

Alexander von Knorre, Christine Haas: Caught! - Time Travel Into The World Of Crime

Erwischt! - Zeitreise ins Verbrechen

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ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

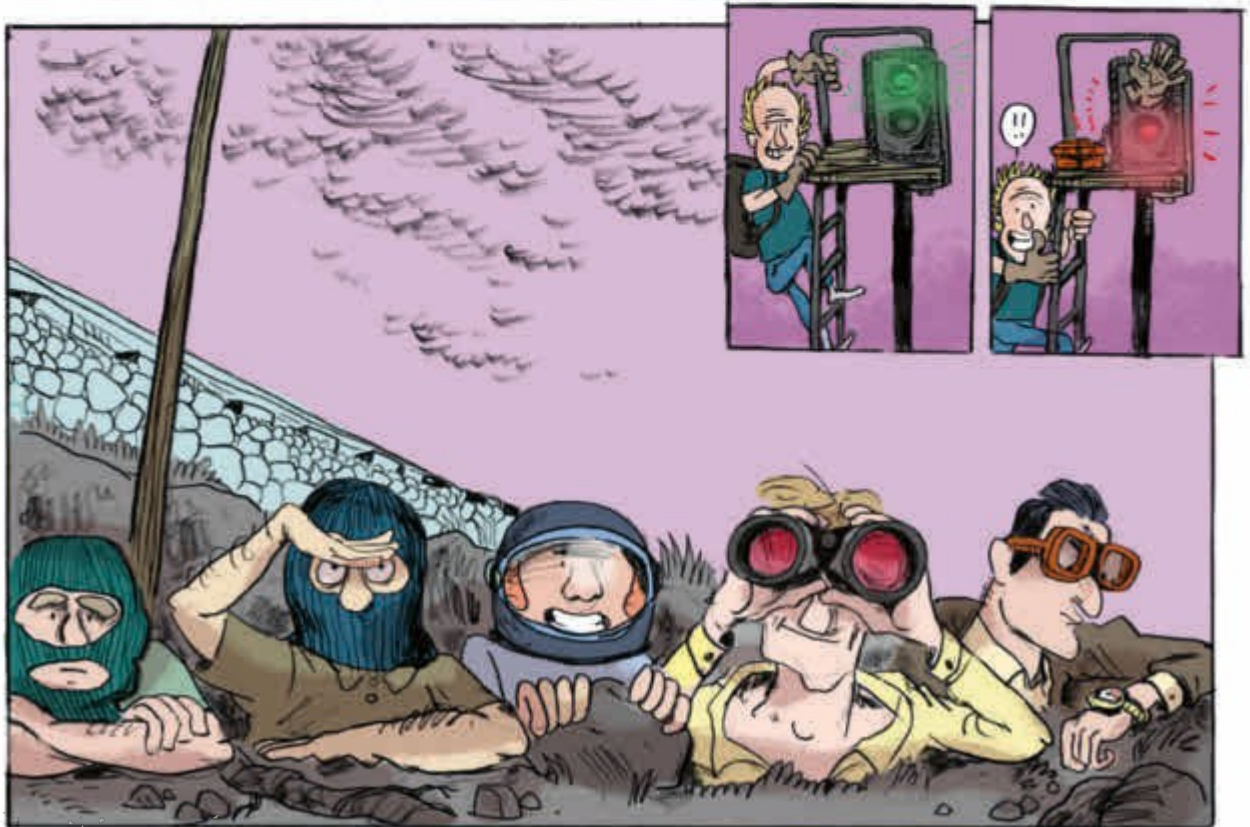
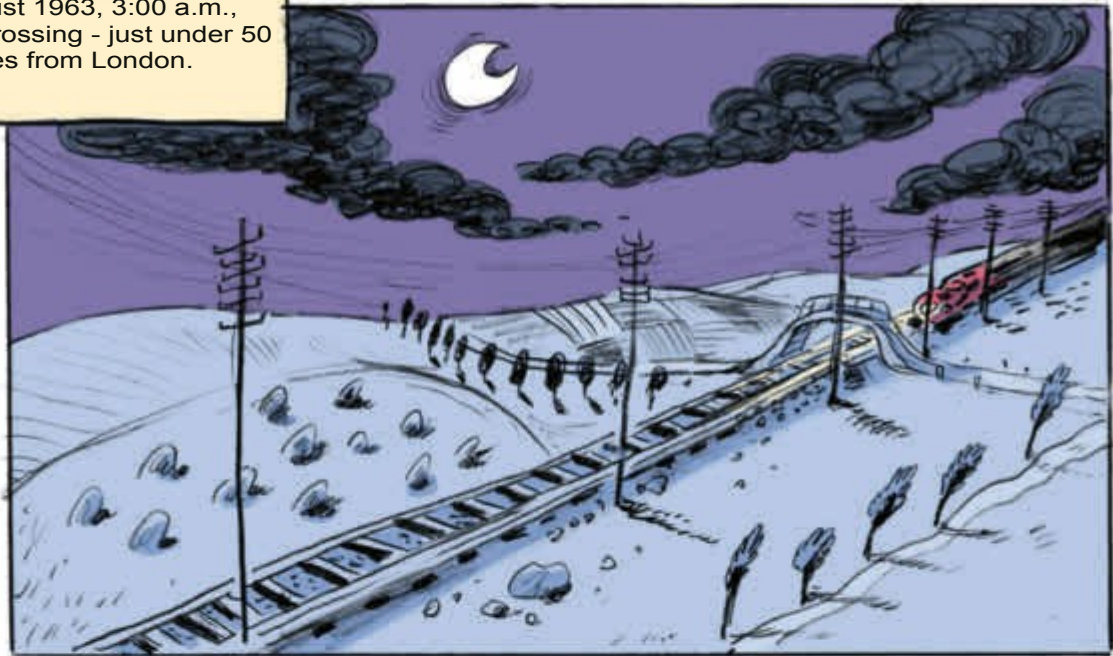
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Please always check the original manuscript

