

Approx. 550 years ago...

Silhouettes of ships loomed on the horizon.

“And what are these devilish droppings? For the Griffin’s bow, Joachim, do you see what I see?”

King Eric tried to sharpen the telescope as much as possible, and then handed it over to his navigator.

The man put the telescope to his eye, pointing it in the same direction as the King a moment ago.

“They are your subjects, my lord,” he responded.

“My subjects? Nonsense! I am sailing now to my subjects! Those wild peasants from Sweden who took my crown never deserved to be my subjects!”

“I mean... Yes, sir, that’s right, it’s your former subjects. Swedes, indeed.”

“As I said! Those slothful peasants without balls, farmers without ploughs, poor deck-hands who dare to call themselves sailors want to race with me? With me? With the Emperor of the North?”

Joachim wanted to say something about the fact that Eric was called the Emperor of the North ten years earlier, and now... But he bit his tongue in time. It would cost him too much to make the king, even a dethroned one, aware of the painful truth. Too much. Literally. Besides... Eric doesn’t need to be made aware of anything. He knows perfectly well how it was and how it is now.

“You will never see the day!” Meanwhile Eric was threatening the ships chasing him. “We will have a boarding operation in a moment! A few new boats for my fleet in Darłowo will always be useful!”

“I do not believe, my lord, that a boarding operation is possible...” The navigator took the telescope from his eye and swallowed. “They... they are getting ready to fire...”

“What?” The ex-king snatched the telescope from his hand. “For my first wife’s grave...” For a moment he stared incredulously through the eyepiece, then he thrust the telescope back into Joachim’s hand and wildly cried aloud. “Hard-a-port!!!!”

Shouting with all their might, the sailors communicated this command to each other. The galleons laboriously began the manoeuvre. Meanwhile, the Swedish ships were getting closer.

Eric felt a trickle of sweat on his back. But he wouldn’t admit it to Joachim and the rest of the crew for the world.

“For the skull of Saint Cordula! Joachim, I told you! I have said a thousand times that Christ and all the apostles should sail with me! I told you! Why did I listen to you?” Eric slowly started to get pumped. “Why did I listen to you and have the treasures loaded on those ships? Why? Why?”

“My lord, your life is more precious than gold...” Joachim tried to explain. “It’s always easier to escape on a lighter ship.”

“My life? My life will be over soon, Joachim.” Eric yanked the servant by the arm, turning him to face him.

“Look at me! I am an old man!”

**“Tell me, what do I,
an old man, need this
gold for? I don’t want
it for myself! I need
it for her, do you
understand? For her!”**

His red beard and hair effectively resisted the grey, and his pale blue eyes still had the same gleam. Even if he considered himself an old man, he certainly did not look like one.

“What do I need this gold for? Tell me, what do I, an old man, need this gold

for? I don't want it for myself! I need it for her, do you understand? For her!"

Joachim did not have time to ask who King Eric meant.

A cannon ball just hit the side of the ship sailing next to them... And then another.

And one more.

Shrieks and screams of terror tore the air.

An inferno broke out on the board of the ship under fire. People were burning alive. They jumped into the water to extinguish the flames and swim to the other ship. In vain. After a few desperate movements they disappeared under the water forever...

Eric's blue eyes lit up with tears. He didn't even try to stop them. It is not how it was supposed to be! Everything went wrong again!

His most faithful people, the best sailors and knights were dying. He could not expose the others to a similar fate in the name of his own ambitions.

"Prepare to jibe!!!! Sheet! Fuuuuuuull speeeeeecead!!!!!" Eric yelled, and his command spread over the waves of the Baltic Sea.

Approx. 545 years later

Elizabeth sat in the library waiting for Albrecht. He has never been late before.

Finally, he came in, out of breath, with his hair flowing, and with madness in his eyes. Very unusual for him.

"Elizabeth, you must help me," he panted nervously, his eyes peering around.

