



Raiders of the Lost Archive



We are in the closing years of the Second World War. A brave Norwegian resistance fighter with a Celtic tonsure makes his way across the border to neutral Sweden. He is known only by the code name 'The Kingfischer'. Although seriously wounded by the bullets of pursuing German soldiers, he struggles as far as the parish of Tantrum and the lodge of an old hunting companion, Oscar 'Gunner' Andersson, whom he finds stuck in a Rut. With his dying breath the Kingfischer tells Andersson that he has managed to smuggle out of Norway something that can cripple German morale by striking at the very roots of their Nasti ideology, proving that the Nordic race has always been part of the Roman Catholic world. It's a photograph of a document pasted into the cover of an old book in a remote Norwegian church. Before he can explain any more, the Fischer King dies with a whimper. Andersson looks at the blurred photograph, where it is faintly possible to discern an incomplete map of the world that looks as if it came from a faulty Cumbrian slide projector. He fails to see how it can hurt the Germans, so he just puts it away in the family bible.

Fifteen years later, Andersson's ten-year-old daughter Britta (a precocious child, 'as old as the Earth, and as young as the Sea, eternally right, infallible me') finds the photograph while pursuing scriptural exegesis. She asks her father about it and he tells her as much as he knows. She wonders, 'What-if it is a pre-Columbian map demonstrating a knowledge of North America that conventional scholarship has hitherto denied?' She writes to the vicar of the church in Norway, asking if she can come to look at the map. The reply is a disappointment: the vicar tells her that she has to have at least a Ph.D. to be allowed to see it. But that only makes little Britta determined to pass an academic exam. With Schliemann-like zeal, she attains proficiency in all the ancient and modern languages of Europe. She reads voraciously, concentrating on primary sources. While other children are enjoying Donald Duck, Britta is analysing *Diplomatarium Danicum*. Her parents sometimes wonder if it is healthy for her to have her nose constantly buried in some papal bull.



By the age of nineteen Britta Theodora Andersson is more than qualified to start university, but she realises that proper analysis of the huge amount of data is going to require access to a powerful computer and the creation of a search engine capable of coping with non-standard spelling. This is still back in the days before the PC, when it took a whole room to hold a computer, and the only one in Sweden at the time belongs to the SAAB aeroplane factory in Linköping, where the family are now living. Instead of going to university she gets a job as a typist at SAAB. When all the other staff go home, Britta spends the evenings at the computer, learning everything that can be learnt, developing new programming languages (of which BOLOC is her favourite), double-checking the calculations of Einstein and Bohr, honing her skills in *akrebi*,[†] becoming an expert in cryptography and Norse Code, and inventing a way to connect computers via the telephone line. In the process she creates the Internet and single-handedly establishes the global rules for electronic communication via Usenet.

Britta has many other strings to her lyre – one of the most high-strung lyres in Sweden. She is a skilled metalworker, having been the only tomboy at Sillinäs primary school to choose metalwork instead of needlework. Learning how to blow bellows and forge iron gives her a lifelong familiarity with hot air and forgery. Many a keen blade has been tempered in Tantrum. Grandfather Fritz, a stone- and freemason, initiates her in the arcane science of geology, artificial weathering and stonewalling. Grandmother Brunhilda teaches her different kinds of craft, so that she can embroider material and fabricate strawmen. From her father, who is so obsessed with clean streams that he even wed one, Britta soaks up everything about changing lake levels and muddying waters. Mother Rut Gunhilda teaches her good manners so that she can act like a lady. When it comes to sexual morals, Britta is strait-laced and jacketed, disappointing many a young swain who has heard of her reputation as the curious lassie who cannot say nay.

To compensate for her humble origins, Britta cultivates influential friends. Guests at her candlelight suppers include prominent politicians, top-drawyer lawyers, human ecologists, divine apologists, Liberian diplomats, and professors in every conceivable field of scholarship with whom she is on first-name terms (although their names cannot be revealed). They number the Piltown Professor of Phrenology at the University of Humburg, the editor of the definitive corpus of Ogham inscriptions in South America (a cunning linguist with impressive scholarly apparatus), and the professor of Kven-Ainu studies at the Redbuck Institute of Oceanography and Atlantology.

