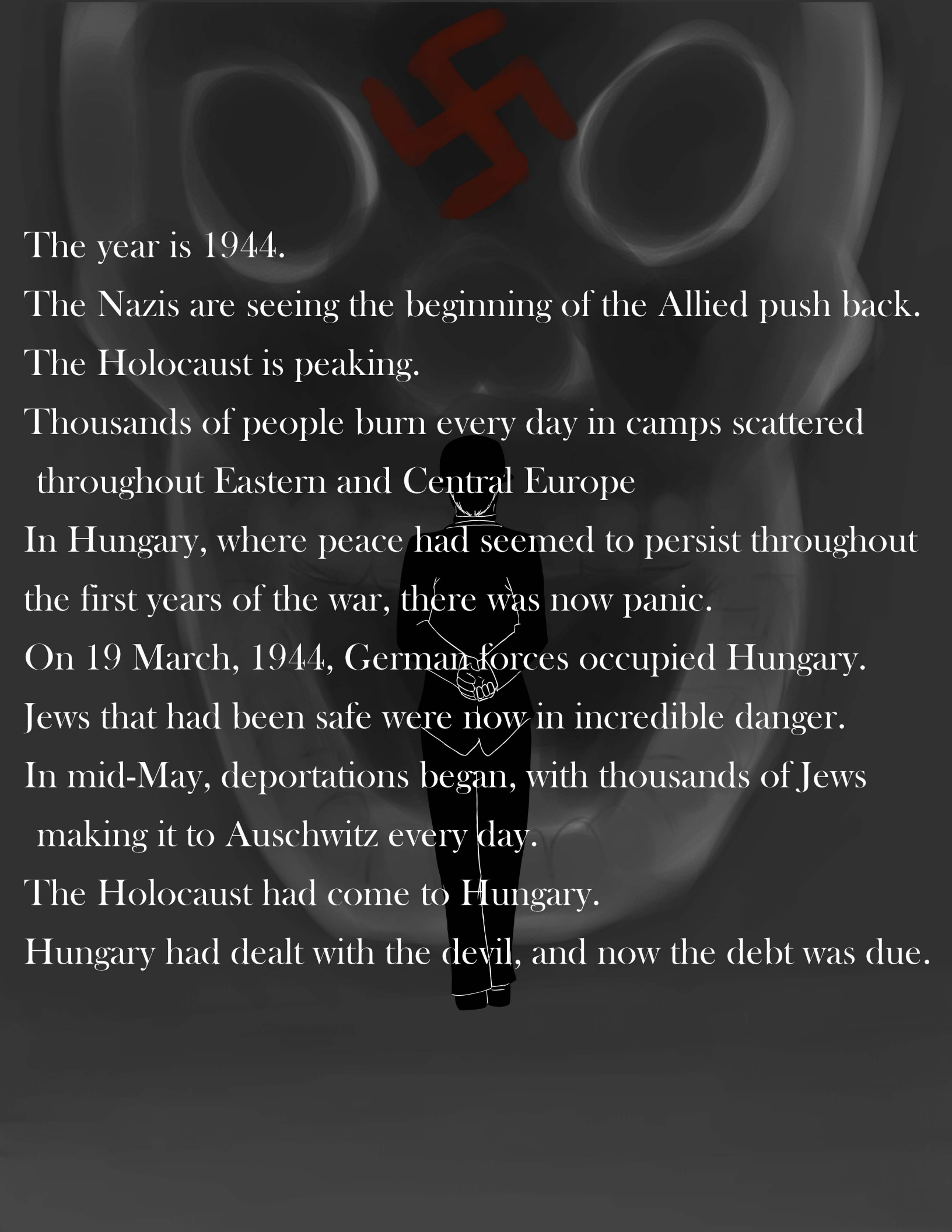




44-1600

GOLDEN SOULS

Katherine Lauffer



The year is 1944.

The Nazis are seeing the beginning of the Allied push back.

The Holocaust is peaking.

Thousands of people burn every day in camps scattered throughout Eastern and Central Europe

In Hungary, where peace had seemed to persist throughout the first years of the war, there was now panic.

On 19 March, 1944, German forces occupied Hungary.

Jews that had been safe were now in incredible danger.

In mid-May, deportations began, with thousands of Jews making it to Auschwitz every day.

The Holocaust had come to Hungary.

Hungary had dealt with the devil, and now the debt was due.



NEGOTIATIONS



Part 1

March 24

Today, the Vaada officially opened negotiations for Jewish lives with Nazi representatives.

[Dieter Wisliceny]

[Rezso Kasztner & Joel Brand]

So what can two Jews offer for the thousands left in your capital?

What could we offer indeed...

We can offer two million dollars, with a down payment of two hundred thousand

There wasn't much... But it was all we could safely risk.

The money will come from abroad.

Well, for that I can promise no deportations, but it might not be good enough for much else...

