

The Marino Family grew into its own with the Cold War, blossoming as a criminal nation within nations. Dominic's rising star soared with the success of his practical approach, and the growing ranks of those committed to or terrified of him ensured his profitable survival. He outlived Don Scali by sheer force of will alone, and assumed the kingpin's seat at the head of the Family table before the body was cold.

By the latter half of the Cold War, the Marino Family basically owned Europe, and those operating across the Continent, including spies, paid their dues or tangled with underworld enforcers. Unofficially, the Family became a quiet fourth super power intent not upon ideological conflict or expansion, but rather old fashioned greed.

THE REICHSBANK ROBBERY: A TREASURE HUNTER'S PERSPECTIVE

During World War II, the Nazis stole a vast amount of gold, silver, diamonds, precious art, currency, and other valuables, worth in excess of five and a half billion U.S. dollars at today's value. In February 1945, after the successful U.S. bombing of Berlin and the near-demolition of the Reichsbank (the Nazi war machine's monetary stockpile), much of the horde was moved 200 miles south, to the village of Merkers, where it was hidden in the bowels of a potassium mine. Two months later, the U.S. Third Army captured Merkers and French mine workers told the Allies about the underground spoils. The find consisted of over 8,000 bars of gold bullion and enormous piles of loose gold, silver, and currency, but it only accounted for a portion of the reported Reichsbank monies.

As the Allies were sifting through the Merkers cache, the Nazis decided to move the rest of the Reichsbank — including over nine tons of gold — to Oberbayern, their stronghold in southern Bavaria. They hoped to regroup from this location, plotting the rise of the Fourth Reich, but U.S. forces eventually caught up with them and captured their riches. Talled with the Merkers and other finds, however, this still fell short of the closing balances of the Precious Metals Department of the Berlin Reichsbank.

The vast majority of this missing fortune has never been found — at least, not to the public's knowledge. Despite this being dubbed by Guinness "The Largest Robbery in the History of the World," the widely accepted assumption is that this gold wasn't stolen by any single person or group, but rather by many opportunistic members of the Nazi Party and others with access to the gold in the twilight of the war.

The allure of lost Nazi gold is strong among treasure hunters, who piece together stories and rumors from all over, hoping to confirm and find a missing Nazi fortune. In the *World on Fire*, the horde's final destination — or, at least, the destination of the largest *recorded* horde — is defined, though Game Controls can easily establish other caches of nearly any size to fuel their own storylines. To this end, we provide a sampling of the many theories and threads potentially leading to additional stolen riches. Any new Nazi gold caches are likely subject to the same side effects as Dominic Demise's find (see page 61), though the GC can easily develop a reason this isn't the case.

- In 1945, in a remote part of the Austrian Alps, a Nazi caravan awakened farm girl Ida Weisenbacher and ordered her to hitch up a wagon to transport several heavy crates to Lake Toplitz (the Nazi vehicles couldn't complete the journey due to the rugged terrain). The crates were marked in code and Weisenbacher never saw their contents, but conjecture initially centered on stolen gold. Efforts to confirm this met with failure time and again, however. Lake Toplitz is over 300 ft. deep and its floor is littered with ancient trees uprooted or collapsed from the steep limestone cliffs surrounding it. Its water is devoid of oxygen and nothing lives there except bacteria and a rare species of worm. Together, these conditions thwarted attempts to search for the gold, and when divers eventually recovered rockets, torpedoes, and coded crates containing a printing press and counterfeit British pounds, many concluded that no other loot would be found. This may, of course, not be the case.
- In 2003, an amateur diver discovered a solid gold cauldron at the bottom of Lake Chimsee in Bavaria. The item was decorated with Celtic and Indo-Germanic figures and speculation pointed to its commission by a Nazi official fascinated with mythology. The cauldron was appraised at over a hundred thousand U.S. dollars, prompting another sweep through the Nazi's former "alpine fortress" in the Bavarian Alps. *Officially*, nothing was ever found.
- Wehrmacht officer Dr. Max Merten was one of many Nazi overseers at slave labor camps across Europe. In Greece, he was the administrator of the camp at Thessaloniki and stole 50 cases of valuables from its captives allegedly totaling two billion modern U.S. dollars. Merten moved these objects to the Peloponnesus peninsula aboard a Nazi submarine and from there the stolen goods were transferred to the *Sofia*, a fishing boat that was intentionally sunk near Kalamata. Merten planned to retrieve the gold after the war but wound up in a Greek prison in 1958. He later received a presidential pardon but wasn't allowed to leave Germany without incurring further jail time. He died in 1976 and the valuables were presumably never recovered.

COLD WAR RECRUITMENT

Most of the modern groups presented in *World on Fire* are highly cosmopolitan, recruiting from every corner of the globe and every layer of society and walk of life. This is common practice in some parts of today's real world espionage community, but wasn't always. Especially during the Cold War, when borders and beliefs were clearly defined, many organizations enforced strict recruitment and promotion criteria.

Majestic Branch, for instance, was intensely national until stress and attrition reduced its membership to only a handful of operatives in the 60s and 70s. This forced the Branch to rethink its narrow approach and begin actively seeking foreign agents, beginning with proven doubles ready to defect.

The Nine Tiger Dynasty has always been fiercely defensive of its traditions, slow to modernize culturally, technologically, and otherwise. In the latter quarter of the 20th century, it started to induct foreigners, though only in a limited capacity and rarely without proof of the outsiders' devotion or aptitude with The Edge (see page 61).