

The Everlasting

It was late evening of May 2024. We could hear the birds chirping as we watched the sunset from the suburbs of Bolzano. The mountainous region of South Tyrol greeted us with a cold winter. I climbed my way onto the trunk of Peter's Hilux. "It all comes alive again. Nature is everlasting. And ever-expanding superpower". "Covering philosophy today, are we?" Manu responded to me. what is taking Preston so long? Are they all doing geography again, or what?". "You can come help them, Emmanuel." - I answered. You French were excellent at it back in the 1800s". "It might be about this garden thing again. Oh wait, is it them that are exiting?.", I took the driver seat and ignited the truck. "We don't have much time, do we?" Peter took front passenger seat and opened his map. "Yeah, kind of. But keep it hush-hush for now, it's just a chill trip to the woods. You know, one that gives you the chills". Everyone got into the car, and Preston proudly stated that they got the location of the complex. Before driving away I pushed the button on the Walkie-Talkie. "Everlasting plotting course". Hilux hit the road.

Gianna, being silent for a while suddenly spoke. "So, it's essentially a fancy garden... underground, am I right?". "Build by Habsburgs and then made a military base." - clarified Preston. We drove out of Bolzano and split from the main road towards the mountains. Gianna took one of the research books we took for the trip.

- "Erich Ahlers, the History of South Tirol... Peter, that would be your..."

- "grandfather. Peter completed. "We located the complex thanks to him"

I couldn't finish, As we all heard loud noise coming from the Walkie-talkie. "Everlasting, you reached the stopping point, everything seems clear in the area, Over" - the speaker sounded. I passed the device to Peter.

- "Eve? This is Everlasting. Roger that."

- "Can you guys hear me?"

- "Loud and clear"

- "Weird. Here the signal's weak and distorted. Whatever's causing it - watch out."

Eve transmitted and then went silent

We have driven maybe one or two kilometers into the woods, and went off the road maybe 5 minutes before the arrival. Density of the trees made it impossible to drive further, and it seemed as though the trees were arranged to hide something large. We got off the truck. "Peter and Gianna, do you have the sensor?". And they did have it. If Eve's estimations were correct, the entrance was in the radius of 20 meters, the maximum amount the device could detect it from. And it did pick up the signal. What did we find was a small... sunflower field. "Isn't it supposed to be more concrete-ish?". Gianna Pointed out. We looked around. Despite the tree density the sunshine still reached the flowers. One of them had very strange-looking petals. They turned out to be transparent. "Now, we need the peacock feather you brought." Said Peter. I took the feather from my shoulder-bag and passed it to him. He aligned it on the petal of the sunflower. It seemed as if the Ivy growing nearby had suddenly withdrawn from its place revealing a stairway leading

underground. "Optics at its finest" - Peter added nonchalantly. "Does it get any weirder than this"? Said Manu looking at the entrance. "You should've read about other occurrences in this region. You would surely know it does." - Responded Preston already heading downstairs. After opening the door to our amazement the daylight was still there. "Told you." - he added. "The book describes plants transparent down to their roots, which you can see on the ceiling". We stood inside what seemed to be an intersection, with four greenhouses, two on the left and on the right. It looked more like a lab than a plantation with various sanitizing and cutting equipment still around. - "Looks both abandoned, and functioning at the same time. I've never seen anything like it." - I looked around. Over the doors on the path in front of us we could see the Habsburg house crest. Everything was clearly visible as we explored the complex. "So, are we searching for something in particular, or just looking around? You and Peter really pushed for this exploration" - Manu addressed me once again. "Peter, the journal, do you remember?, Rob, let's go, the command hq should be right across the next corner" - Preston said. We passed a door with some German words on it. I asked Peter to translate this to me "main command chamber" Wait, is it unlocked?" - He pushed the door knob, and we entered. The chamber was a cylinder-shaped cell with round glass cells in which we could see vines of ivy that we've seen previously on the walls of the stairway. But under these vines one could see a person in each glass cell. In that moment, a chilling alarm sound filled the base. If the possibly alive army in this complex wasn't enough to stop us, this was. We started running towards the exit on a path full of flora that emerged from the now open greenhouses. Couple of slips, but we made it. And the entrance sealed itself. "Please, can we just pretend like it never happened and we went fishing or something? It still feels unreal." - whispered Gianna, she couldn't take the stress. Did everyone make it out? I asked, and everyone answered. We retreated to the truck and took our seats. This time Preston was driving, and after we made it to a normal road I decided to break the silence. "Do you all have a feeling of your memories slipping - fading? I can recall less and less with every minute". Peter joined me and said "Is it bad though? I'm not sure if anyone would even want to remember such a story. Overall I'm glad we're alive". "Right." I answered and pulled out the walkie-talkie. After pushing the button I only said "Eve? We made it out. Everything changes. Nothing is truly everlasting."