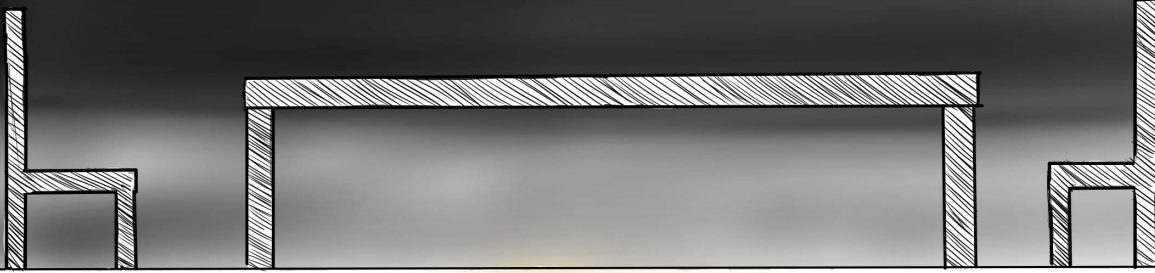
What about a small group that may go to Palestine?

I think not. Massive emigration, however, I am willing to discuss.

An emigration plan for 150 or 160 thousand then...

This was not the ideal situation. But what other choice did we have?

Negotiations were not the first plans.



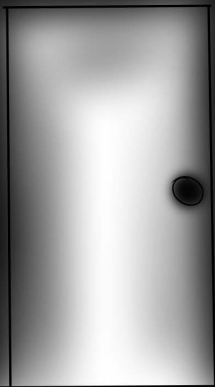
We sent messengers, warning others...



"Do not board the trains
they mean death."

But their ears were closed to what they did not want to hear.

Hiding was a



closed door

No one would run.



Not that no one
tried...

Resistance was
tempting,



But we did not have
the strength

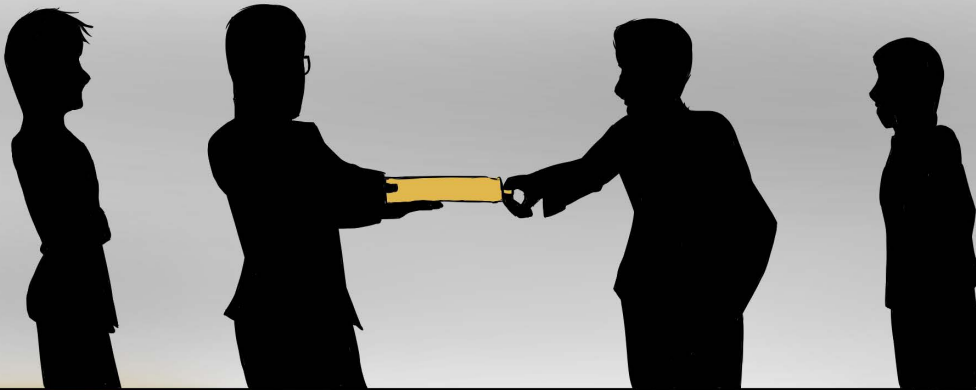
Negotiation was our last good option.



Of course, negotiations are only good if both sides can deliver.

April 9

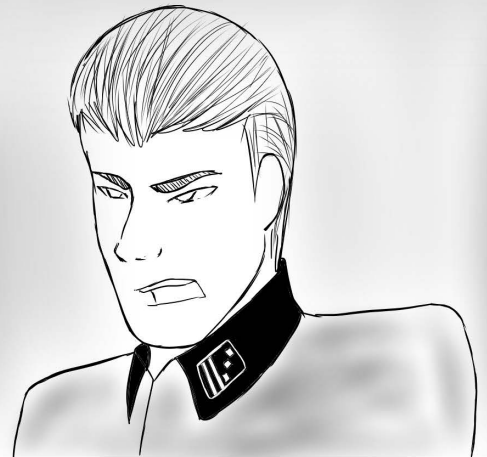
[\$200,000 in down payment is due. \$92,000 is all that is available.]



April 21

\$77,000 more was paid, bringing payment to \$169,000

You Jews really are greedy cheaters. You can't even fulfill a promise?



Don't be so indignant, at least we Germans are still gentlemen.

Unfortunately, deportations are now unavoidable. Maybe you can let 600 people emigrate though.



This seemed like a dead end. But the Nazis weren't quite done.



I want to make a deal with you, Joel Brand



And what is that?



For an appropriate payment...



I will release one million Jews from Auschwitz.



Be it trucks, tea, coffee, soap... Material, for blood.

The "trucks for blood" deal was struck, the price decided as 10,000 winterized trucks and differing amounts of consumer supplies.

Brand left for Istanbul to offer the deal to the Jews and the Allies. He did not return throughout the war.



Two months after Brand disappeared, I had lost nearly all hope.



Trains with thousands of Jews were leaving at disastrous rates.

I needed to do something.

I went and talked to Eichmann



I wanted to revisit the idea of large-scale emigration.

