang up. Its name was a strange mix of Sanskrit and Hebrew: *nefesh visudha*. This precious object represented the true symbol of Leo Bruno's power, far more than the *Mitra of the Divine Force* or *susumna binah*, an uncomfortable but lavish headdress with a platinum egg on its top. Its use was exclusively limited to military meetings.

Carlo Orrei took a deep bow and started his report: "Our investigations, so far, undoubtedly lead to people above suspicion. They are plotting against you, *Excellency*. They hold very high positions in the Vatican hierarchy; there is no ultimate evidence, but the enemy is much closer than you expected him to be. He's here, within these very walls. Everybody dreads you by now, even those who granted your power."

"Except for Cardinal Osvaldo Mezzi."

"Except for Mezzi, however, who based the entire investigation on unclear evidence initially."

"Mezzi has the sixth sense of a witch. He suspects a plot before it is even planned," laughed the *Generalissimo*, and a swallow-tailed butterfly came and rested on his bejeweled hand, just like a flower.

"Yes, and he was right. Mezzi had suspected Cardinal Cesare Monatti, the closest person to you, your intimate friend and ideologist of your power."

"Friend!?! Reading in his mind I always learned not to trust him but to use him as much as I could. I needed a theological reason for the entry of Artecraz and Tecnocraz in the New Universal Church. And he found it. The theologian, the treacherous theologian, did a great job for me. Artecraz and Tecnocraz are ours. Thanks to these two churches everything will be easier. Artecraz will put at my disposal infinite series of masterpieces now filling the bank vaults of the world, and this will mean taking control of the worldwide finance. Tecnocraz will provide me with very advanced technologies, as well as international teams committed in very different fields and addressable to fresh lines of research.

Monatti's contribution was essential. A real pity! Now he is no longer useful. He will go down in history as the greatest theologian of all time, but at the moment he is but a problem and, let me say, a real danger. He is now a deadly puppet in the hands of my biggest and treacherous enemy, pope Paolo VII.

In any case, I haven't thanked you for your work yet."

At this point, in the half-light of the room, the officer noticed two women in very luxurious dresses and extreme in elegance, if compared to the nakedness of the *Generalissimo*. Their hats were funny in style and covered with shining sapphires and diamonds. Their silhouettes were well defined in the soft, warm and prehistoric light diffused by Himalayan salt lamps. And their glamorous faces, finally, looked as white as snow.

"Asmodeo! Open the window."

The Generalissimo gave the order to an invisible being, hidden in the darkest corner of the room. And so officer Carlo Orrei realized that the odd sound he had heard on the threshold of the throne room came from the wings of an android angel, a golden skinned putto, twenty inches tall, whose name was the one of a powerful daemon.

The afternoon sun came in and enlightened the Generalissimo who was there by the window. His necklace of emeralds glared delightfully in the light, which reflected thousands of colors on the damask textile of the two priestesses, she-Cardinal Elena Tebaldi and she-Archbishop Amalia Smithsonian, two powerful representatives of the Muses of God, the mystical harem the Generalissimo had assembled.

“You like my necklace, I can see. Come, let me give it to you.”

As if he was hypnotized, and maybe he really was, having met the Generalissimo’s look more than once, Orrei approached the throne.

Leo Bruno took his necklace off and put it around his loyal knight’s neck, as the two women were watching with perplexity. Certainly those gems didn’t look good on the soldier’s neck, and the jewel, as if it was a living thing, almost gave the impression of being resented for that improbable change of property. The butterflies began to fly around the new owner nervously yet harmoniously, as if he was a huge flower. One of them, in particular, the bright green one, was looking greedy of the young officer’s smell. Or maybe of that superb jewel, assuming that emeralds could smell, like orange-blossoms or jasmines. But all of a sudden the soldier screamed. The butterfly had allegedly stung him on the carotid.

