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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:05,000

Tonight, one of World War II's most enduring mysteries.

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00:00:05,000 --> 00:00:09,000

A stunning treasure worth half a billion dollars.

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00:00:09,000 --> 00:00:12,000

Lost without a trace.

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00:00:12,000 --> 00:00:16,000

It might be the most expensive and beautiful work of art ever made.

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00:00:16,000 --> 00:00:18,000

It's like it's just vanished.

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00:00:18,000 --> 00:00:24,000

Now we uncover the top theories surrounding the disappearance of a work of art so remarkable

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00:00:24,000 --> 00:00:27,000

that it's known as the age of the world.

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00:00:27,000 --> 00:00:31,000

The castle suffers tremendous damage.

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00:00:31,000 --> 00:00:35,000

We have to wonder if the amber room destroyed as well.

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00:00:35,000 --> 00:00:40,000

Stinson Mettawer are convinced that the amber room is hidden behind the castle's walls.

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00:00:40,000 --> 00:00:44,000

Just waiting to be explored and waiting to produce discoveries.

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00:00:44,000 --> 00:00:48,000

Can a new expedition finally reveal its location?

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00:00:48,000 --> 00:00:51,000

It's a treasure trove of material.

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00:00:51,000 --> 00:00:54,000

It's a treasure trove of material.

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00:00:54,000 --> 00:00:59,000

Will we ever be able to find the incomparable amber room?

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00:01:19,000 --> 00:01:21,000

It's September.

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00:01:22,000 --> 00:01:25,000

It's September 1941.

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00:01:25,000 --> 00:01:29,000

Leningrad, USSR.

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00:01:31,000 --> 00:01:37,000

Nazi forces invade Russia, moving relentlessly east in a vicious sweep of destruction.

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00:01:37,000 --> 00:01:42,000

As his troops advance, Hitler gives one important order.

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00:01:43,000 --> 00:01:50,000

Preserve the priceless works of art in Leningrad's Catherine Palace at all costs.

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00:01:51,000 --> 00:01:58,000

Hitler wants to gut Russia, and he wants to steal every work of art he can

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00:01:58,000 --> 00:02:01,000

and route to conquering the entire country.

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00:02:01,000 --> 00:02:06,000

The Catherine Palace supposedly houses the most valuable work of art in the world.

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00:02:08,000 --> 00:02:12,000

The artwork in question is known as the Amber Room.

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00:02:12,000 --> 00:02:14,000

It's exactly what it sounds like.

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00:02:14,000 --> 00:02:17,000

It's a room covered in beautiful amber panels.

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00:02:17,000 --> 00:02:21,000

Some people estimate it to be worth over half a billion dollars,

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00:02:21,000 --> 00:02:26,000

making it one of the most expensive and beautiful rooms ever created.

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00:02:26,000 --> 00:02:32,000

During World War II, the German military stole over 600,000 pieces of art from across Europe,

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00:02:32,000 --> 00:02:37,000

ransacking billions of dollars worth of priceless cultural artifacts.

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00:02:37,000 --> 00:02:42,000

And some say Hitler wants the Amber Room above all else.

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00:02:42,000 --> 00:02:46,000

Not only does Hitler love art, but he's also a nationalist,

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00:02:46,000 --> 00:02:52,000

and it infuriates him that there are works of German art outside of German territory.

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00:02:52,000 --> 00:02:57,000

And the Amber Room is a German work of art that he desperately wants back.

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00:02:58,000 --> 00:03:03,000

Work began on the room in 1701 in Berlin, which then was part of Prussia.

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00:03:03,000 --> 00:03:08,000

Frederick I, who rules over the powerful empire in what's now Germany,

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00:03:08,000 --> 00:03:11,000

originally commissions the Amber Room.

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00:03:11,000 --> 00:03:14,000

Designed by a sculptor named Andreas Schluter,

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00:03:14,000 --> 00:03:21,000

and it's lavish and it's resplendent and it's expensive and it's valuable.

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00:03:22,000 --> 00:03:28,000

Andreas Schluter starts by melting the amber to the point where it is a thick kind of liquid.

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00:03:28,000 --> 00:03:33,000

At the time, amber wasn't really used like this, so in addition to being a beautiful work of art,

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00:03:33,000 --> 00:03:35,000

it's also enormously innovative.

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00:03:36,000 --> 00:03:41,000

As if that isn't impressive enough, then these 18th century craftspeople encrust in the jewels

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00:03:41,000 --> 00:03:44,000

and then cover it with gold and silver leaf.

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00:03:44,000 --> 00:03:50,000

It's also adorned with these four Italian mosaics, making them works of art within a work of art.

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00:03:50,000 --> 00:03:54,000

King Frederick wants a palace that will outshine Francis Versailles,

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00:03:54,000 --> 00:03:57,000

and he decides that this is going to be the centerpiece.

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00:03:57,000 --> 00:04:02,000

In 1701, the Amber Room is installed in the Berlin City Palace,

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00:04:02,000 --> 00:04:04,000

but it won't be there for long.

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00:04:06,000 --> 00:04:11,000

The Amber Room, unsurprisingly, attracts the attention of another European royal,

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00:04:11,000 --> 00:04:14,000

Russia's famous Tsar Peter the Great.

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00:04:14,000 --> 00:04:20,000

Peter the Great visits the Berlin City Palace in 1716 and he gets a tour of the Amber Room.

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00:04:20,000 --> 00:04:24,000

King Frederick is trying to forge an alliance with Russia at the time,

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00:04:24,000 --> 00:04:28,000

and he basically says, you want the Amber Room? You can have it.

