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The Hunt for Giant Blue

Ulrich Renz



BC & FRIENDS

BO & FRIENDS



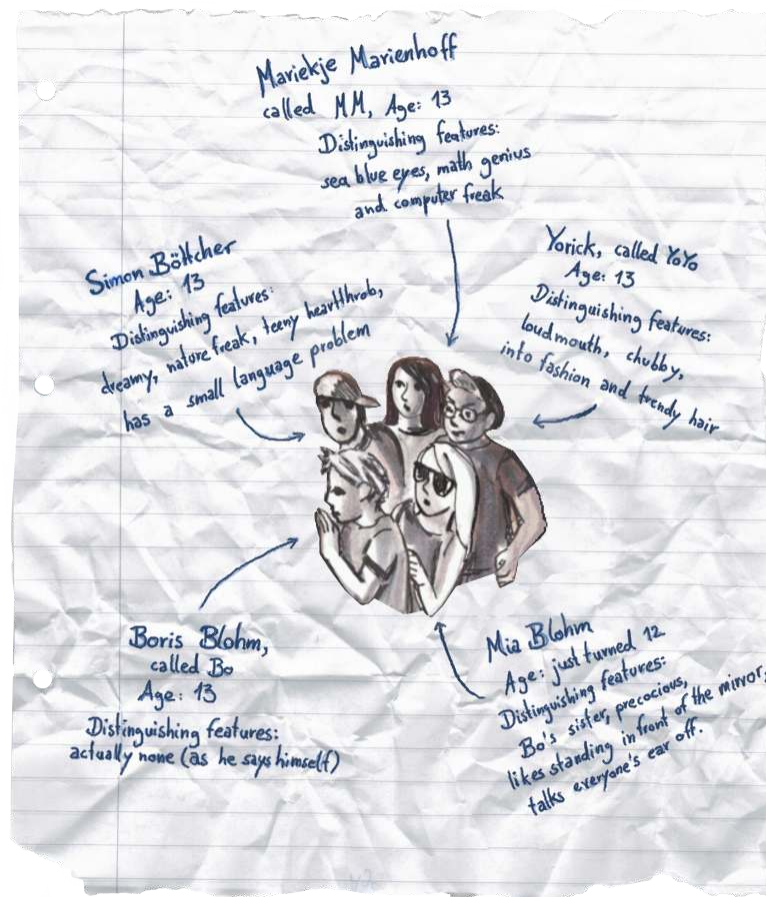
Ulrich Renz

The Hunt for Giant Blue

**Translation from German by Samuel
Cotten**

Wanted Posters

Bo & Friends



- *Name:* Boris Blohm, called **Bo**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* actually none (as he says himself).

- *Name:* **Simon** Böttcher
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* dreamy, nature freak, teeny heartthrob, has a small language problem.

- *Name:* Mariekje Marienhoff, called **MM**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* sea blue eyes, math genius and computer freak.

- *Name:* Yorick, called **YoYo**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* loudmouth, chubby, into fashion and trendy hair.

- *Name:* **Mia** Blohm
- *Age:* just turned 12
- *Distinguishing features:* Bo's sister, precocious, likes standing in front of the mirror, talks everyone's ear off.

Author



- *Name:* Ulrich Renz, called **U**
- *Age:* middle aged
- *Distinguishing features:* loves Spaetzle (a sort of Southern German noodles), likes making music, used to be a doctor, now writes books for children and grown-ups. More at www.bo-and-friends.com.

Translator



- *Name:* Samuel Cotten, called **Sam**
- *Age:* quite a bit younger than the author
- *Distinguishing features:* grew up in California, currently doing his master's thesis in Medical Neuroscience at the Humboldt University in Berlin, also an avid home-beer brewing enthusiast.

CHAPTER ONE

The Blue Giant

Just like professionals ..." YoYo took off his glasses, as he always did when he had something important to say. With the other hand he adjusted his greenish-red plaid beret, without which he hadn't gone out in public since the beginning of his Inspector-Hamilton phase. "Outwitted the alarm, cleared everything out, didn't leave a trace. An absolutely professional burglary. That's how it's done, gentlemen!" His eyes were sparkling.

For MM, YoYo's exuberance was quite off the mark. Restlessly, she slid around on her bicycle seat. "If they are professionals, then that's even worse," she said, more to herself than to her three friends who were sitting in front of her on the railing of the supermarket parking lot like chickens on a perch. As always, YoYo occupied the center place. Sitting between Bo and Simon, who towered over him by at least a head, he looked a bit like a ruffled chick. Normally MM would sit on the outside next to Bo, but today she hadn't even taken the time to get off her bicycle. She

hadn't been able to wait, even for a second, to tell them the news.

