

**RALF ISAU**

**Das Museum der gestohlenen Erinnerungen**

(THE MUSEUM OF STOLEN MEMORIES)

© by K. Thienemanns Verlag, Stuttgart-Vienna-Bern

Synopsis

**Material:**

Cinema film or family series

**Setting:**

The Pollocks' apartment  
Pergamon Museum  
Quassinja, the realm of lost memories

**Main characters:**

Oliver Pollock  
Jessica Pollock, his twin sister  
Thomas Pollock, their father  
János Hajduk, director of the Middle Eastern Museum ("Pergamon Museum")  
Miriam McCullin, an Irish archeologist at the museum  
Nippy, the glass humming bird from the Arabian Nights  
Eleukides the philosopher, a now forgotten contemporary of Plato's  
Kofer, the now forgotten speaking coat belonging to Napoleon  
Pegasus, the winged horse  
Xexano the ruler of Quassinja, the realm of lost memories  
The "Collector", his right-hand man, an Accadian storm demon

**The author:**

Ralf Isau, who was born in Berlin in 1956 and now lives with his family near Stuttgart, mainly works as a computer specialist. Ralf Isau is the new talent in the field of fantasy literature, and his Neschan trilogy, similar in style to Michael Ende's UNENDLICHE GESCHICHTE (*The Neverending Story*), has long been a favorite among readers - more than 100,000 copies have already been sold since the first volume was published in August 1995. For his »Museum of Stolen Memories« he received the »Buxtehuder Bulle« award for the best youth book of the year 1997.

*Das Museum der gestohlenen Erinnerungen*  
(*The Museum of Stolen Memories*)

Stone figures suddenly come to life and prowl round the dark museum. Memories disappear from the heads of people. Strange things are going on in Berlin.

When the twins *Oliver* and *Jessica* return home from their holidays, they have forgotten all about their father. All that remains is an unsettling feeling of emptiness. There is absolutely no trace of their father. The police appear on the scene - they, too, are looking for *Thomas Pollock*, claiming that the twins' father has stolen an ancient golden statue from the Pergamon Museum.

Later, in the dusty mess up in the attic, Oliver and Jessica find a trunk with the last remaining mementos of their dead mother, such as a large jar full of hair slides. They also find a diary belonging to their father. They are amazed to read in his records that the present night watchman was once a respected scientist at the Pergamon Museum. He then goes on to write about *Quassinja*, the realm of lost memories, and *Xexano*, the ancient Babylonian god of this mysterious world. Father has discovered that a second, much older gate is hidden under the reconstructed world-famous Ishtar Gate in the Pergamon Museum. In his diary he has also translated a cuneiform inscription from the keystone of this "inner gate", warning of the reawakening of Xexano. If the golden statue manages, "even before the year turns", to gain control over all the memories of people, no one would ever be able to break his power. Unfortunately, the last part of the enigmatic inscription is unreadable. The twins work out an audacious plan: Oliver will pass through the Ishtar Gate in the museum and enter Quassinja, where he will search for his vanished father - the verses on the keystone provide clues as to how to open the window between the two worlds. Jessica has to stay behind so that she can support the search from the earthly side of the gate. They can only get their father back if the narrow band still joining the twins over the chasm between two worlds does not tear.

Jessica and Oliver hide in the museum until it is locked up for the night. Then, with the aid of an object, the true purpose of which has been forgotten (a hair slide belonging to their mother), Oliver is able to create a whirl of light beneath the Ishtar Gate, and this allows him to pass over into Quassinja, Xexano's realm.

In Quassinja, Oliver is welcomed by a bronze unicorn, which nicknames him *the Searther*. Full of fear, Oliver flees into an ancient wood. There he makes two strange friends - *Nippy*, the glass humming bird and *Kofer*, the coat that used to belong to Napoleon Bonaparte. Later, Oliver meets a white-haired philosopher called *Eleukides*, a one-time pupil of Socrates. Each memory surviving on Quassinja had been forgotten on earth some time, Oliver is told by his new friends. But since *he* has come to Quassinja through his own power, he must be the *Goëlim*, the "liberator". This inevitably makes him an enemy of Xexano, who wants to steal all the memories from earth that remind him of his true name. Oliver's friends also draw his attention to the fact that many of the inhabitants of Quassinja possess talents resulting from dreams they once had. Oliver is surprised to discover that he can create wind of any kind he wants.

