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INTRODUCTION

The Second World War ended more than eighty years ago, and yet we are still finding out what really happened. That is a strange thing to say about the most documented conflict in human history, a war that produced millions of pages of official records, tens of thousands of books and enough film footage to fill years of continuous viewing. But documentation is not the same thing as truth. Much of what was recorded was recorded selectively, shaped by the needs of propaganda or the desire to avoid embarrassment. Much was destroyed - burned in the final weeks by men who knew what the files would prove. And much was locked away, sometimes for decades, by governments on both sides who decided the world was better off not knowing what they had done, or what they had failed to prevent.

This book is about the secrets that survived - the ones that were buried, hidden, disputed, denied or simply lost in the chaos of the war's end. It covers seventy-six cases, organised into eight parts, and every one of them asks the same question: what really happened?

The cases range across the entire war and beyond. There are weapons so advanced they seemed impossible, and weapons so absurd they seem like fiction. There are vanished men - dictators, generals, spies - whose fates were unknown for decades. There are lost treasures worth fortunes, hidden in mines, sunk in lakes and buried under mountains. There are operations so secret that the men and women who carried them out kept silent for the rest of their lives. There is the Pacific war, with its own hidden stories and its own uncomfortable truths. And there is the long, strange aftermath: the escape routes, the hunters, the trials and the secrets that governments on both sides of the Cold War chose to bury rather than face.

Some of these stories will be familiar. The legend of Die Glocke, Hitler's death in the bunker, the Amber Room, the flight of Rudolf Hess - these are the cases that appear in every documentary and every online list. They form Part I of this book, and if you have read the Small Edition, you will recognise them. But you will not recognise the chapters. Every one of the fifteen cases in Part I has been rewritten from the ground up, expanded to nearly twice its original length, with new material that the shorter version deliberately left out: additional witnesses, competing theories, deeper timelines, the aftermath of each case and the connections between them. If the Small Edition told you what happened, Part I of this book tells you how we know.

Parts II through VIII go further. They contain sixty-one cases that do not appear in the Small Edition at all. Part II examines the real weapons that Germany built - not the legends, but the documented machines that reached the battlefield or came within months of doing so, from the V-2 rocket that crossed into space to the thousand-ton tank that never left the drawing board. Part III takes on the myths and legends of the Reich: the occult stories, the Vril Society, the Antarctic base, and the people who invented these stories and why. Part IV

CHAPTER 1: THE BELL: THE SECRET OF DIE GLOCKE

Near the village of Ludwikowice in the hills of Lower Silesia, in what is now south-western Poland, a strange ruin stands among the pine trees. It is a ring of heavy concrete columns, roughly ten metres tall, joined at the top by a thick reinforced beam. The whole structure is about thirty metres across. It has no roof. It has no obvious purpose. Moss and lichen cover the concrete, and the forest has grown close around it, giving it the look of something ancient, although it dates from the 1940s. Locals and visitors call it the Henge, and for more than two decades it has been the altar of one of the most persistent legends of the Second World War.

The legend is elaborate, and it deserves to be told properly before we examine it.

According to the story, the SS operated a research programme in the nearby Wenceslas mine, a network of tunnels cut into the hills. The programme was so secret that it carried a classification higher than anything applied to the V-weapons. Its centrepiece was a device shaped like a large bell - Die Glocke in German - standing roughly four to five metres tall and perhaps three metres across. It was made from a hard, heavy metal, possibly lined with ceramic. Inside the bell, two cylinders rotated at tremendous speed in opposite directions, filled with a metallic violet liquid known only by a codename that translates roughly as "Xerum-525."

When the device was activated, it emitted a pale blue-white glow and a low vibrating hum that could be felt in the chest from several metres away. It was extraordinarily dangerous. Plants placed within its field of effect decomposed into a grey slime within hours. Animals used in tests died. At least five of the scientists assigned to the project fell ill with symptoms that included vertigo, sleep disturbance, blood disorders and tissue breakdown, and several of them died. The area around the device had to be hosed down with brine after each test, and the test chamber was lined with ceramic tiles that were replaced every few weeks.

The purpose of the Bell, according to different versions of the legend, was anti-gravity propulsion, time manipulation, or the generation of a new form of energy. The concrete Henge in the forest, believers claim, was the external test rig - the frame that held the Bell steady while it attempted to lift itself from the ground. In the final days of the war, the SS is said to have murdered the sixty-two scientists and technicians who had worked on the project to ensure absolute secrecy. The Bell itself was loaded onto a large transport aircraft, a Junkers Ju 390, and flown out of Europe to an unknown destination. It has never been seen since.

It is, by any measure, a remarkable story. Now let us trace it to its source.