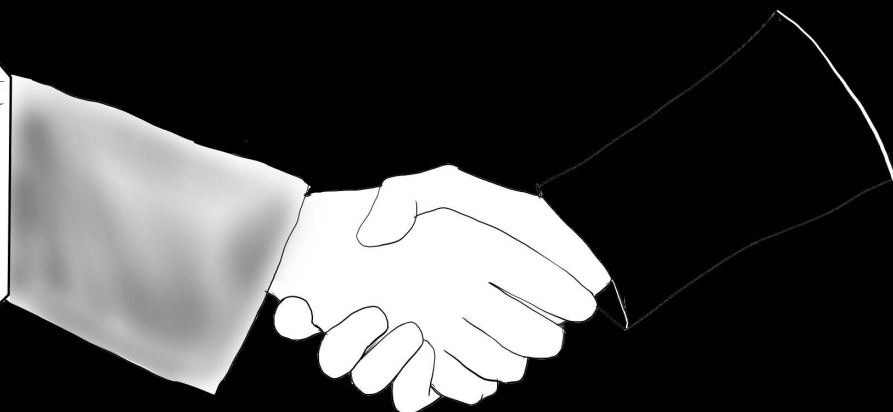


You want us to consider an emigration of six or seven hundred? Fine. But how will you pay?



This was the purpose of the two hundred thousand paid in April, allowing for travel to Palestine.

Palestine I can't allow. How does Spain sound?



A train to Spain, then.



MAKING THE LIST



Part 2

I was allowed to go
to my hometown
to gather
a number of
people.



I returned to Budapest with 388 people.



They stayed in a camp under
SS guard.

Could the Germans be trusted?

Would they really deliver our family and friends to safety?

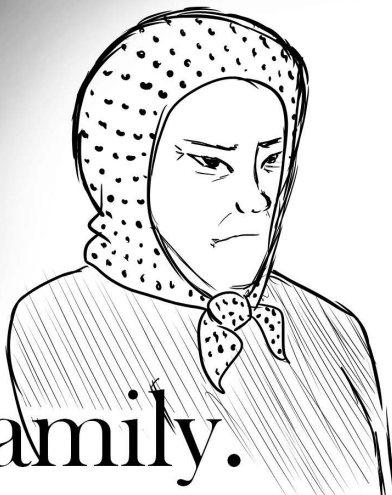


Even I did not know...
If the Nazis reneged
on their word...

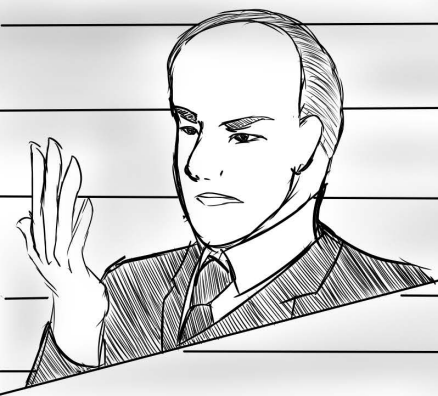


The whole train could
land in Auschwitz.

So I placed the ultimate insurance on
that train.



My own family.



Otto Komoly helped me negotiate prices with Eichmann.

He drove the price up to 500 dollars a head, which we eventually agreed on.



But then we were confronted with Kurt Becher, Chief of the Economic Department of the SS in Hungary. He took over negotiations for the train.



He first demanded 2000 dollars per head. A great leap from Eichmann and almost unattainable.



We talked him down to 1000 dollars a head. Still a lot, but better.



Finally, the list was finished. A total of 1,684 Jewish passengers would take the train.

In order to pay the ransom,
the 150 wealthiest
passengers bought
their place on the
train.



They paid
in a variety
of ways;
gold, foreign
currency,
jewels,
and pengo.

