

THE THOUSAND YEAR EMPIRE OF THE LOLLIPOPS

“If you can’t get bropper work wiz your arty-tarty B.A.,” scolded Major Dark Nutz, “then I’ll find bropper work for you. I will make a real Lohli Popp out of you.”

“Ach Gott,” thought poor Rummi Nutz to himself, “what was a real Lohli Popp, for heaven’s sakes?” And he sighed like the misunderstood and unappreciated son he was. He had studied so hard at the university and had graduated with a major study in foreign languages. Some people even called him a walking dictionary. But no one seemed to want to employ a linguist or an aesthete any more; all they wanted to employ was soldiers.

“Left-right, left-right . . . .” Poor Rummi Nutz swung his arms —because he still had two arms then — and snapped his uniformed legs smartly backwards and forwards exactly in time with the arms and the legs of all the other chocolate soldiers. They wore white jackets and red sashes and blue peaked caps. Their spangles and medals glistened heroically. Over their shoulders they carried chocolate muskets that fired jaffas.

But Rummi’s father, Major Dark Nutz, retired, didn’t have any doubts whatsoever. He stuck his chest out as his son marched by and he felt twenty years younger. Admittedly it was only a Christmas procession and not a real war, but it was a start. It was certainly better than his son doing postgraduate research or whatever stuff and nonsense it was that Rummi had proposed. Boy must be off his rocker to even think of it. All that study had twisted his mind. But now he was safely in the army and that would make a real Lohli Popp out of him all right. Major Dark Nutz went off to the local for an ale that sparkled with pride and memories of his own Valhallian conduct.

He was on his third memorial ale when the TV set above the bar sputtered and produced a picture of his old commanding officer, General Anizeed Bohl. Dark Nutz jumped involuntarily to his feet and saluted with his tankard. But what was this? General Bohl was announcing something or other.

“ . . . regrettably passed away today. We are all desolate.”

“Who, who passed away?” yelled Dark Nutz and then realised that he had forgotten himself. “Begging your pardon, Sir.”

But the TV seemed to sense his curiosity and gave details.

“Our great leader, Kanzler Fairi Vloss, fell asleep today in his private sauna. He is now no more than a pink puddle on the floor of all being.”

Dark rumours circulated the next day about other ways in which Kanzler Vloss might have met his demise. Some of the rumours speculated about General Anizeed Bohl’s silver sabre. Certainly it was less than a week before the provisional government had been replaced with a military regime headed by Bohl.

“Ve need spezial measures to combat der slide ov our great country into tsugary decadence” he proclaimed at evening rallies in the sports stadium. “Ve must *be* hard, ve must *work* hard and ve must *fight* hard!” he growled into the microphone and the crowd seemed to find this a suitable substitute for the gladiator football to which they were normally addicted.

In fact a subtle change seemed to come over the Lohli Popp people in the next few weeks. The females seemed to have lost interest in watching TV and munching on candy and soda pops; and the males seemed to have lost interest in watching TV and guzzling ale. More and more of them seemed to be in uniforms and attending General Anizeed Bohl’s political rallies. Even their posture and their facial expressions seemed to have changed. They stood as though they had a ramrod shoved up their behinds and they held their breath to make their waists smaller and their chests bigger. Major Dark Nutz stood in front of a full length mirror and practised making ferocious expressions.

“Ve must be dignified vor the sake ov our dear Vaterland” he explained to Rummi who caught him twiddling with his moustache.

Rummi thought it was all very funny and asked his father how much dearer he thought it might get because he couldn’t afford the price of foreign novels in the bookshop any more.

“Vot for you read such foreign, decadent trash?” yelled Dark Nutz. “Do not shame your poor father. Here, read dis.” And he gave Rummi an illustrated military history of the Lohli Popp for his birthday present.

It was less than a year later that General Anizeed Bohl proclaimed the Thousand Year Empire of the Lohli Popp and unfurled a new national flag. The flag showed a giant skull and crossbones made of a black aniseed ball and liquorice sticks. Rummi thought that the liquorice sticks on the flag reminded him of the new secret police that he had seen parading at his army barracks. They had SS on their armbands and the letters stood for Special Service.

There had always been loudspeakers in the army barracks of course. But now the army, which was growing larger and larger, was set to work putting up loudspeakers on the street corners of every city, every town

and every village in the whole land of the Lohli Popp. There were even loudspeakers in the barns of some of the remote mountain farms. General Bohl wanted everyone, and by everyone he meant everyone, to hear what he had to say.

“Barlament is for sissies!” he said. “Plah, Plah and nuzzink ever happens.”

“The Rebuplique de Jeeses is decadent sissies!” he said. “Vee Lohli Popp are firile.”

“We must preed bure Lohli Popp,” he said. “We don vant any of dose smelly Jeeses in our plood.”

It all seemed very funny to Rummi. Or it would have seemed funny if everyone else hadn't taken it so seriously. General Bohl is a messianic leader, everyone said, because there is no unemployment and our GNP is growing every day. But there is no unemployment, replied Rummi, because everyone is in the army. Doesn't matter, answered everyone, we are organised, we are strong and we are building something great. What we are building, mumbled Rummi to himself because no one was listening, is airports, railways, highways and munitions.