Elizabeth nodded, though she felt a little uncomfortable. She has known Albrecht for nearly three months. Together, as part of an

international grant, they conducted research on the presence of the Templars in the Duchy of Pomerania.

“Come on,” Albrecht said.

They left the library where Albrecht’s car was parked. The man opened the door for Elizabeth, then got behind the wheel himself and started the engine. It was getting grey and dark. They should see the moon in a moment. They started moving.

They have been driving for a good 30 minutes, and Albrecht didn’t say a word.

“Albrecht, are you okay?” The woman asked.

“As always,” he replied, trying to control the trembling of his voice.

For the first time, Elizabeth thought she should get out of this car. Nay. She should run away.

“What happened?” She asked instead.

“I discovered something. Something... unusual... You’ll see for yourself.” Albrecht turned on the radio and they drove the rest of the way in silence.

At one point, they turned onto a very suburban road. Albrecht put his index finger to his lips, ordering Elizabeth to remain silent. He turned off the headlights.

They turned onto another side road. Albrecht downshifted to one. The car rolled very slowly ahead, lights off.

This way they finally reached the end of the road. Then there were only bushes and trees and a mountain emerging from behind. Albrecht switched off the engine and got out of the car.

“Come on,” he opened the door on the other side and offered Elizabeth his hand. She ignored it. She turned on the flashlight on the phone.

Albrecht went to the trunk of the car, from which he took out a can of gasoline.

Elizabeth felt uncomfortable once again.

“What do you need gasoline for?” She asked.

“You’ll see,” he replied, making Elizabeth even more anxious.

After a few meters, they started climbing small hills, and maybe even a mound made by human hands. In the thickening darkness it was hard to tell.

There were ruins of some structure at the top.

“Where are we?”

Albrecht made a strange gesture with his hand. She did not know whether he wanted to wave it in a gesture of disregard or indicate something to her. Then he grabbed the woman by her shoulders.

“Elizabeth, have you heard about the treasures of King Eric of Pomerania?”

“Of course.”

“Have you thought what could have happened to them after Eric died?”

“I don’t know... But... as you know, one of the treasures, a golden dove was found in his coffin...”

“What about the rest? What about the golden statue of Christ and the twelve silver apostles?”

“I don’t know, Albrecht. I have no idea.”

“You see! I know. I mean... Maybe I don’t know yet, but... I’ll know soon enough. Sorry. I said it wrong. We will both know.”

“But how?” Elizabeth felt she shouldn’t be there. Something strange was happening with Albrecht. This is not the same ambitious scientist, doctor of history whom she met a few months ago. He’s a madman.

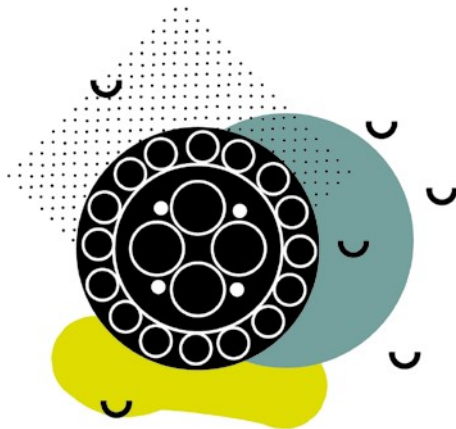
“How do you think? Did you know the Templars guarded Solomon’s temple? And do you know what they really guarded most?”

“Gold? The statues that Eric of Pomerania had later?” The woman fired hypotheses that she read on various websites and magazines, both scientific and para-scientific, and which she herself found highly improbable.

“Bravo, Elizabeth!” Albrecht said and approached her as if to kiss her, but she turned her head away.

“Will you help me?” Albrecht asked undaunted.
 “With what?”
 “An experiment.”
 “What experiment?”
 “A historical experiment.”
 “What? Albrecht... what’s going on? What historical experiment?”
 “You will see. I will perform a Templar ritual from seven hundred years ago.”
 “Albrecht... It’s ridiculous...”
 “Why do you think so? Don’t you think this will give us a better understanding of the people, the era, and the topic we’re researching?”
 Elizabeth looked the man in the eye. And she saw... madness.
 “Okay, okay,” the female researcher understood that there is no point in negotiating with the madman that Albrecht unexpectedly became. “You convinced me. What should I do?”
 “Collect some brushwood.”