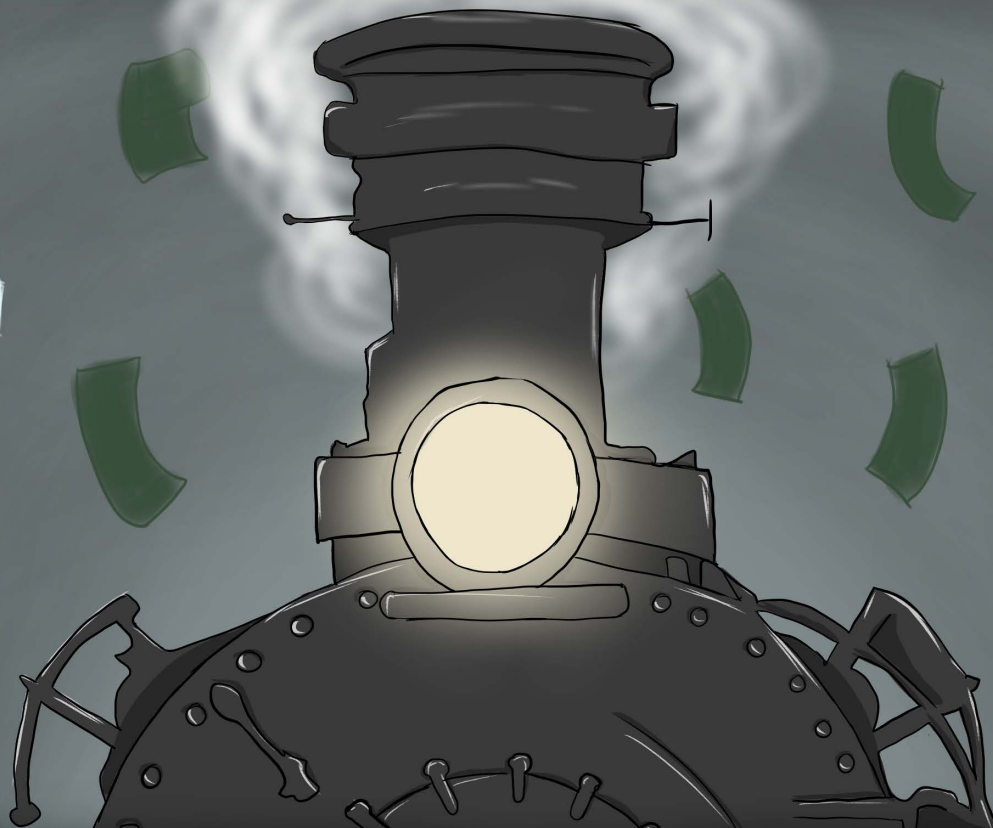


Komoly headed a
monetary
committee
to collect
and account
for payments.
I was not a
part of this group.

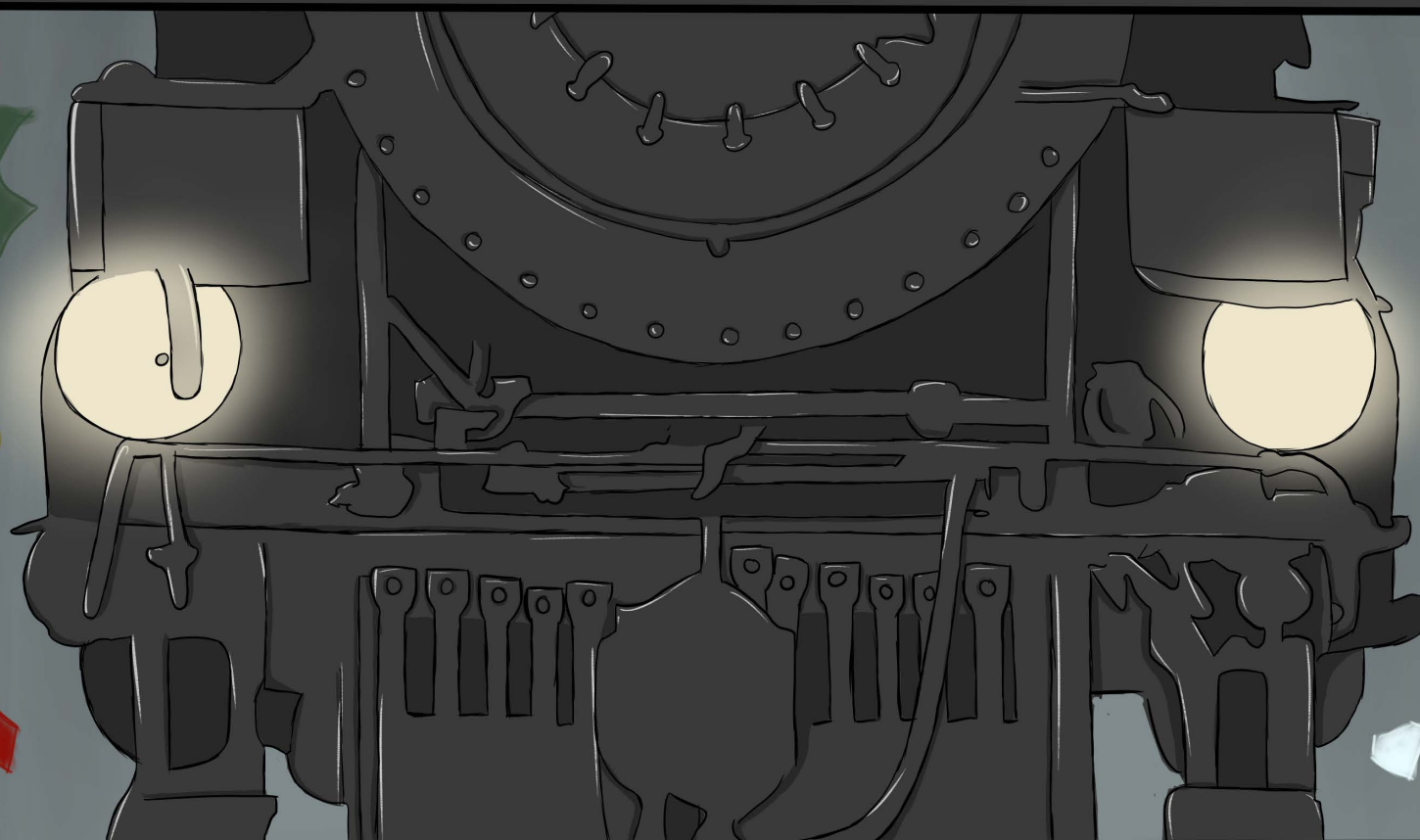


And so I had done it.
The path was difficult,
but I knew it was the
right way.
Now, just to get the
train off to its
destination.



