

A hot Constantinople summer 1865. Fifteen year old Vassili Zaharoff one of the countless young fellows growing up in Tatavla, the greek slum area ekes out an existence as a „pessweng“ and „tulumbadschi“ means a pimp, gigolo, drug dealer, money launderer. He speaks ten languages fluently, possesses a heat wrenching charm, is smart, handsome, wise and has a special kind of honesty, exactly what one needs when one chooses to live on the other side of the law.

The sophisticated young gambler lives dangerously, lives on the edge, sometimes the hunter, sometimes the hunted. He is a masterly liar and cheat, father's a son and deserts the mother of his child. Along the way he grabs money out of the cashbox of his rather unfair uncle, flees to London, lands there in a prison and manages to escape just by the skin of his teeth.

In times other than the eighteen hundreds, Zaharoff would have been classed as a nameless Bohemian from the Balkans. But throughout England, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Turkey and Greece are signs of war. With the monarchies crumbling and new democracy still in its infancy, clumpy military are left to fill the vacuum.

Diplomacy cradles worthless alliances and important international treaties are made and at the same time broken. History opens itself to those who know no scruples. It is a society where moral values do not play an important role any longer.

Zaharoff the neverending casanova, the cunning commisioner, the Mister 5 Percent, now 34 years old, accidentally begins to operate as an agent for a Norwegian Arms Concern in Athens/Greece. He knows exactly that this may be his last chance. Quickly he realises that between the drunken sailors and the pretentious business managers and famous statesmen lies a very fine line. With money and sex all of them can be bought, blackmailed and sold. Within a very short time he climbs to the top of the social ladder and conquers Petersburg, London, Paris.

Using his killer gutter instict, he plays Russian Generals, Greek Prime minis-

ZAHAROFF WARS AND LOVE

by Wolf Reiser

ters, French Bankers, Turkish Militaries and German Press giants one against the other. Like a prankster from the Levant he calls all hands: cunning intrigue, notorious bribery, ugly acts of sabotage and classic tricks of espionage. Single handedly he becomes the king of the global arms business.

At this point he supplies practically every country in the world. He provokes and stages wars with such ease and comfort as others would do in organising a garden party. He leaves behind a trail of destructions, bloodbaths, battlefields and in the year 1900 he is one of the richest men in the world. „Monsieur Z.Z.“ or „The pedlar of Death“ or „The Grey Wulf“ or „L'homme mysterieux de L'Europe“, as he is widely known has become a legend in his lifetime, a myth, the great tamer of the turn of the century. But alas, it is not enough for him to be the most powerful man of the world. His greedy endeavours in order to compensate for his miserable childhood know no limits, nobody knows not even he himself where this road should end.

The extremely successful and at the same time entangled life of Zaharoff is in addition crowned by a tragic love. At the age of 44, he meets a Spanish born Duchess. This is not only a top address in the worlds noble circles. This lady is not only poetic, but also tender and breathtakingly beautiful. Zaharoff, the irresistible heartbreaker, fills her heart's desires and indeed she reciprocates his love. But the Devil and his Madonna find themselves in a love riddled with malice. A few weeks after her husband, an important figure of the Royal, Spanisch-Bourbon Court, discovered the

existence of his wife's affair, he falls into a coma. The choleric aristocrat lies semi-conscious in a darkened chambre in the wing of the Kings's Palace out of Madrid. His deteriorating condition prompts the doctors to give him less than a half year to live.

The laws of this time do not allow divorce. For the Duchess, a devout Catholic, this suggestion from Zaharoff is absolutely unacceptable. He succeeds in restraining her indignation but is forced to accept that marriage could be considered only after the death of the Duke.

Patience is asked now and Zaharoff has to show style and to prove that he will be able to move in this circles. Nevertheless they rent love nests on the Cote and meet secretly hiding their love from others to avoid the gossip columns. Separated and on the side of less amiable companions in order to fulfill their obligatory social duties, they start to become victims of fear, jealousy and reconciliations.

This passionate love is cursed, says the Duchess and feels more and more that she can no longer tolerate the nerve racking situation that their happiness is totally dependant upon the death of another. But for the loving and calculating Zaharoff, a life without her is not any longer imaginable.