[†] *Recte* Swedish *akribi*, from Greek ἀκρίβεια ‘exactitude’.

After many years of preparation in museums, libraries and laboratories, and after working in a vital capacity for every major company in Sweden, Britta feels she has done her homework. She is finally ready to start her interdisciplinary historical studies at university, as a mature student. She decides not to go to Uppsala University since her research has demonstrated that Uppsala is not the original place of that name and that the proprietors of the Uppland School are just uppstarts. She opts for Linköping University. However, she quickly runs into opposition from the entrenched views of the orthodox scholars. Sad to say, they refuse to accept the thesis of her proposed magnum opus, which runs as follows:

The Goths originated in Tantrum (Jordanes' aptly named *vagina nationum*), from where they followed their woad through Europe via the Gothic Canal, Lake Roxen and the Vistula, under the leadership of Britta's ancestor Theodoric (after whom she gets her middle name). Shocked by the childish behaviour of the Vandals and Alans and depressed by the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the last of the Goths moved back to Tantrum. There they remained, regularly holding their þings, until 1362, when Pope Iniquitous selected them for a very special mission. The Catholics in Boston and the rest of Vinland were several centuries in arrears with their tithes, and the pagans had not paid a cent since the year dot, so strong-arm tactics were called for.

A spunky band of assorted Norse heavies left 56 Norumbega Heights in Gothenburg and set off for the New World on a luxury knarr leased from King Hakon Magnusopium. The spiritual leader of the mission was from Greenland City, a holy man always engrossed in his horn-book. Ivar Hardon was his name, a canon of high calibre, in good standing with senior church potentates. Also on board the craft was Paul ('the Pole') Kuntson, a concupiscent cartographer continually on the lookout for a woman who might let the Scandinavian surveyor. Ivar Hardon was stiff with worry that his diocese had no bishop. He said to Paul Kuntson, 'What's a bishopric without a bishop?' And Paul – inevitably – replied, 'A prick.'

The first landfall was Norfolk, where an Oxford mathematician minor-ing in astronomy joined the crew. He taught them the difference between longitude and latitude and instructed them in the use of his new invention, the compass. This gave the Swedes the idea for a new sport which they called orienteering. The next port of call was the Orkneys, where they picked up Henry Sinclair, the permanently pissed Pict killer of Highland Park. His speech was so slurred that he pronounced his name Zichmni. The drunken lord of Orkney brought along his personal confessors-cum-chefs – a fish friar and a chip monk – two brethren

with grey and sordid habits. They were forever fingering a copy of the Grail (one of those cheap relics which Jacques de Molay had mass-produced, and for which the Knights Templar had been convicted *en masse* of heresy). The greyfriars thought it might amuse the Skraelings to try drinking out of this mass chalice, a stone cup with a hole in it.

From his post on the poop, Paul Kuntson mapped all the coasts of Greenland and Hudson Bay. Once on land, Kuntson chased the comely Native American women without reservations, but the other Norsemen remained chaste out of fear of contracting breast cancer from them; instead they drilled ‘mooring holes’ for the seamen wherever the frigate went. While trading with the natives, the greyfriars swapped the Holy Grail for a coconut, thinking that the addition of a silver foot would make it a mouth-watering goblet for the Pope.