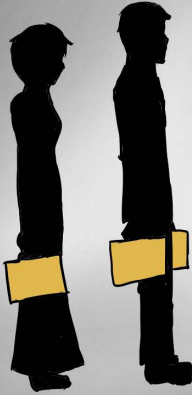


PAYMENT AND THE TRAIN



Part 3

Today
Hansi and Andreas
delivered
three suitcases

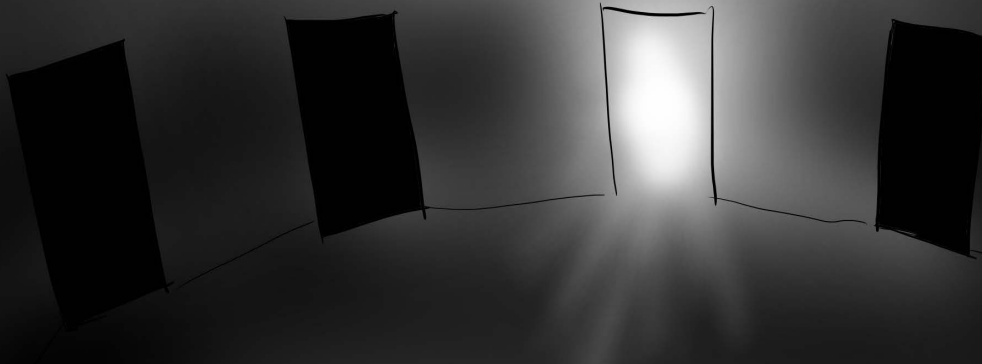


We are
paying
murderers.

Each one is rife
with controversy.



This was the right decision.



It is the only way.

The train took all types...

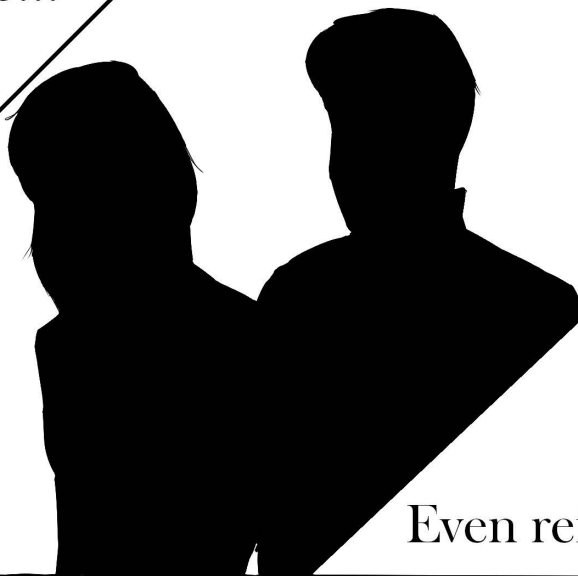


Even the anti-Zionist, Hasidic rabbi Joel Teitelbaum from Cluj.

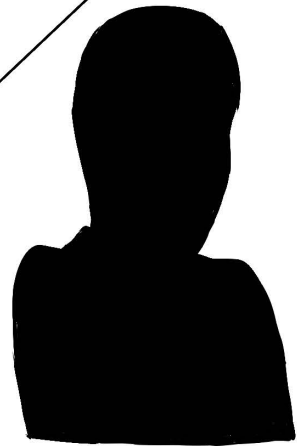
He made sure to let it be known that God was responsible for his salvation, not the Zionists.



Orthodox and Neologue...

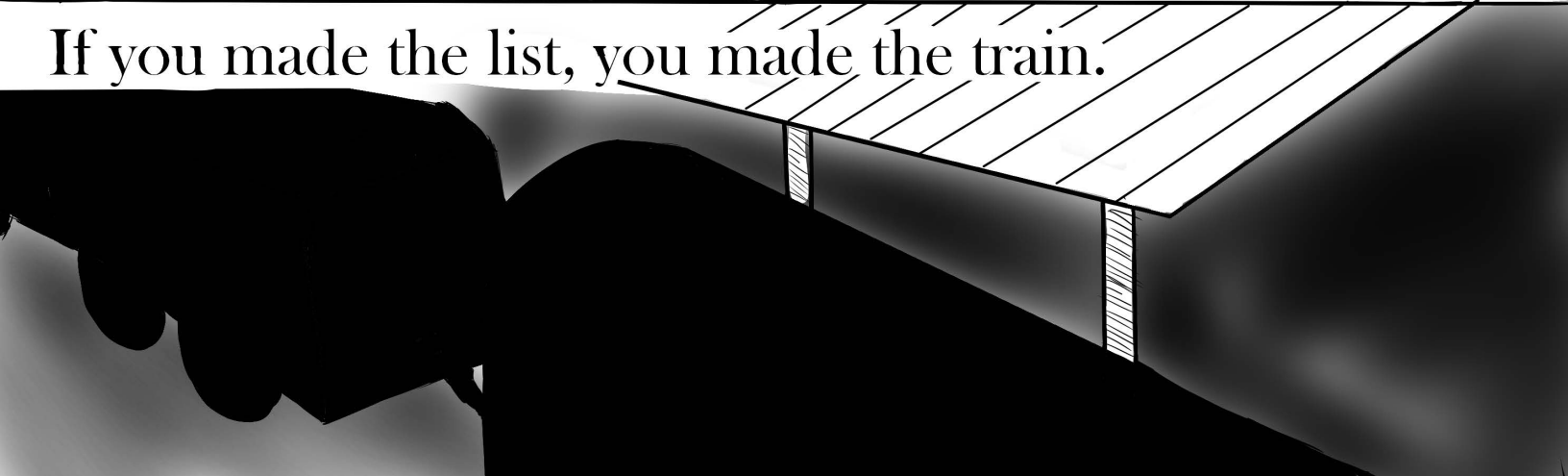


Zionists and other Jews...