The man pushed the decaying leaves that piled up on the top of the hill with his foot. On a strip of bare ground, he began to carve grooves marking some symbol with a thick branch. Elizabeth’s task was to fill the grooves with broken brushwood and dry grass. When they were all full, Albrecht poured gasoline over them.



Elizabeth watched it with mounting fear.

“Albrecht, what is this?”
 She asked.

“King Solomon’s Seal,” he replied with absolute calm. He pulled a box of matches from his jacket pocket. He struck a match and threw

it on the brushwood doused with the gasoline. The gasoline-fuelled fire instantly consumed successive layers of brushwood filling the symbol carved in the ground.

Albrecht raised his hands.

“Andromalius, demon of hidden treasures, I summon you!”

“Albrecht, what are you doing?” Elizabeth was really scared. “Are you crazy? Have you gone mad, Albrecht!”

But the man did not respond to her call. He stood still, immersed in ecstasy.

“Jesus Christ... God...” Elizabeth whispered. She had time to cross herself before she fell unconscious to the ground.

Present day

Tom turned on the TV. The evening news program just began. As this year's high school graduate who wanted to study history, Tom knew that apart from history, he had to take the civics exam. Civics was not his favourite subject. But he explained it to himself that in a few dozen or several hundred years, what he learned about at civics today would be history... So civics is future history.

He turned a deaf ear to the information about the flourishing economy and the Prime Minister's visit to the Podkarpackie region. But at one point he heard an announcement that genuinely intrigued him:

“And now we come to the news from Europe. A shipwreck from the 15th century was discovered at the bottom of the Baltic Sea! Is it the galleon full of treasures of Eric of Pomerania? Our correspondent from Sweden Roman Rutkowski was looking for an answer to this question.”

Tom immediately turned up the TV. A journalist with a microphone appeared on the screen against the background of the stormy Baltic Sea.

"A few days ago a team of divers cooperating with the Stockholm Museum discovered a very well-preserved wreck, probably from the 15th century, at the bottom of the Baltic Sea!" Roman Rutkowski tried to shout over the roar of the waves.

After a while, the scenery on the screen changed and the reporter's voice sounded as calm as being recorded in a studio.

"According to Swedish historians, everything indicates that it is the wreck of one of the galleons of Eric of Pomerania, king of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, called the Emperor of the North and the last Viking, coming from the Slavic Griffin dynasty." Roman Rutkowski's voice sounded off, while the camera showed the ship, barely visible in the dark depths of the sea.

"The Griffins were a Slavic dynasty ruling the Duchy of Pomerania for over 500 years, i.e. the lands stretching between Łębork and Bytów and the western borders of the German federal state – Mecklenburg Vorpommern." The reporter continued, while instead of photos of the sunken wreck, graphics with a map of the Duchy of Pomerania began to appear on the screen.

"Eric was a son of one of the dukes of the Griffin family, Wartislaw VII. Thanks to the kinship with the Danish Queen Margaret, who no longer had children of her own, he was crowned the king of Denmark, Norway and Sweden at the age of 14. Unfortunately, after years of rule, all three countries disobeyed Eric and led to his dethronement. At that time, the former king Eric decided to become a pirate. He settled on the island of Gotland, from where he undertook plundering expeditions on the ships passing around. This gave him the nickname of the last Viking. Finally, he decided to return to his hometown of Darłowo. However, at sea, between Gotland and the port in Darłowo, he was caught by the ships of the Swedes, who demanded the return of the coronation jewels and other treasures that they believed he had stolen from them. In the absence of Eric's reaction, they began shelling his fleet, causing one of the galleons to sink."