"Top pros, top-of-the-line pros ..." YoYo could hardly contain himself. As a world expert on everything, he was, of course, a world expert on burglary. "I once read about a burglary where the criminals, disguised as a moving company, drove up in broad daylight with a van and calmly took out everything. In the end, they claimed a receipt from the porter for their time and even got a tip ..."

While YoYo told his stories of the "coolest burglaries in the world" with growing excitement, MM again saw her father in her mind when he came home after lunch, wearing his rumpled shirt that stretched over his stomach with the slipped purple bow tie. She'd known immediately that something bad had happened. Wordlessly, he plopped down in the chair. He stared at the ceiling for what seemed like forever.

"All gone," he finally said.

"What ... gone?" she asked, though she already knew the answer.

"Everything. Everything stolen."

"Giant Blue, too?" She held her breath.

He just closed his eyes and nodded slowly. His face was pale.

“Who?” she asked helplessly. But what answer could she get?

“Oh, Tati –” She wanted to say something comforting, but nothing came into her mind.

From the kitchen came Mom’s voice: “Now don’t worry, Robert, the insurance will cover everything!” She arrived with a bowl of cookies. “By the way, Professor Arnold invited us tonight. Don’t you remember? Try to put on something trendy, will you? And, for heaven’s sake, leave that horrible bow-tie at home!”

For the thousandth time, MM realized that her parents didn’t come from the same planet. Tati’s research, which meant everything to him, was just gimmickry to Mom. She didn’t even know that he had just built the fastest computer in the world – Giant Blue.

For her, only the stuff in her fancy-schmancy boutique clothing store really mattered. With the accusation, “no professor in the world wears such things!” she would come home with piles of new shirts, suits and ties for Dad. He would always thank her with a friendly smile and devoted sigh, but, sure enough, wouldn’t change anything about his outfit – which for years had consisted of baggy, black

trousers and suspenders, a white shirt that typically wasn't very crisp, and the inevitable purple bow tie. He just didn't have the time to worry about things like clothes. For him, there was only Giant Blue - and the "Swinging Einsteins," his jazz choir, which consisted entirely of gray-haired or bald-headed professors who met every Thursday evening to rehearse.

"Oh, Tati -" Again MM didn't get further. Tati ... Somehow this was her name for him since the times when nothing was more fun than scrambling around on his belly roaring "Tati, Tati!" - especially on Sundays, when he just wanted to take his nap. She'd gotten the name from her favorite book at the time, "Tati, the Wild Boar."

Back then, her father must have already been busy with his supercomputer. She'd always been a bit scared when there was talk of it - a blue giant certainly was very dangerous.

Now she was almost fourteen, and herself well versed in the world of computers. She was, of course, no longer scared of the monster machine, but she still had a great respect for it. Giant Blue was almost a thousand times faster than any previous supercomputer. The secret was in the chips that drove him. MM had not yet understood in detail what exactly was so special about them, but

apparently it had something to do with a material that Tati had discovered and called "XXI." The wonderful thing about this XXI was that it could conduct electricity with no resistance, like a metal that had been cooled down to absolute zero. Giant Blue could therefore do without the cooling apparatus that all previous supercomputers required, which weighed tons and was necessary to bring the chips down to extremely low temperatures.

In the last two weeks it had finally become clear that the XXI chips in Giant Blue were really working properly. She remembered how Tati had come home in the evening after the first successful test run, and had danced with joy. He stretched his arms in the air and stood on his toes, moving his hips and belly to some music in his head, slowly at first, then faster and faster. That evening he could hardly stop, even though Mom shook her head, as she always did when he performed this dance, which he had learned as a child from "Babu," his beloved Greek grandpa. After dinner, he took a bottle of champagne from the fridge. "This is a cause for celebration!" he beamed, and popped the cork so boisterously that half the bottle foamed out onto the tablecloth. In the process of filling the glasses, a good deal more was lost. What was left, sloshed upon the clinking of the glasses - but that bothered him as little as the

disapproving glances of his wife. Even without champagne he was just happy, and MM with him.

Now he was sitting in his chair like a handful of misery. MM realized that he was fighting back tears.

“They knew exactly where to find everything,” he said, “and how to turn off the alarm.” Tati’s stomach heaved. “The locks weren’t broken, and neither were the windows. Totally professional, that’s what the police are saying. Either that, or they have an accomplice among my employees. They immediately called in Niko to the police station for interrogation. Next to me, he is the only one who has a key. I told them that I vouch for Niko without hesitation. Of course, they are interrogating him regardless.”