Unable to find any Christians (all the inhabitants of Norse America had been secretly evacuated to the Canary Islands), the party split up. One group sailed back down Niagara Falls to the east coast, where Ivar Hardon supervised the erection of the Newport Tower. This was to mark the harbour from which they left the New World, after solemnly naming the land Norumbega. Back in Europe after his frustrating journey, Ivar Hardon had the satisfaction of depositing one copy of the map in a church in Norway. The ever-frisky Paul Kuntson mounted a filly for his long ride to Rome, siring bastards at every inn on the way. He presented the coconut cup and another copy of his map to the new incumbent of the papal throne. Pope Rural listened with palpable distaste to Kuntson’s cringing apology for the failure of this expensive mission to bring back any tithes. The pontiff grudgingly accepted the map but he offered no bounty for the coconut. As an old European he was vehemently anti-American, so he buried all the evidence deep in the secret Vatican archives. (Centuries later a senior Vatican official, Umberto Baldi, known as ‘God’s Archivist’, is found hanging under Greyfriars Bridge in London. Coincidence? Britta doesn’t think so.)

Meanwhile, back in North America, the other group of Norsemen penetrated deep into the wilds, turning their ‘collection journey’ into an ‘exploration journey’ (the only difference was one rune, which they hoped no one would notice).[‡] Encamped in the midwest, they tried to establish a new Sweden in miniature. At first, relations with the natives were amicable – the Sioux even picked up a few hundred words of the ancient *e*-dialect of Tantrum, as well as the place-name Mini-Sweden, which they corrupted into Minnesota. Things turned sour when the new settlers, returning from a fishing trip, produced some fermented herring and began polluting the atmosphere, then drained the spirit pond to get absolutely sauced and started desecrating the totem pole by dancing round it, imitating the action of small frogs. The redskins were

[‡] They changed *t* to *d* in *optagelsefard*, but cunningly wrote it as the ambiguous $\mathfrak{B} \mathfrak{D} \mathfrak{X} \mathfrak{Y} \mathfrak{T} \mathfrak{T} \mathfrak{H} \mathfrak{X} \mathfrak{R} \mathfrak{D}$.

appalled (even today their descendants are paler than other American Indians). They drove out the Goths and Norwegians, who were implacably pursued and brutally butchered, left to die in their Kensington gore – but not before one of the masons among them, a Norwegian called Tyrkleif Thorvaldstone, managed to dress a stone and carve some runes with an **A**bsolutely **V**ital **M**essage for posterity. That message was not discovered until 1898, when a Swedish settler, rooting up a slender young asp, ejaculated: ‘Oh man, lookee here!’

Presented at an undergraduate seminar in this way, without the supporting evidence at hand for the moment, Britta’s ideas seem speculative – perhaps the operative word would be ‘greywacky’. She is ridiculed by scholars and fellow students alike. She finds out that all the other researchers and lecturers belong to a society of self-hating Scandinavians affiliated to the Columbian Brotherhood, a clandestine but powerful global conspiracy whose motto is ‘Forget the Greenlanders’. They use secret handshakes and invoke bureaucratic technicalities to make sure that Britta is edged out of the university before she achieves the diploma necessary to consult the map in that Norwegian church. She is obliged to forge ahead with her research on a freelance basis, while earning an honest living in the secondary school system, teaching every subject but gymnastics.

But now she and her angelic daughter have a PC of their own (boasting a huge hard-drive and a Pentadic 133 professor), with an illustrated dictionary beside it, an Internet account and several e-mail addresses (one of them under the moniker *dora.dammit@not.telling.com*), and Britta T. Andersson can continue her studies and disseminate her findings with the aid of the organ she set up years before. She researches via Google and lectures people via Usenet. She posts to newsgroups so frequently that she earns the title of Top Poster six years running. She forges genuine friendships with a few e-correspondents in obscure corners of the world, and finds herself especially drawn to shifty types with a bent for using the CAPS LOCK key. One of them is a figure with a split personality who goes under the *nom de guerre* Graffiti, with whom she exchanges *billets-doux* written in her best computer-manual French. With one foul-mouthed fellow in particular she develops a profound and poignant relationship: an expatriate Scandinavian now living in the Antipodes, running an unauthorised furniture business and spending all his time and sunburnt dollars on fruitless litigation and criminal stalking while trying to find his true purpose in life. His name is Pukko[§] I. Elgskog. Britta sends e-mails promising copies of precious diplomas for Pukko’s four

[§] Pukko – sharp as a knife in Finland, thick as a brick in Sweden.

eyes only, and although the letters all get lost in the mail or the envelopes arrive empty, Pukko never loses faith. He promises to write the foreword to Britta's forthcoming treatise, and Britta is not backward about accepting the offer. They agree to share everything, even stevens.