Back home, Jessica examines the empty flat. The room next to her's, the photographs on the wall - there is a lot to show her that she must not only have a father but also a brother. But she can remember neither the one nor the other. She goes back to visit the Middle Eastern Museum ("Pergamon Museum", its more popular name, is not very precise). Opposite the Ishtar Gate she sees a huge, strangely lively mural. Then she meets the director of the museum, *János Hajduk*. He seems to be very friendly, but he cannot give her any news about her vanished relatives, either. Then she meets one of the scientists working at the museum. *Miriam McCullin* from Ireland is more understanding. When she learns of the enigmatic old cuneiform texts in the diary she promises to do all she can to help. Jessica goes to visit Miriam in her flat, a world of knowledge that seems to consist only of books. Miriam has discovered that there must be a "Trail of Names" going from the gods of religions still alive today right back to the distant past of Mesopotamia. This marks the beginning of a research trip through the millenia. Amazing facts are brought to light, knowledge that had apparently been forgotten long since.

Jessica and Miriam quickly become friends. While their "Trail of Names" rapidly gets longer and longer, more and more bearers of memories disappear from earth - first exhibition pieces in museums, then names and pictures from archives and memorials, and finally even thoughts from the minds of people. Miriam knows a professor in Oxford, and she asks him for help in deciphering the verses on the keystone. Since Jessica is a computer freak, the two of them send the scholar an appropriate message by e-mail.

Oliver and his companions enter the town of *Nargon* through the zip-like opening of the wall of *Gildewert*, a canal house that is very much alive and kicking. Nargon is a place consisting of forgotten living quarters of all ages of human history. *Gildewert* tells them of *Herman van Daalen*, a one-time "expert on Jews", who, according to *Gildewert*, now rules Nargon with an iron sceptre. *Gildewert* tells Oliver to beware of him since he is one of *Xexano*'s minions. The next day, Oliver discovers how seriously *Gildewert*'s warnings are to be taken. He meets the *Collector*, a being consisting of the most evil of human memories who can continually change his form. This creature chases him through the streets of Nargon, now in the body of a griffin, then as a chimera, a basilisk, a faun and even more horrible figures. Oliver manages to escape, thanks to the help he gets from a stone figure from a fountain and a bronze head.

Soon afterwards, he and his friends see a procession of prisoners destined for liquidation in *Xexano*'s new mill at the foot of his mighty tower of steps. In the convoy, Oliver discovers the old brush that used to make him long to paint, and a snow-white horse with wings. He uses his dream talents to blow up a storm that creates such a muddle that he can free both the brush and the horse and escape with his friends through the air.

After a stopover in a village inhabited solely by forgotten teddy bears, the companions fly on to the *Nargon* Desert. Each living memory - and that includes *Pegasus*, the white winged horse and *Dab*, the paintbrush - has a stone here with its name on it without which it would not be able to exist. With the help of his gift of wind Oliver is able to find his own stone. In the *Nargon* Desert lives *Semiramis*, the mother of the person who later became *Xexano*, the golden statue. Oliver hopes she will be able to provide the answers to some urgent questions: Where is his father? What is *Xexano*'s true name? Where can he find one of the mysterious *twilight fields*, those "thin layers" between *Quassinja* and the earth which might allow Oliver to contact Jessica or even to return to earth? *Semiramis* turns out to be uncommunicative. But then Oliver demonstrates why the unicorn called him "the Searther". With *Nippy*'s assistance

he finds Semiramis's name stone, and in view of her impending end the "Queen of Nightmares" discloses that a wise man is said to live near the *Annahag* volcano who might be able to help Oliver.

In the library of the Humboldt University, Miriam and Jessica find further clues. More by coincidence than anything else, they discover that the name of the museum director, *János Hajduk*, is reminiscent of Janus, the god with two faces. And in his diary, Jessica's father had warned of a certain *Double Face*, who, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, had been an informal member of the secret police and had denounced Thomas - hence the scientific director of the museum had been degraded to the post of a night watchman.