The soldier fell to the floor and twisted for a few seconds, as if an invisible beast was devouring his flesh. Then, nothing more. His body stiffened and he stared lightless, and petrified.

“He’s dead”, said Amalia Smithsonian, while Elena Tebaldi was setting her eyes on the green butterfly flying circles in the middle of the room.

The insect looked very fast and very intelligent. The woman took out a decorated lace fan from her loose sleeve and brandished it like a small yet deadly weapon of some ninja warrior. She waved it around the Lepidoptera slowly, then, as quick as a lightning, she hit the creature, which crashed on the floor.

The insect died instantly, the woman picked it up and handed it to the Generalissimo. Staring at it with his blue eyes, the man said: “*vanessa extraordinaria*.” I created this specimen myself, almost ten years ago. It was a gift for our Pope Paolo VIII. At that time a peaceful trust linked the authorities and I certainly was not yet an

obstacle to his empire.

But it was manipulated with genes of ichneumon and cobra, the shape of its sting and the smell of its poison leave but few doubts. Nobody must come in here!"

Then he jumped off the throne, his mantle just like a cloud of white silk in the air. He walked around the corpse several times, then he knelt by. He inspected the lifeless body, taking off his clothes one by one. Wide and scarlet spots appeared from his shoulders to his pubis, as far as the internal part of the thighs, like the epidermal geography of a mysterious death.

"A cocktail of poisons," commented the Generalissimo observing the corpse "Not cobra's only." The soldier's body, completely naked, the very pale skin and the scars everywhere gave an ominous impression.

The Generalissimo turned to Amalia Smithsonian, whose hat, in the shape of an overturned cone, very high and ending with a diamond, cast a long shadow on Carlo Orrei's struggling face.

"Hand me two internal detectors"; the woman obeyed, looking for something in the hidden pocket of her bell-flared skirt. She was unusually calm, despite the tragic situation, while Elena appeared more dismayed; having killed the deadly butterfly with her fan, now she was observing the scene with disgust. Finally Amalia took out two little objects, which looked like Egyptian onyx scarabs. The Generalissimo slipped one of them in the mouth of the dead, the other one in his sphincter. The two things came to life and their six bionic legs began to operate inside, activating their cameras and chemical and biological minute laboratories situated in their heads and under their abdomens.

The Generalissimo's mind was able to detect their signals telepathically.

"The bowel, liver and spleen are partially exploded, the heart has unfastened from the chest, the brains are almost completely destroyed.

This poison was intended to kill a god, not a man."

"Intended to kill you, your Highness," Elena cried.

"My chosen officer. My trusted companion. They will have to pay for it," the man claimed, clenching his right fist and hitting the floor with such an unprecedented violence that the marble shattered into pieces, while his eyes filled with tears.

"I want Carlo to be cloned and delivered by a nun of the *Muses of God*, or, better, by the uterus of Persephone, the sacred mare. I hope the Uthcats were active when the murder took place" said the Generalissimo while pointing old oleo-graphic video

cameras in the shape of a human eye, embedded in large onyx plates.

“Of course, our Brightness, all has been recorded” Elena replied.

“You will send the Uthcat film to the Great Jury and the Flamen Universalis, while you will provide Osvaldo Mezzi with the results of the bio-chemical analysis on the corpse and on the killer butterfly. It’s a dangerous situation that requires the strictest secrecy. For the next few hours we will keep Carlo Orrei’s death a secret and will say he has been sent to Bucharest on a secret mission.

Now hide his corpse. Wait! I have an idea!”

The two priestesses feared those *ideas*. The Generalissimo used everything to express his lively creativity, even the corpse of a person he had cherished, as in this case. But he had to provoke the murderer.

The two women carried the corpse down to the basement, where a well-equipped laboratory was. They removed from Carlo Orrei, or better from what was left of him, large portions of tissues and his brains, then preserved in a cryogenetic box for future cloning. The rest of the body was liquefied and transformed into a big piece of soap, a heart-shaped red sculpture.