case 1: the great post office robbery

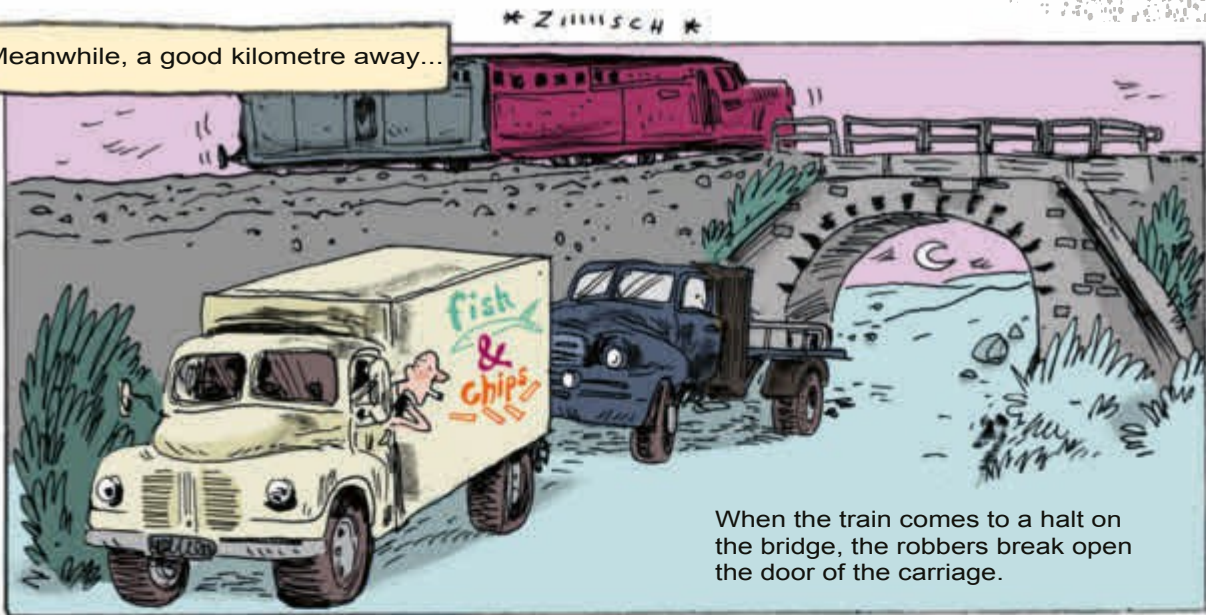
8th August 1963, 3:00 a.m.,
Sears Crossing - just under 50
kilometres from London.



case 1: the great post office robbery



Meanwhile, a good kilometre away...





case 1: the great post office robbery



What happened?

Never has more money been stolen than in the UK on the night of 8th August 1963: as it does every day, the Glasgow **mail train** rattles through the darkness at 3:00 in the morning. It was carrying thousands of letters, parcels and packages to be delivered in London the next day. This is well known. What hardly anyone knows is that **128 sacks**, filled to the brim with **banknotes**, are stored in the carriage directly behind the locomotive. Day after day, the mail train transports huge amounts of cash from the banks in Glasgow to the London headquarters. The freight of the mail train of 8th August is even particularly valuable. Nevertheless, nobody fears a robbery. And so the engine driver and the stoker are merely surprised when about 50 kilometres from London, a signal suddenly turns red. While the 70 or so postal workers on the train calmly continue sorting letters, the stoker gets out of the engine to see what's going on. This is the moment the gang hiding in the darkness has been waiting for.