Even refugee Poles and Slovaks

If you made the list, you made the train.



June 30

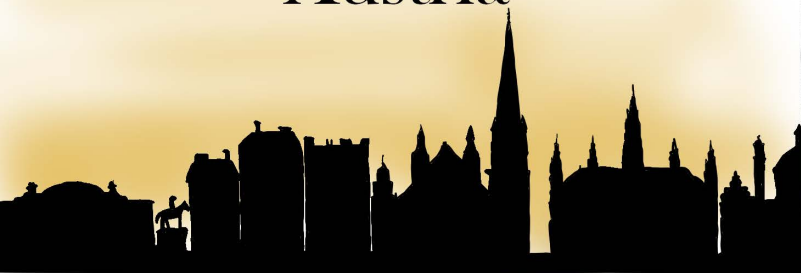
Austria

Budapest

The train departed from Budapest, headed for the Austro-Hungarian border.

From here, there were two options.

The train could continue to head west, into Austria



As the war turned against the Germans, Eichmann decided to send the train somewhere else.

Bergen Belsen.

As the Allied forces pushed further into France, travel to Spain became impossible.



The train headed toward Linz, Austria.

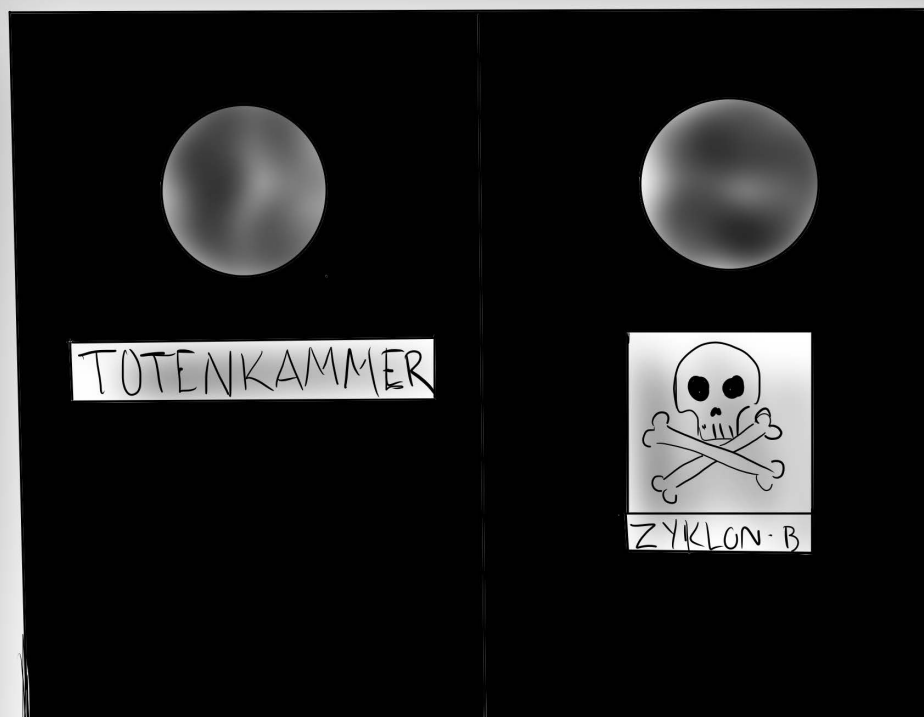


There were whispers across the train.

The word "showers" sent panic shooting through the passengers.