Can unimaginable Griffin treasures be hidden inside the ship sunk over five hundred years ago?!" The reporter spoke this last sentence again over the waves.

The television studio reappeared on the screen.

"Thank you, Roman," the speaker who hosted the program said. "Can the interior of the sunken ship that we have just seen hide the legendary treasures of King Eric of Pomerania?" The journalist repeated. *"We turn to Professor Maria Niemilska from the Institute of the History of Western Pomerania with this question. Good morning, Professor."*

"Good morning". Professor Niemilska nodded. "First of all, I would like to draw your attention to the word 'legendary'. Legendary means fairy tale, magic tale, or untrue. If we talk about something or someone in this way, we automatically question their historicity. As in the case of the legend of Wars and Sawa. We know that it is a fairy tale and no one studies the Vistula in terms of the functioning of the mermaid ecosystem. Put simply, how the mermaids live in the Vistula, because it is known that they do not live there, because they do not exist!"

"Professor, of course, I understand, but how does this relate to the treasures of King Eric of Pomerania?" The speaker interrupted the Professor.

"Sir, please don't interrupt me, this is very rude. I was just about to get to this!" The Professor was indignant. *"Well, the so-called treasures of King Eric of Pomerania are confirmed historically in "Chronicles" of Thomas Kantzow, a Pomeranian chronicler from the first half of the 16th century. In his writings there is a detailed list of valuable items that are commonly referred to as King Eric's treasures, and which during Kantzow's times were disposed of by Eric's great niece, Duchess Sophia Stargard."*



"Oh!" The speaker reacted vividly. *"And can you tell us where these treasures are now? What's happening with them?"*

"Forgive me, but I feel obliged to correct you: not 'you', but 'Professor', okay? Thank you. As far as historical sources are concerned, the list contained in the Kantzow Chronicles is the last one in which we hear of the said treasure."

"So what happened to it?" The journalist asked.

"Sir, we historians are not soothsayers or storytellers or legend tellers who would make use of fiction. We rely on hard historical evidence. And according to hard historical evidence, one of King Eric's most precious items appears in historical sources for the next and last time in 1724, when King Eric's coffin fell apart. Among the earthly remains of the ruler, a golden dove was found, which was sent to Berlin, to the Prussian King Frederick William I."

"What happened to the rest of the treasures?" The journalist continued his questions.

"We do not know. There are no historical sources."

"What kind of treasures were they?"

"Historical sources say, inter alia, about cast silver statues of the twelve apostles and a gold statue of Jesus Christ."

"Are there any assumptions about what happened to them?" The journalist asked.

"Sir, as I have already said: let us leave all assumptions, speculations and fantasies to writers and storytellers. However, in my opinion reading pseudo-historical novels is a waste of time. In general, I think that writing sensational novels supposedly based on history, but really on the writer's imagination, should be prohibited! There should be an official ban on non-historians not allowing them to write history books!"

"Well..." It was obvious that the journalist is tired of the conversation. *"But after all, such books stimulate interest in history, encourage you to read serious, scientific books..."*

"It just appears so to you, sir!" Professor Niemilska snorted. *"First-year students come to my class and ask: Professor, where is this crypt with*

this dormant griffin or in which basement is this griffin skull left by the ancient Romans? Have they found... never mind. Do you understand? And then I say to them: in the basement under Baba Yaga's hut. Do you understand? And they said: Professor, but Baba Yaga is a fairy tale! Do you understand? They don't understand that these stories about griffins, witches, some artifacts and mystical treasures are also a fairy tale. Do you understand? They don't see it's the same!"

"Yeah. Well. It's funny in its own way..."

"Funny?" The Professor rose from her chair with indignation. *"It is not funny at all... It is tragic!"*

"I understand..." The journalist took a handkerchief from his pocket, wiping his forehead. *"Thank you very much for the interview. My and your guest was Professor Maria Niemilska..."*

Tom turned off the TV. The next day he had an English test. So he reached for the original version of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. Next to it there was a novel by an author from Szczecin thanks to which he wanted to study history.