At the signal from their leader Bruce Reynolds, **two masked men** separate the locomotive and the first carriage, in which the money is stored, from the rest of the train. The driver is threatened with **an iron bar** and forced to drive the locomotive to a small bridge. The Bridego Bridge, one kilometre away, leads over a road on which two delivery vans are already waiting. The train has barely come to a halt when the robbers break open the door of the money wagon. While some of them keep the guards inside at bay with iron bars, the rest of the gang drag the sacks of money into the waiting vans under the bridge. When 120 sacks have been loaded, the 15 men take off. They race to their hideout, a farm about 50 kilometres away. Their haul: **2.6 million Pounds!** That is one of the largest sums of money ever transported on a mail train.

The 120 sacks that Reynolds and his men captured weighed a total of 2,5 tonnes - about as much as a large car!



Big haul: 2,6 million Pounds would be worth around 60 million Euros today! For example, you could buy an aeroplane or around 2,000 cars from that money.

How did the gang prepare?

Bruce Reynolds and his men have managed to hold up and rob a train with around 70 postal workers on board **without firing a single shot**. The biggest robbery in history is the result of months of **meticulous preparation**: first of all, the right place had to be found to stop the train. The lonely Sears Crossing was almost perfect for this, as there was nothing here but fields, meadows - and a signal. This train traffic light was usually green. So the leader of the gang, Bruce Reynolds, recruited an electrician: Roger Cordrey. He climbs up to the signal on the night of the robbery. There he puts a glove over the green light and **connects** a battery to the **red light**. The light turns red and the **train driver brakes**.

Other gang members have long since **cut** the **phone lines** so that no one can call for help quickly (mobile phones didn't exist back then).

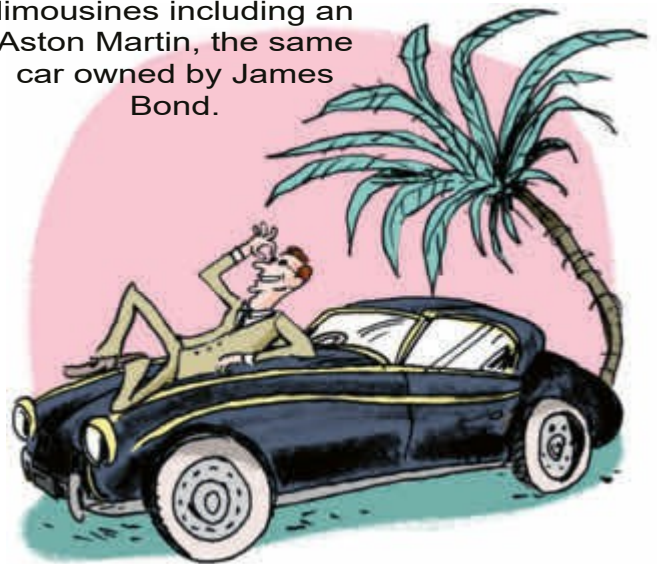
Bruce Reynolds and his men have also thought about how they can get rid of the 70 or so postal workers aboard the train: The men separate **the locomotive and the first carriage**, in which the money is stored, from the other carriages. Letters, parcels and packages, and above all the officials who sort them, are left behind at Sears Crossing,



while the train driver is forced to continue with the money wagon to the nearby bridge.

The escape is also well prepared: Months earlier, the gang had already bought a **farm** and made it their headquarters. While the police set up roadblocks to intercept the crooks with their loot, they quietly play Monopoly on the farm. Waiting in their hideout for the police to leave again.

Bruce Reynolds owns several expensive limousines including an Aston Martin, the same car owned by James Bond.



WANTED !

Bruce Reynolds

Nickname "the Major" (a major is an officer)



Born: 7 September 1931

Occupations: Thief, but also errand boy and bicycle courier, for example.

At the age of 14, Reynolds dropped out of school and started working.