Of all people, Niko! How could someone think Niko was capable of such wickedness? Niko, he was always so helpful and reliable. He’d worked for Tati for as long as MM could remember – and he’d actually been her first love. As a first-grader, her heart throbbed in his presence when she visited Tati at the Institute. In her eyes, Niko looked just like Winnetou in the movie she’d once seen on television: tall, slim, and tan, with long, dark brown hair tied in a ponytail. And just like Winnetou, he had something mysterious about him. He spoke with a calm, deep voice and rolled his r’s in

a strange way. Back then, she always thought he was doing it on purpose and admired him all the more for it. Later, she found out from Tati that his rolled r's came from the fact that he had a different mother tongue and had only been twelve years old when he came to Germany. She could not remember where he came from originally. The scar that split his left eyebrow was another mystery to her. She had never asked him about it, but when she was little, she was certain that it had come from a buffalo hunt.

At age eight, when she started to get interested in computers, Niko patiently taught her the first steps. He could explain wonderfully - quite unlike Tati, who was absolutely willing, but only brought forth incomprehensible gibberish when it came to computers. He would start speaking of teraflops, Boolean operators and artificial acceleration, as if nowadays you learned all that stuff in kindergarten. Niko, on the other hand, could explain even the most complicated things in such a way that she could catch on to them. Under his guidance, she could now and then tinker with discarded computers. Last year she got to the point where she was able to assemble her own computer, which she christened "Little Blue," a tip of the hat to Giant Blue. Little Blue couldn't, of course, come close to competing with Tati's supercomputer, but

nevertheless was still faster than anything you could buy in a normal computer store. Tati had gotten her chips and processors that were not even on the market.

“**N**o crime without a motive, gentlemen!” YoYo’s voice brought her back to the parking lot. “If you know what drives the crook, you can easily find out the rest.”

“Maybe it’s just about money in the end? They resell the stuff somewhere on the black market?” Bo said. As always, he was sitting slightly hunched with his tousled head of hair resting in his hands.

“I don’t think you can sell that stuff,” MM said. “From the outside, Giant Blue looks like a broken refrigerator, full of cables and chips and circuit boards.” Apart from that, it was still covered with the little blue flowers that she had “decorated” it with as a small child.

“Could be science espionage,” Bo said. “Maybe there are some other researchers working on a supercomputer who badly want to be the first? Or some company? Imagine the money you could make with a computer that is a thousand times faster than any other!”

YoYo cleared his throat to make it known that he was desperate to share his ideas. “The mafia,” he said gravely. He didn’t seem to feel the need for more words. But the

familiar grip on his glasses showed that it was a definitive answer.

MM really couldn't imagine what the mafia would have to do with a supercomputer. By mafia she imagined dark types with sunglasses and guns in their suit pockets.

As if he'd read her thoughts, YoYo said: "Guns and the whole sun glasses-stuff, that's all water under the bridge. The real business now is done on the computer. Cracking passwords, plundering accounts, decrypting secret data, all of which can then be nicely resold to other criminals."

Suddenly MM realized that this was not one of YoYo's usual exaggerations. She gulped. Tati's computer in the hands of hardened criminals who wanted to hurt innocent people?

"I also believe in the mafia," came suddenly from Simon, and everyone turned to him. He spoke so little that the others were again and again surprised when he uttered something. As always, he was swinging his legs as though his thoughts were somewhere very far away. He shook the blonde mane from his face and grinned: "Was that wrong again?"

"No, absolutely perfect," Bo said. Simon's German had already improved a lot, thanks to the consistent tutoring of his buddies, who always corrected him immediately when

he made a mistake. But still, the many years he'd spent in America with his family had, of course, left their mark.

"Yes, yes, absolutely perfect," MM said, too - even though she felt that it was debatable if a sentence like, "I believe in the mafia" could really be called perfect.

For a long time no one said anything. MM was thinking back to Tati, and her heart sank.

"Gentlemen!" YoYo jumped off the railing with a leap, which one would not have expected from him, given his corpulence (as he himself liked to call his overweight). "One thing is clear: We must take care of the matter. This is a case for professionals."

Although YoYo's pro-obsession annoyed her, MM felt a load being taken off her mind. Not that she seriously believed they would find Giant Blue or the burglars. But she would not simply stand by and do nothing.

"What about Mia?" Bo asked somewhat despondently. "Shouldn't we let her take part?"