Meanwhile, Britta suffers all-round abuse and circular arguments from other newsgroup users. They make fun of her Oxford spelling and her Scarborough grammar, which they cruelly dub 'Brittish', with two *t*'s. They call her a plagiarist merely because she takes other people's lines and passes them off as her own. They call her a kook simply because she believes in every unorthodox theory on this flat earth. They call her a liar solely because she cites fraudulent evidence in favour of fakes. They call her a bluff because they refuse to accept her 50+ good excuses for not revealing her sources – their problem, not hers. They have the iron gall to forge her posts, they ignore her threats of legal retribution and data inspection, and they deride her dyslexia by e-mailing virulent spam and hard-pore corn purporting to come from a bastard scion of Kuntson. This makes her a very cross poster. Only her profound faith in God and the consolation of philosophy that she receives from Pukko keep her going, doggedly working on the book that will make the naysayers eat their hats as soon as it is edited. And together they hatch their plans for the great coup – code name 'Operation Goodnight' – in which they will turn the Easter tables on their adversaries and their ad hominem.

Pukko sells his last few sticks of furniture and his shares in a septic tank to raise the cash for a standby flight to Sweden. Britta and Pukko finally meet in the flesh. They head for that church in Norway, not to get married (Britta has no wish to get bunked, bonked and binked again), but to break into the sacristy a minuit after midnight. With a medieval statue of Mary looming all over them, they open the book. The map pasted inside the cover turns out to come from a dot matrix printer and thus, they conclude, cannot be pre-Columbian. The failure of their nocturnal mission makes Pukko swear: 'Fy for Søren! We've been misled. It's the wrong book.' But Britta suspects that the map is a printout of a scanned copy of the genuine original, and she thinks she knows where that can be found – 'Elementary, my dear Pukko.'

They head to the nearest airport, where Britta refuses to let an Internet security man from Iceland frisk her on the apron. Off they fly in a stolen SAAB aircraft, with Britta at the controls, all the way to war-torn Iraq. Through a hail of ack-ack fire Britta lands the plane in the wasteland. Here they run the gauntlet of dangers and hardships too numerous to relate. At one point they are kidnapped by terrorists who see a chance of a fat ransom. They are kept

tied up in a cellar. Britta tries to cut her ropes by rubbing them against the edge of a stone. Pukko sees that it's going to take years before that has any effect, so he starts to bite the ropes, and within a couple of hours they are free. As Pukko says, 'Tooth is stronger than friction.' Later they stumble across a doug-out concealed by an old election campaign sign saying 'Vote for Ba'ath so you won't smell like Shi'ite'. Inside they discover a huge cache of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, thus incidentally justifying Bush's gunboat diplomacy. When the last of their food runs out they are forced to live off conkleberries and the scratchings from Pukko's beard. They hijack a US army truck which turns out to be driven by Elvis Presley – 69 years old, emaciated, no sideburns, but still recognisable. Elvis pulls a gun, so Pukko is obliged to shoot him with a .44 Olaus Magnum. The King dies – this time for real – muttering two syllables which Britta and Pukko try to make sense of: Rosebud? Reboul? Roswell? Rosslyn? Royston? Roxen? Rock on?

A map in the *Iraq Exploration Journal* sets them on the right course (Pukko subscribes to *IEJ*). Using up their last jerry can of fuel, they finally reach their goal in deepest Kurdistan: a Christian monastery perched atop a mountain peak. Obstinate abbots – again with Celtic tonsures – block the gate with their crosiers, insisting that no women are allowed in, but the fearless Pukko, spoonerising with sheer excitement and seconding every relish, traps the Kurds and makes frazzled dogmeat out of every panicking monk.