First as a messenger boy, then he takes on various jobs. When he gets arrested for theft for the first time, he is working as a bicycle courier. Reynolds escapes from prison, is arrested again and flees again. As soon as he is free again, he continues his career as a thief. He is caught again and taken into custody. After that, he is no longer satisfied with small-time crooks. From then on, he enters rich people's houses. There he robs jewellery, gems and cash. It's going so well,

that he will soon be almost as rich as the people he steals from. To make sure that nobody suspects anything, he buys an antique shop and pretends to be dealer. When he learns of his friend and accomplice Gordon Goody, that huge sums of cash are transported on the mail train that runs night after night from Glasgow to London, it is clear to him immediately: the robbery is to be his masterpiece.

Characteristics: conspicuously well-dressed

Character: loves luxury and the thrills, thinks very strategically (thanks to him, the raid on the postal train planned down to the last detail), ambitious, polite - he is regarded as a Gentleman thief

How were the gang members caught?

The robbery and escape are masterfully planned, but they are not perfect. Reynolds has ordered the guards in the money wagon not to get out for at least 30 minutes. This is an important **clue for Scotland Yard**, London's criminal investigation department, as the gang's hideout can apparently **be reached by car within half an hour**. By midday the day after the robbery, the police radio announced that the robbers were probably hiding within a 50-kilometre radius of the crime scene, Bridego Bridge (a distance that could be covered by car in 30 minutes). Five days later, the police discovered the farm.

At this point, Reynolds and his people may have fled, but they have **left traces behind**.

Scotland Yard examines the Monopoly game and around a thousand other objects - and finds lots of **fingerprints**. These prints are compared in the computer with the fingerprints of the criminals, which are already stored there. The search takes just a few seconds, and the result makes Scotland Yard rejoice: nine prints are identical to those stored.

Among them are those of Bruce Reynolds.

Now the police have launched **a manhunt**:

The posters they have put up everywhere offer a **reward** for information leading to the arrest of a suspect. The reward for such a tip-off is said to be 200,000 pounds. That's about 200 times as much as the average citizen earns in a year

during this time! Of course, many people are keen on the money, and so Scotland Yard receives loads of tips, some of which help the police. And by the beginning of January 1964, most of the gang members are arrested. But not Bruce Reynolds, who has **fled to Mexico** with his wife and young son Nick. He lived there for five years. He returns to Great Britain in 1968. Under a false name, he initially lives undetected in a small town by the sea. But then he calls other gang members in London. The police get wind of this and track him down despite his disguise. **Only three mail train robbers are never found**. The reason: they also wore **gloves** on the farm. No fingerprints of them can therefore be found.



Fingerprints wanted!

A **fingerprint** is something very special because it is different from all other fingerprints in the world - it is **unique**. This is due to the tiny grooves on the fingertips, the so-called papillary ridges. They look slightly different on every finger. People leave fingerprints on everything they touch. A fingerprint is clearly visible when chocolate sticks to your fingers, for example. But even someone who just washed their

hands leaves traces on the surface they touch - some skin grease and sweat always stick. This cannot be seen with the naked eye, but can easily be made visible. For example with **graphite powder**. The police also use chemicals when searching for fingerprints to unmask criminals.

DID YOU KNOW?

Graphite powder only needs to be sprinkled over the fingerprint to reveal the fine lines. The powder is easy to make by grinding the tip of a pencil.



DID YOU KNOW?

Since no two people have exactly the same fingerprints, it can also be used to unlock some cell phones.

The punishment

In **the longest trial in English criminal history** to date, most of the mail train robbers are sentenced to very long prison terms - seven of them to **30 years in prison!** Not even murderers get that much. Perhaps the court would have been more lenient if the mail train robbers had not been celebrated like heroes by the public. But that's the way it is: many people are impressed that 15 men managed to stop an entire train and steal a huge amount of money without firing a single shot, and even without having any guns with them. The mail train robbers are regarded as gentleman thieves.

With this harsh penalty, the judge wants to prevent something like this from ever happening again.

Four years later, the head of the gang, **Bruce Reynolds**, is sentenced to 25 years in prison, but only has to serve **nine years**. Most of the other mail train robbers were also released earlier. Two of them manage to escape from prison: Charlie Wilson flees to Canada. There, Scotland Yard tracked him down four years later and he was sent back behind bars. Ronald Biggs, on the other hand, lives in Brazil for a whole 30 years after his escape before he can no longer stand it for homesickness, returns and is sentenced to nine years in prison.



Can this still happen today?

No, because today most things happen **online**. Money is no longer transported by train. But it is transported in cars. For example, the cash that is collected in supermarkets. Such cash transporters are still being robbed today. However, telephone lines are not cut for this purpose. As a rule, this is no longer possible, as they now usually run underground. And even if that were possible, it wouldn't matter because anyone with a mobile phone could still call the police immediately.

