



'You are a cheat.'

'I am not a cheat.'

'I say you are. How else do you keep on beating us?'

'I keep on beating you because I am a better card player.'

James Bond was in a faintly ridiculous situation. He was on a train in the Austrian Tyrol somewhere between Innsbruck and Kitzbühel, surrounded by a knot of angry blond-haired German boys. He had thought at first that they were boy scouts; they wore a uniform of khaki military-style shirts with black ties and shorts, which were draped with fussy leather belts and straps. But he had soon discovered that they were Hitler-Jugend, Hitler Youth, on their way to a camp in the Alps. He had heard about the organization, how every boy in Germany from fourteen to eighteen was encouraged to join and go to training camps, rallies and field exercises.

The journey overnight from Boulogne on the transcontinental Arlberg Express had been uneventful, but when James had changed to a local train in Innsbruck he had found it swarming with the boys. The carriages were full of them; like miniature German soldiers, their uniforms decorated with swastikas and the stylized S, the sig rune, that they shared with the SS.

A group of them had been sitting on the floor playing cards in the corridor, and, to pass the time, James had joined them. He had won a great deal of money from them, but the more he won, the more they kept trying to win their money back and the more they kept losing. In the end, James had felt so guilty about what was happening that he had thrown down his cards and told them that he had had enough. They had insisted, however, that he carry on and give them another chance. When James refused, a bulky, thick-lipped lad called Gerhardt had grabbed him by the shirtfront and threatened to thump him if he wouldn't play any more. James had pushed him away, but the boy wouldn't back down. His face was red and he was trembling with anger.

'I say that you are a cheat,' he repeated, jabbing James in the chest with a finger.

'I don't need to cheat,' said James, who had spent much of his early life in Switzerland and spoke fluent German.

Gerhardt swayed from side to side in the cramped space as the train rattled round a bend.

'I am used to winning,' he said angrily.

'That's because you are used to playing with this lot,' said James. 'And quite frankly they're pretty hopeless. So maybe you've learnt a valuable lesson today.'

James was a good card player. He had picked up most of his skills from his foul-mouthed Chinese messmate at school, Tommy Chong. Tommy was an excellent player and a good teacher. Winning at cards takes skill, nerve, experience and luck. And James had plenty of each. These boys, though, were enthusiastic and inexperienced, which is not a good combination for gambling.

'You have taken all my spending money for the trip,' said a small, bony lad called Artur, who seemed close to tears.

'You should have stopped gambling before you lost it all then, shouldn't you?' said James, trying to disguise the growing note of impatience in his voice. 'What do you want me to do? Just hand it all back?'

'Give us the chance to win it back,' said a third youth. 'Yes. Double or quits,' said Artur.

'No,' said James. 'I've given you enough chances. Face facts. I'm a better player than any of you, and if you carry on you'll all end up with nothing.'

'Well, if you will not give us the chance to win the money fairly, we will have to take it,' said Gerhardt, jutting his big chin out aggressively.

'Don't be stupid,' said James. 'You may be dressed up like toy soldiers, but I'll bet you know nothing about fighting. Believe me. If you take me on, you will lose again. My advice to you is to spend a little less time learning to march about waving flags and a little more time learning to play cards. Until then, you should steer clear of any game more complicated than snap.'