Rummi wanted to hold a speech and say “Make butter and not guns.” But no one was in the slightest interested in such a silly idea which was so totally lacking in dignity and national pride. He decided to ignore it all, but he just couldn't get it out of his head. So he wrote letters about it to all his friends from other countries who had once been his fellow students at university. He wrote to Pierre Che Darre in the Rebuplique de Jeeses. He wrote to Ava Ma-Deira in the Oligarchy of the Five Ports. And he even wrote to Makk Karroon, who had never really been a close friend but who was now a career diplomat in the Meringuovian Monarchy.

He could have saved his time. All his letters were returned, stamped ‘Undeliverable!’. And in the army barracks he was called in to the office of Colonel Knut Krakker.

“Unpatriotic to correspond with decadent countries,” snapped Colonel Krakker and gave Rummi such a withering look that it almost melted him down to chocolate powder. “Noted from your letters that you understand their inferior languages. May be useful. Report to S.S. Training School immediately.” Colonel Krakker made no apology for having read Rummi's private correspondence and he didn't waste words.

At S.S. Training School Rummi was examined every day on the speeches of General Anizeed Bohl until he was word perfect. He hated it.

“Our fellow Lohli Popp are brisoners in the Rebuplique de Jeeses,” bellowed Bohl.

“Dose Jeeses shtink!” he screamed. “Dey haf been made soft and rotten by dere plah plah temocracy and dere bleetingheart religion. Dose Jeeses are Cheesus-lovfers.”

“Ve cannot dolerate dis brovocation of der Jeeses no longer. Ve Lohli Popps fear nuzzink but Gott.”

And so Rummi Nutz became an officer in the chocolate soldier army and the whole army was issued with new liquorice stick automatic rifles that could fire more deadly aniseed balls per second than the old chocolate muskets could send off in half an hour.

But when General Bohl invaded the Jeeses in order to liberate them from their all round inferiority, he got more than he had bargained for. The President of the Jeeses had formed an international defense pact with the king of the Meringuovians and the Merchant-Chairman of the Ports. Even the United Communist Commissariats of Fruites (UCCF) came to the party. The Chocolate army was caught in a pincer movement and lost a whole regiment of Tofi Armands and Beenud Krakkuls. The rest of the army beat a hasty retreat but not before poor Rummi had his chocolate arm blown off by a molotov cocktail.

Even in hospital the loudspeakers blared out lies about total war and final victory from the frontier and Rummi put his head under the pillow. Major Dark Nutz put on his old uniform and polished up all his old medals when he came to see his son Rummi, but Rummi wouldn't bring his head out from under the pillow. Not even when they awarded him the Valhalla Medal of Honour would he bring his head out from under the pillow, so they had to leave the medal on the bedspread.

It was weeks of self-pity before Rummi thought of his neglected university tutor and mentor, Herr Doktor Pepp Ermintz. Pepp was the editor of the Karramehl Dropps Illustrierte and a charismatic lecturer in the ethics of journalism. But if Pepp was still a guru, he was a guru without honour. Rummi found him in a back room that stank of whisky sour.

The front office was occupied by a rubbery ju-jube wearing a grin full of gold fillings and the uniform of a colonel in the SS.

“Colonel Rupperpack at your service, schentulmen!” he sneered and clicked his heels more from habit than courtesy. “Going for another booze-up, Herr Doktor Pepp Ermintz?” he continued. “Don't you have some editorials for our brand new Sqvashdikker Tchoornal?” And he cackled like a Victorian villain.

“It's too late for protests and editorials now.” Pepp despaired to his old student over his creme de menthe. “No one can hear your protests and editorials any more. They don't even want to hear about how you

lost your chocolate arm. Not unless you want to tell them it's a glorious war of self-defence."

And so Rummi realised that much as he loved words, the time had come for action.

"I shall become a Lohli Popp of action" he laughed bitterly. "But not quite what General Bohl had in mind."

The next day Rummi pinned his medal of honour on his uniform for the first time and found it was an open sesame to Bohl's Pentagon.

"War despatch for General Anizeed Bohl!" he barked. And no one checked under his hero's helmet or else they would have found the sherbert powder bomb with the liquorice stick fuse.

General Bohl wore an ascetic black uniform and carried a black whip. There was a golden skull and cross bones on his cap. He was in the middle of a harangue on self-sacrifice for Lohli Popp Land.

"Vinal fictory is ineffitable avter ve release der secret weapon. Our heroic empire of der Lohli Popp vill endure a dousand years!" Anizeed Bohl was hectoring his audience of businessmen and barely took time to salute before he took a greedy-size bite from Rummi's surprise lolly.

When the smoke cleared, there were bits of aniseed and sherbert powder spattered over just about everything. As in all good fairy tales, the villain had self-destructed and the hero, Rummi, had survived. But Rummi's uniform was so encrusted with bits of aniseed that he had to throw it in the garbage. He dug out his corduroy trousers, his brothel creeper boots and his check shirt from his old student's wardrobe and accepted a postgraduate scholarship to write a doctorate on a semiotic analysis of the linguistics of propaganda.

In free elections Doktor Pepp Erminz was the overwhelming choice of the people. He was so excited that he even gave up boozing. He appointed Rummi to be ambassador to the Reublique de Jeeses and Rummi pursued his linguistic research over beaujolais with Che Darre and the Contesse de Camembert. Even Major Dark Nutz was finally persuaded that his son Rummi was a kind of a success, in his own way. The uniform of an ambassador was almost as beautiful as the uniform of a major, he conceded, and the food and wine were vastly superior.

And how can you have a more happy ending than that? For everybody. Except for General Anizeed Bohl. But someone has to be the villain, hey? Otherwise we'd all be sinful.