

# E s war

## einmal...

an English lad called Douglas, who loved to read of the world and learn the tongues of distant lands. What he longed for more than anything was to see the world for himself, rather than zooming in on it to the maximum resolution offered by Google Earth. But, alas, his family was poor. So he stayed at home, browsing atlases, phrasebooks and Wikipedia in the hope that one day he too could travel.

Upon reaching his twentieth year, Douglas learned of Erasmus – a powerful lord at court in Brussels, said to have vast sums of gold for the financing of expeditions and quests. He quickly sent an E-missive and was awarded a stipend to spend one year exploring Berlin, capital of mighty Prussia. He embraced his wicked father and lovely stepmother and set off down the path, his few belongings slung over his shoulder.

The journey was long and hard, but four arduous hours later he was in Berlin. Full of wonderment, he stood before the majestic Fernsehturm: part Diskokugel, part Frikadellenbällchen on a cocktail stick. He took a room in a nearby Wohngemeinschaft and sat by the window to peruse Tip, a tome of local lore he found upon a shelf. Flicking through the pages, he was soon enraptured by its talk of curried sausage and underground wagons. But what intrigued him most of all was a short paragraph about a mill that had been converted to a Festsaal, where young people might dance to music composed on modern mechanised harpsichords. Its name was Zwerghain.

The book said that entry was hard to gain; only those with the correct garb and manner were allowed to pass by the fearsome guards. Douglas sighed and cried aloud: “I wish I could go to Zwerghain!”

Just then he caught sight of a most unusual fellow standing by the door, wearing enormous high heels, an impressive wig and flawless make-up.

„Wer bist du?“ Asked our hero, quite perplexed.

„Ey Mensch, ich bin dein Mitbewohner, JoJo. Du kannst mich aber als dein Schutzengel betrachten. Also denn, was ist los, mein Lieber? Warum schreist du so?“

„Ach, JoJo, ich bin sehr traurig. Ich würde so gerne ins Zwerghain, weiß aber nicht, wie ich reinkommen sollte.“

„Tja, damit kann ich dir helfen. Du musst nur drei kleine Aufgaben erfüllen. Nimm doch dieses magisches Wegbier, es führt dich hin.“

Jojo handed Douglas a brown glass bottle labeled ‘Berliner Pilsner’. Douglas peered at the red bear on the ticket, and when he looked up, JoJo had gone. Confused and a little forlorn he took a swig, mumbling:

„Wegbier, Wegbier, wohin soll ich geh’n?

Ich will heut’ Nacht ins Zwerghain,

Und kann den Weg nicht sehen.“

Suddenly the bottle tugged at his arm. It pulled him onto the crowded street and into a bright yellow omnibus. The bus soon entered a forest, and Douglas was the only passenger left when the beer nudged him once again. He got out and the beer led him into the trees. After a few minutes he found himself by a lake. In front of him stood a man of somewhat advanced years, quite naked.

„Douglas, willkommen. Es ist schon Zeit für die erste Aufgabe: FKK.“

„Effka was? Was muss ich eigentlich tun?“ asked Douglas, eyes fixed on the horizon.

„Du musst dich vor einer Menge Unbekannten völlig ausziehen, und in den See springen. Nur dann bist du rein.“

Douglas noticed a large group of people sitting by the lakeside, all naked. Despite the anxiety and embarrassment rising up in his breast, he cast his garments valiantly to the floor, and himself into the water.

Next, the beer took him to large blue castle set back from a boulevard named in honour of Karl Marchs, a famous alchemist. He went in and was greeted by a stern woman sitting behind a desk.

„Guten Tag Douglas. Ich bin die Beamte. Für deine zweite Aufgabe musst du um eine Nachtklubeintrittserlaubnisbestätigung kämpfen. Ohne meinen Stempel kommst du nie ins Zwerghain.“

The battle was fierce, but by summoning all of his strength and knowledge of EU migration law, Douglas finally bested the clerk. He took the scroll and stumbled back to the street, glugging on the Wegbier.

The small bottle, now nearly empty, guided him once more across the city. All too soon he was at the gates of Zwerghain itself. He joined the line of people waiting and

wondered what was in store for him next. The man beside him, armed with a Wegbier of his own, turned and said:

„First time at Zwerghain, mate?“

„Entschuldigung, bist du nicht deutsch?“

„It's Berlin kid, no-one here's from here.“

„Oh, how much there is to learn! Tell me, have you been into Zwerghain? How do I get in?“

„You must answer a riddle. The question is always the same, but no-one has ever learned the answer.“

By now they were at the front of the queue, and the man stepped forward. The guard whispered something, waited for a response and then considered it. Evidently the answer was unsatisfactory; the guard drew his sword and beheaded the man there and then. Douglas drank the last of his Wegbier, handed the empty bottle to a passing tramp and stepped forward. The guard scowled at him through a chain-mail of piercings.

„Und nun die dritte Aufgabe. Wenn du mein Rätsel richtig beantwortest, kommst du rein. Aber falls nicht, stirbst du. Bist du bereit?“

Douglas took a deep breath and nodded. His inquisitor paused before asking: „Douglas, was ist Zwerghain?“

What is Zwerghain? Douglas' mind raced. He thought of the crowds and the forest, of JoJo, FKK, the Stempel, of the beggar, the bus and the Bahn. He thought of his Wegbier. He thought of Berlin, and he answered:

„Zwerghain? Es ist ja nur ein Klub.“

The guard bowed deeply and stood aside. In Douglas went, und wenn er nicht gestorben ist, tanzt er noch heute.