Later, the two friends go and visit an old rabbi at the New Synagogue in Berlin. The Jewish scholar had also noticed the increasing forgetfulness spreading in the city - particularly regarding the history of the suffering of his people. Beneath the golden dome of the house of God, Jessica hears about the terrors of the Nazi regime. Then the rabbi gets out a large tome, the Babylonian Talmud, and tells them about the biblical Nimrod, who "made the whole world stubborn against Him (God)". Jessica and Miriam are very pensive when they leave the synagogue. That very night they return to the museum. Here they watch *János Hajduk* standing in front of the illuminated Ishtar Gate with two stone statues, both of which have come alive, and talking to *Xexano*.

*Pegasus* has to fly up the *Annahag* volcano twice. While Oliver is waiting for him alone, his attention is attracted by a limping fawn. Suddenly the animal changes into a four-winged creature - the Collector! Oliver is kidnapped and carried off to a den of rigidly staring Gorgons with snakes instead of hair on their heads. But *Nippy* is able to rescue him by "cutting" through his fetters with her glass wings. By now *Pegasus* is already waiting for them in the woods. The friends are reunited on the slopes of *Annahag*.

And then a new chase begins - the Collector's flying lions are gathering up in the sky. *Pegasus* tries to escape in the *Swamps of Morgum*, which even the flying cats fear, but he is driven back and so badly injured that he and all his companions crash into the middle of the red sea of fire of the *Annahag* volcano.

When Oliver comes round again, he is greeted by the "Librarian of the *Annahag*", who introduces himself as *Reven Niaga*. The powerful wise man had at some time in the past robbed the lava lake of its fire in order to save all beings the Collector throws into this supposedly deathly trap. Since the inhabitants of *Quassinja* have amazing powers of recovery, it is not long before the friends are well again. *Reven Niaga*'s underground palace used to be a secret part of the library of Alexandria. He now makes the wisdom he has gained over the centuries available to Oliver. *Reven* tells him that it was *Nimrod* who, thanks to the knowledge he had from the time before the Great Flood, had found the way to *Quassinja*. But even he, *Reven*, does not know the true name of *Nimrod* alias *Xexano*.

Together with *Reven Niaga*, the companions go through endless tunnels to an exit leading into the *Swamps of Morgum*. This moor is a gigantic twilight field, explains *Reven*, one that is inhabited by half forgotten, unconscious and often very sinister memories of human beings. And indeed: the friends meet menacing apparitions reminiscent of all kinds of nightmares. But that night Oliver also meets his sister, who is visiting him through her dreams. Another night, he is visited by his own self - subconscious memories from the time he was in his mother's womb. The tiny fellow that looks like an embryo comforts Oliver with the realization that his

mother loved him and Jessica very much. The companions at last leave the swamps on the banks of the *Sea of Forgetting*. They are welcomed by a flying ship.

Jessica's hobby is cryptography - even as a little girl she used to invent secret languages. She realises that the last unreadable part of the inscription must be a secret code. Since it would be too complicated for her to decipher the cuneiform signs on her PC by herself, she develops a program to help her distribute this work to many computers via the world wide web. And indeed: after several days a reply arrives on the internet. "May he regain lost thinking" are the final words of the inscription. So she must remember the true meaning of the "key" with which Oliver had opened the Ishtar Gate to Quassinja. As she is going to get the jar of hair slides, a green scarab sent by Hajduk almost manages to thwart her plan, but at the last moment Jessica identifies the right hair slide - Oliver's "key". At night she opens the Ishtar Gate and her father steps out. Hajduk is also in the museum but he can no longer prevent the return of his old rival. There is a chase through the museum; the scarab is destroyed but Hajduk manages to escape.