In the monastic archives, Britta finds the coffer she is after, shrouded under a booksheet amidst fallen masonry. She is gratified to see her chest overflowing with a wad of sources that were believed to have been lost forever:

- ⊗ a history of Gothenburg and the Goths by Diocassiodorus*;
- ✦ the original MS of *Beowulf*, signed and dated by the East Geatish author: "Lýncéapmz, 26 Auꝥurc 549" (exactly the date logically deduced by Britta);
- ⊗ a B-manuscript, a C-essay and a D-composition of the Vulnerable Bede (to which Pukko surreptitiously adds an E-mail and an F-word);
- ✦ a foldout picture of Knickerless Lynn removing a G-string to reveal all the nautical bits – hence the abbreviation NORWICH;
- ⊗ Aristotle's lost work on comedy, in which he argues that the best belly-laughs are provoked by loonies who are unintentionally funny;
- ✦ an entry visa to Iceland from 1477, issued to Christopher Columbus, with an annotation – 'If this Cristóbal Colón isn't an asshole, he's damn close to one' – evidently written by a hyperdiffusionist immigration officer;
- ⊗ the deed poll by which Pelagius changed his name to Palladius;
- ✦ some whatsits and doodahs by Nicholas Thingey;

* Attributed by some scholars to Ablabius and his daughter, Ablabia Minora; cf. Jordanes *supra*.

- ⊗ a polite request from King Arthur, dated 67 BC, asking for someone to come and teach Christianity to the Surrey men;
- ✦ the unknown *Ora Begorra* by the Irish scholar Dicuil;
- ⊗ *The Rough Guide to Engroneland* by Nicolò Zeno;
- ✦ Leonardo da Vinci's plan of Rosslyn Chapel marking the column in which the original Holy Grail is concealed;
- ⊗ an Old Slavonic silver bible, **ЗОЛОТА БИБЛИЯ** (*Zolota Biblia*), once owned by Vlad the Emailer, looted by Swedes, and now caked with pond scum;
- ✦ *Et in Orcadia Ego* by Sigeric the Serious, a post-treaty tract;
- ⊗ a scroll of the New Testament with an agnostic Gospel of Philip sandwiched between Matthew and Marcus, continuing the story of Jesus after the resurrection and his move to Gaul, with the development of the house of David into the Merovingian line (later the Långaröv dynasty);
- ✦ a new Old Norse *Skammsaga* (an ambiguous title, meaning either 'short story' or 'saga of shame');
- ⊗ a fuzzie sixteenth-century rubbing of the Kensington runestone with interlinear transliteration into the characters on the Phaistos disk, confirming the proto-Idiotic decipherment by Foucaulloyou (aka Graffiti);
- ✦ a spruce transcription of the missing Gran tapes, with a deathbed confession retracting the previous deathbed confession to faking the runestone, and confessing instead to faking the Larsson papers;
- ⊗ medieval maps of North America signed in anatase by Paulus Cunnifilius.

Britta has discovered all the sources she needs to clinch her case. Or as she herself exclaims in a poetic frenzy: 'I have managed to achieve the archive / to paint the picture for everyone to see.' Moreover, a close examination reveals that these documents are stored in nothing less than the original Ark of the Covenant, on which both Theodoric and Moses have left their names written in woad, thus certifying the Ark as Gothic/Mosaic.

The climax sees Britta gushing as her seminal work comes off the printing presses. Even before it is proof-read, the book is nominated for the prestigious August Prize (although Britta is somewhat peeved to be in the fiction category). The 1144-page tome has no ISBN but four prefaces: one by Sir Pukko Elgskog (yes, he got knighted), with LOTS of words in CAPITALS; one jointly written by Kirsten Wallace and Birgitta Seaver, concocting a recipe for *chapeau au gratin* with prime sauce; one endorsement by an unnamed professor of methodology and copyright law; and the most important one by President George Wanker Bush, personally thanking Britta for his re-election. The title of the lavishly illustrated book is *My Pet Goth*. ✦