

The Poodle's Real Core

Daniel Ziltener

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There still was nothing to see far and wide. Nothing but the endless road curling through the scarce landscape.

"I don't have a single drop of water left in my bottle! How long is this gonna go on?"

"Calm down, Carl-Heinz! In at most one hour we're in the forest. And stop lugging the shovel behind you on the ground!"

Eventually they reached the forest, filled their bottles, and Hans-Peter spread the plan. It was evening already, and Carl-Heinz lit a torch.

"Now look at this!", Hans-Peter spoke, "Look at it! Isn't that a splendid specimen of structural design!"

"Yes, indeed... But the security measurements aren't any less perfect!"

"Sure, but don't forget: It's the sect's sanctuary, and all sects have their weak points. Any rules preventing them from perfecting the system."

"Yes, as soon as you're in. But, say, don't poodles have free access to the sanctuary?"

"Oh, great, Carl-Heinz! And now you take your shrinking cannon out of your wallet and shrink us down to poodle-format, right?"

Out of the blue, the torch started to drip. The hot wax set the plan alight and destroyed it.

"Oh great!", cursed Hans-Peter, "Holy wax-shit! Now we never get into this... this 'sanctuary of the blue dwarf poodle'!"

"Hmm... dwarf-poodle... I got it! We tinker a... uh... a... giant red poodle! A trojan poodle! Then they think it's a gift of a befriended sect!"

"Man, Carl-Heinz! Befriended sects, that's an oxymoron!"

"Well, I mean, blue dwarf-poodles aren't exactly close to reality either."

So they gave the idea a chance. At least it allegedly already worked once, and they couldn't come up with an alternative.

Ultimately, half the copse where they set up their camp had to bite the dust. They got the red color eventually from a junk dealer in exchange for their snatched saws.

Thus, one night, they pushed their giant trojan red poodle in front of the sanctuary. Whole three

days and nights they had to persevere until the sect, after extensive and hot tempered debates and the secession of the 'green poodles of death', decided to pull the giant poodle into the sanctuary. After that, Hans-Peter and Carl-Heinz had the sanctuary all to their own.

Late in the evening, as Hans-Peter later noted in the protocol, "the valorous bandits of the giant red poodle rose from the wooden poodle's waist", and found themselves in a labyrinth of corridors.

The walls were decorated with downright uncanny poodle drawings, and everything, even the torch flames, were kept in a crude yet gloomy blue. "How should we find our way in here?", Carl-Heinz whispered. Hans-Peter responded: "It's best if we use the second can of red paint to mark our way. A small colour speck won't harm this blue desert!".

So they begun to systematically scan the whole sanctuary for the mysterious sapphire poodle. In the uncanny, wide network of corridors and halls even the quietest noise sounded as menacing as a gunshot. And behind every second corner, there was a sleeping, blue-painted poodle.

Not to imagine, not even in blue, what would happen if one of them woke up.

Or just yet.

Once, a poodle woke up and opened his uncannily blue-glistening eyes, whereupon Carl-Heinz, with a skilled kick, forwarded it to the blue poodle-heaven. "Even they have red blood", he remarked laconically. Hans-Peter whispered: "Yes, but it was close enough. Just imagine he'd barked. I've seen the headline in front of my mind's eye: 'bandit duo mauled by dwarf poodle pack!'!" -

The corridors and chambers became more and more uncanny, and the two bandits shivered about the conception, one could treat them like what's shown on the paintings, should they get discovered. But all that was nothing compared to their next discovery.

Carl-Heinz carefully opened the blue gate, behind which they already presumed the sanctuary. A whole city suddenly lied ahead of them, and this again was fully kept in blue. They stood on some kind of subterranean observation deck and gazed down onto the sea of houses lit in the pale light of uncountable torches.

At the other end they saw another observation deck, though one with giant gates - the sanctuary.

They took a deep breath, as deep as probably never before, and descended the stairs down into the city.

They sneaked through narrow, dreary alleyways and hasted across broad streets. They knew that they wouldn't just find the usual poodles, but humans, too, here - here and there they heard a snoring.

The city was an even more uncanny and even dodgier labyrinth than the system of corridors before. The houses seemed to have been placed completely aimless inside that giant cavern. But it does not stop there. The alleyways weren't exactly clean, and heaps of blue rubbish which supposedly wasn't very quiet when stepping on it, had to be dodged.

Bit by bit, orienting themselves at the blue cavern roof, they got closer to the other end of the city.

But then they heard a noise.

Steps!

Hans-Peter and Carl-Heinz begun to shiver. Where did these steps come from? The echo in the deserted alleys made it impossible to find out where the source of this, probably blue, bale lied. They ran. They ran as silent and as fast as probably never before in their lifes. Here around a blue corner, and there. But nowhere a niche to hide.

The steps got louder.

Carl-Heinz bumped his toes at a something on the ground. He just wanted to start swearing, as he noticed what he had in front of himself.

A hole in the ground. A blue hole.

"Quick, Hans-Peter! Down here!", he whispered over to him, and they disappeared in the hole.

Whatever kinds of things there were down there, they didn't even want to know. Probably another blue city. Or maybe just a banal, blue sewerage, in which a rather unsavoury kind of blue things floated around.

They hearked. The steps still got closer. Something yipped, and then someone cursed. Then, the steps slowly departed.

Later it would be written in the protocol: "And the two valorous bandits of the giant red poodle again betook themselves to the path of their blue odyssey, as they became aware of their luck, owed to a blue

dwarf-poodle and a dumb sect member."

Shortly thereafter, they reached the stairs to the sanctuary, climbed them, and stood in front of the giant blue gate. But how would it look inside? And what if there were guards in there?

Carl-Heinz knocked.

"Are you nuts? Did you go mad over all that blue?" Hans-Peter barked whisperingly at him, after they hid in a blue niche besides the gate for minutes. Carl-Heinz shrugged and carefully opened the gate.

Ultimately they stood in the sanctuary, the gates closed behind them. Artful, blue decorations, unhearable blue fountains and uncountable blue plants surrounded the holy relic. It was huge and glossy. Paralyzed, they watched it glister for a whole minute.

"A... a... BLACK POODLE? What's that supposed to be?", Hans-Peter cursed.

"Don't forget, the treasure isn't the poodle, it's in the poodle!", Carl-Heinz calmed him, "let's open the poodle!"

And they opened the poodle.

The poodle was quite rusty, but they succeeded. cautiously, Carl-Heinz gathered the precious sapphire poodle from the relic's waist and quoth: "So this is the poodle's real core!"

Author's note

This short story was originally written as an assessment essay in German in high school. The task was to choose one of three phrases which then had to be included into the essay. I wasn't asked for a short story. Just for an essay.

The phrase, of course, was "Das also ist des Pudels Kern", translated to English as "So this is the poodle's real core", a phrase from the tragedy "Faust" of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In German, "des Pudels Kern" has become a proverb.

Now, in 2013, I decided to revisit my short story and translate it to English, and release it in both German and English.