Anyone who knew Bo's "little" sister knew that the question was of no earthly use. They wouldn't be able to prevent her from joining in, anyway. Mia was just like that: If she wanted something, she got it.

"Tell her that we're really thrilled that she's joining us again," YoYo grinned. Then he planted himself like a soldier

at attention. Everyone could guess that one of his famous speeches was imminent.

“Make it short, I have to go to dinner,” Bo grumbled. His mom couldn’t take a joke when serving her famous organic specialties.

YoYo looked at him reproachfully and took off his glasses. “Gentlemen –” With a look at MM he added: “Um, and ladies –” Then he pondered for a long moment. He didn’t seem to know how making things short really worked. Then he said, very solemnly: “I hereby declare our second case open.”

CHAPTER TWO

The Mafia

Does Simon already know that I'm joining in?" was Mia's first question. Immediately Bo regretted that he had let his sister in.

"Yeah, sure, he rolled his eyes out of sheer enthusiasm – for two minutes."

Mia yelled out: "You're mean! Tell me that's not true!"

"Of course not. He didn't roll his eyes, but just stared at me, asking: 'Mia, who's that?' "

This was too much for her – with a cry she threw herself on Bo and beat at him like a crazy person. Once again he was painfully reminded that twelve-year-old girls were certifiably insane by nature. In the case of his sister, the aggravating circumstance was that she happened to be in the worst hormone rush of puberty, which had unfortunately begun way too early and had completely befuddled her mind. "Looks like sixteen, but is eight in the head," was his standard response when someone wanted to know more details about his sister.

On the wall above her bed she had posters of some guys with odd hairdos and electric guitars, but for the actual victim of her craving attacks she had elected Simon. Lately she'd been calling him "Sisi," because she found it so "sweeeeet."

When she had gotten herself somewhat together again, she started the same old story about the cell phone. "This time I need to have a cell phone like yours!" Last time, during the million-euros-blackmail affair, YoYo had equipped the whole gang with top-notch smartphones, complete with conference call capability and all the bells and whistles. There were different versions of the answer to the question of how he'd gotten the money for the phones. Bo was the only one with whom he had entrusted the whole truth.

"And what do you think Mom would say if you suddenly came up with a cell phone?" For their mother, cell phones were the devil. She was convinced that the radiation would make you sick. He'd been allowed to keep his on the condition that he used it "only in emergencies" - his interpretation of an emergency was, of course, somehow different from his mother's. An emergency was when the phone rang. As a precaution, he always put it on vibrate

only. Mom had long ago forgotten that he even owned a cell phone.

“Be glad that you’re allowed to participate at all,” he said, trying to get rid of Mia. That was, of course, such a *lèse-majesté* for her that she wouldn’t exchange a word with him for the rest of the day.

It was quite the contrary, however, with her best friend Melanie. Mia had a good cry with her on the phone later that day about her terrible brother. Melanie and Mia were insanity in a double-pack. Whenever the two of them weren’t hanging out on the phone, they were spending their time at H&M in front of the mirror. Or they were at home, also in front of the mirror, trying on clothes and make-up stuff. They were giggling and laughing incessantly, even though the result of their fashion ventures were sometimes enough to make one cry.

“If you tell Melanie even a single word about our case, I’ll wring your neck,” he preemptively made clear. She just shrugged her shoulders and uttered her usual, “Oh, brother sweetie ...”

Bo was not particularly unhappy that Mia was not present at the “strategic briefing” convened by YoYo the next day. She had an appointment with the orthodontist. She had

“accidentally” flushed her braces down the toilet; in fact, she probably just didn’t like the color any more. Simon wasn’t exactly crestfallen. He tussled with Bo, who had greeted him with a “Hello, Sisi,” imitating Mia’s seductive glance. Simon gave him a load of water from his water bottle.

They arranged to meet, as usual, in the parking lot outside the supermarket, next to the little house for the shopping carts. Not exactly the most comfortable place – no one really knew why they would meet right here, where there was a constant coming and going of carts rumbling past. Regardless, it was their place. They would sit there together after school for a while, or would meet there whenever there was something to discuss – or just for the fun of it.

YoYo had his hands full trying to put a stop to the fooling around. He had to clear his throat several times before everybody finally sat quietly on the railing.

“Gentlemen,” he began and made a little dramatic pause. “Gentlemen, it is my honor to have the brightest minds of Great Britain gathered around me.”

Bo looked furtively at MM, but it would have been better not to. As soon as their eyes met, neither could help