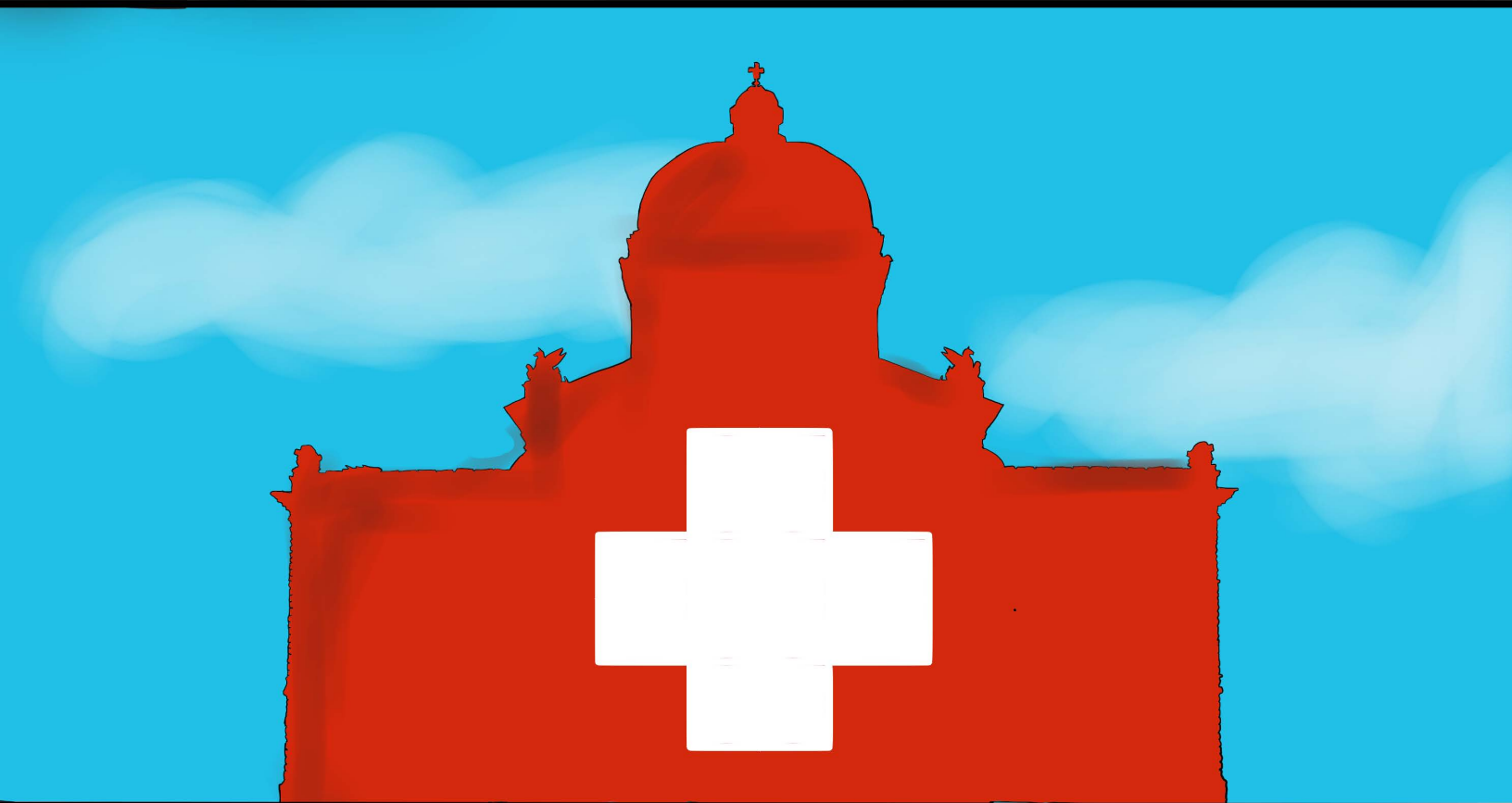


They were convinced they were destined for the gas.



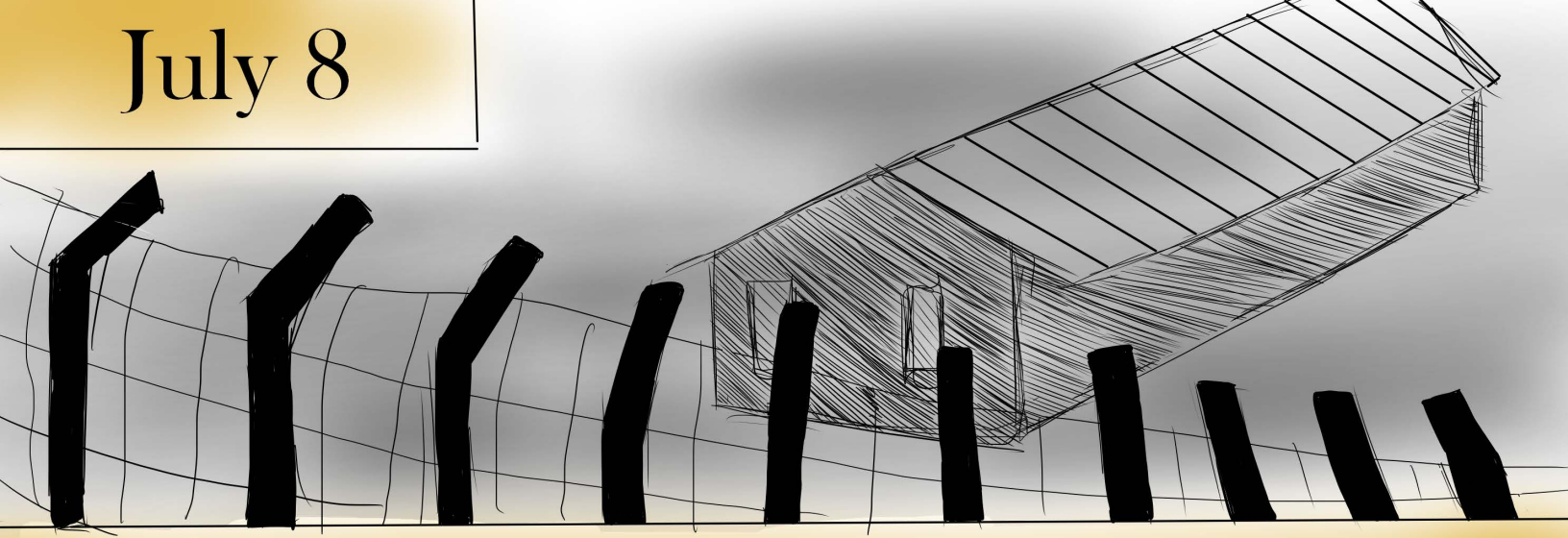


FROM BERGEN BELSEN TO SWITZERLAND



Part 4

July 8



The train arrived at Bergen Belsen...