Suddenly Zaharoff's illegitimate son appears. He only wants to get to know his father, this mysterious invisible master of the darkness, who now and then makes the headlines in connection with war and multimillion pounddeals. But in Zaharoff's life there is no place for this trouble-maker of the forgotten past. Icecold he dismisses the tiresome

visitor. Exactly now, with the ever increasing probability of him becoming part of the noble Spanish family, such reminders of his origin would lead to a social disaster. Besides, he had invested a lot of time over the years in order to delete all traces of his life and in turn procure a new, perfect polished image.

Driven to despair the son approaches a well known journalist, who had for a long time without any success been investigating the case of the untouchable armsdealer. For this journalist the unexpected turn up of that young man is a golden opportunity. But instead of trying to bring Zaharoff to justice for his large variety of crimes during decades, he chooses to use the simpleton and the new found facts for his own benefit in the form of blackmail. Zaharoff panics.

A few days later two bodies are found in the Seine river. Police investigations are frozen soon after without any results. Zaharoff's bodyguards could not know that the son also would appear at the arranged meeting place. Thus, in his own mind freeing himself from any guilt, Zaharoff then concerns himself with more important business that being the completion of his lifeswork.

But of course that incident left traces. Full with rage, Zaharoff throws himself back into the world's politics. And the whole world is ready for him. At the end of World War I he has made more than one hundred million pounds.

Waiting for the death of the Duke occupies him continuously. The only real love of his life has become an agonising pain and endless suffering. After 20 years of deplorable restraint his inner frustration comes to an explosion, culminating in repulsive psychopathic uproar. Himself a Greek from Turkish Constantinople causes discord between the armies of his two native countries. So he supplies both Konstantin II and later Atatürk with all kinds of arms. Using the full power of the media here and there he kindles the fire of anger and mistrust, driving both countries, traditional enemies anyway, into the brutal battle of 1921/22, which ended in the blood-soaked harbour dock of Smyrna/Izmir.

Following his emotions for the first time in his undertakings he lost an im-

mense amount of private money in this self engineered war.

Nearly 40 years have passed and finally the redeeming news arrived. That the death of a lunatic is the key to his happiness is a degrading insult for Zaharoff. What use are the most influential friends, intimate contacts in governments, banks and business empires against the maelstrom of time?

In 1924 after one year of mourning Zaharoff and the Duchess marry in the small village of Arronville near Paris. It is probably the most inconsolable wedding of all times, the burial of two hearts. Long time ago, during a passionate St.Tropez summer night, she mentioned how much she loves the Riviera. Since this moment Zaharoff worked furiously, in order to present to her the principality Monaco together with the Casino of Monte Carlo. For that he even brought a private paragraph into the „Treaty of Versailles“. He devoted himself all of the years for this moment, but the most expensive love gift of the century has become but a pitiful shell of its former glory.

Zaharoff is on target – he finally can call a country his own – but life and love have vanished. Two sorrowful old people are controlling the tiny state of Monte Carlo, but they are jealous of visitors, positively afraid of strangers, surrounded 24 hours by bodyguards and servants. A few months after the wedding the Duchess dies in his gout rigid arms; a blow from which he never recovered and for which he could not forgive the fates.

Left behind is a lonely, embittered king in a golden wheelchair. Still he seeks the consolation and company of women, but the harder he tries the more difficult he finds it to escape from the memories of his one and only love. She comes back to him through the eyes of every other woman.

Is it repentance, vanity, boredom or solitude why the 83 years old man starts to write his memoirs? Nobody knows the answer. At one point during this very last „act of armament“ he grabs the pile of manuscripts and throws them into the burning fire. The owner of 300 directorates, banks, railways, hotels,

oil and mining concessions, factories, shipyards, arms and weapon companies, the Sir, Knight and Duke of Spain, who holds 298 decorations from thirty-one nations throws it all away.

November 1936. It's about seven o'clock in the evening, time to have diner in the huge, illuminated dining-room on the ground floor of his splendid 120-Rooms-Chateau – to have diner once more alone again.