*The Flying Dutchman* carries Oliver and his friends over the sea to *Atlantis*, Xexano's hidden island. Here Oliver sees the *Lake of Banished Memories* and even drinks from the pink waves, which turn out to be a memory of his own mother. Deeply moved by the love she had felt for her twins, Oliver sets forth for the last stage of his struggle against Xexano. While Pegasus and Nippy are taking the news of the impending revolt against Xexano to their allies in the town of Amnesia, Oliver, Reven, Eleukides, Kofer and Dab penetrate the gigantic tower of steps of the "Golden Ruler". The building is a town in its own right, with Xexano's throne room located right at the very top. Here Oliver and his friends are cornered by the Collector and thrown into a dungeon deep down under the tower. Here Oliver at last finds his father - haggard and in rags but happy to see his son again and more determined than ever to put a stop to János Hajduk and, of course, Xexano. Oliver secretly slips Thomas his mother's hair slide. Then he is summoned to Xexano, only to learn that on New Year's night he and his father are to be the first to end up in Xexano's mill. Xexano reveals to Oliver in a riddle where his true name is to be found: "Everyone wants to bear my name, but *I*, I trample on it." At first Oliver cannot make head or tail of it. As he is being taken back to his cell by the jailer, a one-eyed cyclops, a brightly shimmering whirl of light appears on the barred door. Thomas is attracted to it as if by magic and steps through the gate towards earth.

In the Pollocks' apartment, Thomas tells his daughter and Miriam what he knows about Xexano, although he cannot remember his time in Quassinja. Nevertheless, his report is a great help to Jessica and Miriam. In the meantime, memories all over the world are disappearing, especially those that can warn people of the outcome of totalitarian rule - Xexano is preparing his return to earth. Then even the Pergamon Museum disappears, with only the wing containing the Ishtar Gate and the Babylonian procession street remaining. At the scene of this phenomenon, Jessica, her father and Miriam desperately look for news from Oliver, for a clue to Xexano's true name, but they can find nothing. On December 31 Thomas even commits a scientific sacrilege: with a hammer and chisel he prizes open the tiles above the keystone over the Ishtar Gate - but there are no clues, either. Just before midnight Jessica has a brainwave - or is it the narrow band joining the twins that makes her do the right thing? She carefully examines the huge mural opposite the Ishtar Gate and finds a message from

Oliver there: "Look under his feet. There you will find Xexano's true name." Jessica and Miriam know the words engraved under the pedestal of the Xexano statue. Then the gate between Quassinja and the earth opens. Out steps Xexano.

Oliver has seen a large mural in Xexano's throne room. That is the twilight field Semiramis had not wanted to speak about! Nippy reports back to the dungeon and Oliver asks her and Dab to paint a message for Jessica in the picture.

At long last there is an uprising in Amnesia. Pegasus and other allies liberate the friends from their prison. They immediately start to climb up to Xexano's throne room, with Oliver flying on ahead on Pegasus's back. Far below them, fires are burning in the town. Xexano's terracotta army is ground to dust by the rebels. In the throne room there is a confrontation with the Collector, but now Oliver beats him at his own game - with an icy, relentless gale he hurls the malicious creature into Xexano's recently completed mill, where it is ground to dust. That very instance, Xexano bursts into the throne room, followed by Reven. Xexano opens the whirl of light in front of the mural which is to allow him to escape to earth. Reven corners the "Golden Ruler", but then at the last moment Xexano succeeds in jumping through the door. Oliver has to take leave of his companions painfully quickly. Then he follows Xexano. Jessica, Thomas and Miriam are already waiting on the other side. Jessica calls Xexano's true name. The figure loses its sheen and clumsily moves towards the gate to make a getaway back to Quassinja. But then the unicorn appears and blocks its path. Xexano freezes to become a lifeless statue. "Flee!" calls the unicorn. Oliver and the others just manage to beat a hasty retreat into a model of an Assyrian tomb before there is an almighty explosion which blows the Ishtar Gate and the Xexano statue to pieces.

Thomas is appointed new director of the museum. He and Miriam not only get to know each other better but fall in love. They decide to get married.

Hajduk lands in prison but later disappears from there without any trace.

In Iraq, a gigantic tower of steps appears from nowhere in the middle of the desert.

And in Berlin, an old Jew appears, enquiring about a paintbrush he had once had to leave behind in the attic when fleeing from the Nazis. Dab may have stayed behind in Quassinja, but now there is someone here who is eager to learn. The old man promises to let Oliver into the secrets of painting.