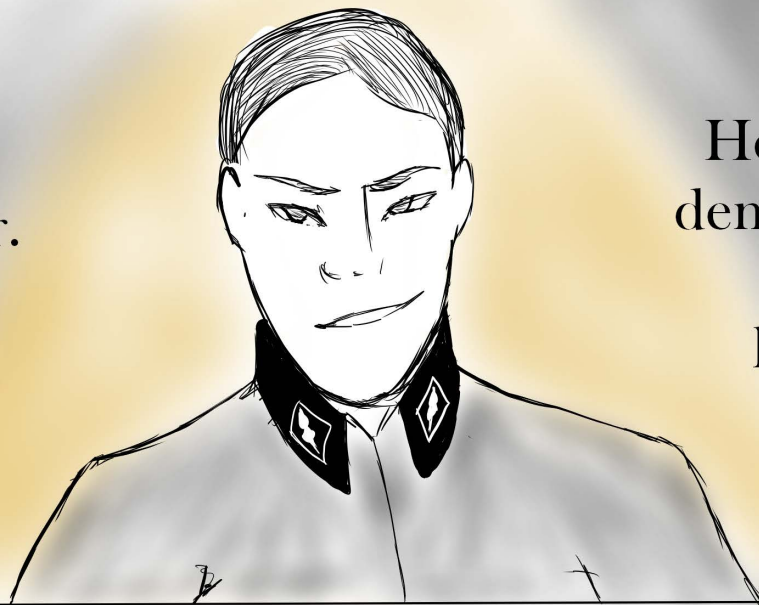
I demanded to know what was going on. All I was told was that more payment was required.

All the work we had already done had to be re-done...



I called on one of my foreign contacts. Saly Mayer, Swiss representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Center. If this problem was going to be solved, it was going to take foreign funds.

Our opponent
was Kurt Becher.



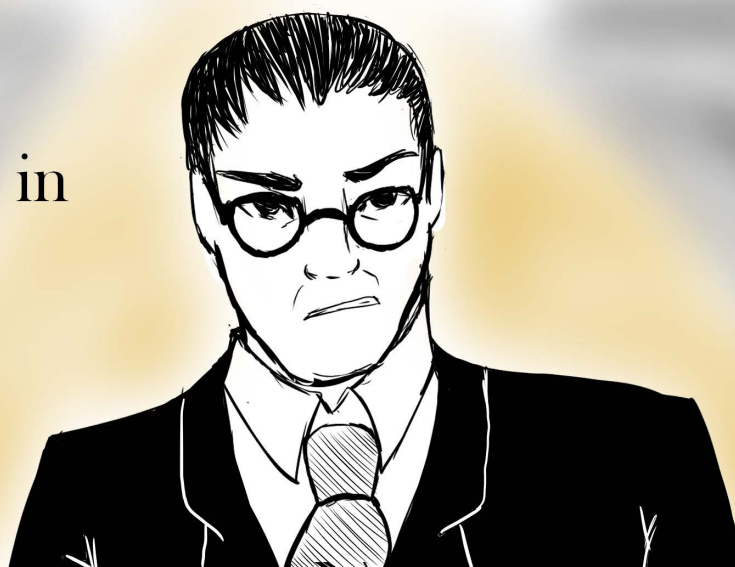
He made large
demands, much
like he
had in April.

As much as
Mayer may
have wanted
to help, he was
limited.



The money the
Americans had
sent had to be
distributed out
to many Jews
throughout the
world in similar
situations...

This put me in
a very tight
spot.



I was going
to have to
bluff against
an SS officer.

December 4

I had convinced
Becher I
could deliver
20 million SFR.

I can deliver
5 million
immediately
for the train's
release.



Fine. But I
will eventually
see the
rest of that
20 million.

I had done it.
I had convinced
him to let the
rest of my
people go.

Night of December 6



The remaining passengers
arrive in Switzerland.

After a long, stressful
journey...



They were finally safe.

In an ordeal lasting an entire year, Rezso Kasztner and his associates were able to save 1,684 Jews that were documented.

His efforts were inherently dangerous, dealing with men who would not hesitate to double-cross him.

A prideful man, Kasztner is often accused of seeking fame and wealth.

Regardless of his pride, without Kasztner's efforts, that many more Jewish Hungarians would have been burned in the crematoria of Auschwitz.

Those that he saved are the Golden Souls.