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00:04:29,000 --> 00:04:35,000

Around the time of Empress Catherine the Great, it's installed in the Catherine Palace,

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00:04:35,000 --> 00:04:40,000

and that's where it stays, undisturbed and unmoved for about two centuries.

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00:04:40,000 --> 00:04:45,000

And even after Russia becomes the USSR and St. Petersburg becomes Leningrad,

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00:04:45,000 --> 00:04:50,000

the Amber Room is just there pretty peacefully until the Nazis arrive.

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00:04:59,000 --> 00:05:03,000

And here's where the mystery starts, because after the Nazi siege of Leningrad,

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00:05:03,000 --> 00:05:06,000

the Amber Room goes missing.

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00:05:06,000 --> 00:05:08,000

We know that it was in the Catherine Palace.

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00:05:08,000 --> 00:05:12,000

We know that Hitler sends Nazi troops to go recover it,

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00:05:12,000 --> 00:05:16,000

but that's the last thing we know. Everything else is just theories.

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00:05:19,000 --> 00:05:23,000

We think that the Nazis do in fact steal the Amber Room from Leningrad.

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00:05:23,000 --> 00:05:28,000

The most valuable cultural institutions at the time are the old palaces of the Tsars,

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00:05:28,000 --> 00:05:32,000

and so Hitler sets his sights on those. He's going to tear them apart.

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00:05:32,000 --> 00:05:36,000

He's going to loot. He's going to pillage. He's going to burn them. He's going to destroy them.

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00:05:39,000 --> 00:05:44,000

Hitler gives specific instructions not to destroy the Catherine Palace,

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00:05:44,000 --> 00:05:48,000

at least not until the Amber Room is found.

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00:05:49,000 --> 00:05:52,000

But apparently finding the Amber Room is easier said than done,

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00:05:52,000 --> 00:05:55,000

because when the Nazis arrive, they don't see it.

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00:05:57,000 --> 00:06:00,000

So there's this one room, pretty nondescript,

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00:06:00,000 --> 00:06:04,000

and the soldiers notice a little bit of plaster on the floor,

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00:06:04,000 --> 00:06:08,000

and they also notice a little bubbling in the wallpaper right near the seam.

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00:06:09,000 --> 00:06:13,000

One of the soldiers just slides a fingernail right under the wallpaper,

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00:06:13,000 --> 00:06:17,000

and there's a little bit of sheepskin or some other covering right behind that,

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00:06:17,000 --> 00:06:20,000

and just beyond that, there's the glow.

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00:06:22,000 --> 00:06:23,000

So he starts shouting,

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00:06:23,000 --> 00:06:27,000

"Ist here, Ist here!" and his comrades come charging down the hall.

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00:06:29,000 --> 00:06:32,000

They rip off the wallpaper, and there it is, the Amber Room.

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00:06:33,000 --> 00:06:38,000

The room had been hidden by head Soviet art curator, Anatoly Kuchimov.

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00:06:41,000 --> 00:06:45,000

The original plan is for Kuchimov to pack up as many works of art as possible for safekeeping

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00:06:45,000 --> 00:06:49,000

and bring them deeper into Russia and away from Nazi hands.

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00:06:49,000 --> 00:06:52,000

Kuchimov does an analysis of the Amber Room,

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00:06:52,000 --> 00:06:55,000

and he realizes that these panels are very delicate,

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00:06:55,000 --> 00:06:57,000

and they've become brittle over time,

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00:06:57,000 --> 00:07:00,000

so there's really only one move left to make.

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00:07:01,000 --> 00:07:05,000

Kuchimov covers the Amber Room from floor to ceiling.

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00:07:05,000 --> 00:07:10,000

In thick wallpaper, hoping the Nazis won't look too closely.

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00:07:11,000 --> 00:07:13,000

But in this last ditch effort,

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00:07:13,000 --> 00:07:15,000

the Germans uncover the roofs,

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00:07:15,000 --> 00:07:19,000

and unlike Kuchimov, they have all the hands and time that they need

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00:07:19,000 --> 00:07:22,000

to pack this thing up very carefully and slowly.

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00:07:22,000 --> 00:07:27,000

They spend about two days dismantling the Amber Room and packing it into crates.

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00:07:28,000 --> 00:07:31,000

But where does the Amber Room go from here?

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00:07:33,000 --> 00:07:39,000

The Germans take the Amber Room, along with a number of other important Russian cultural artifacts,

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00:07:39,000 --> 00:07:42,000

and transport them to Konigsberg Castle.

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00:07:44,000 --> 00:07:47,000

Hitler's ultimate plan is to build a museum,

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00:07:47,000 --> 00:07:49,000

the greatest museum in the entire world,

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00:07:49,000 --> 00:07:52,000

and it was going to be in his hometown of Lentz, Austria.

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00:07:52,000 --> 00:07:54,000

Eventually the Amber Room would go there,

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00:07:54,000 --> 00:07:56,000

but while the museum was being built,

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00:07:56,000 --> 00:08:00,000

the Amber Room would wait in Konigsberg Castle.

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00:08:02,000 --> 00:08:05,000

On November 13, 1941,

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00:08:05,000 --> 00:08:11,000

a local newspaper announces an exhibition featuring the Amber Room at the castle.

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00:08:11,000 --> 00:08:16,000

So that's the best evidence we have that the Amber Room ever actually went to Konigsberg.

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00:08:16,000 --> 00:08:19,000

But we don't have any photographic evidence of that,

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00:08:19,000 --> 00:08:21,000

and so we're not really even sure if that ever happened.

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00:08:22,000 --> 00:08:24,000

Now here's the really unfortunate part.

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00:08:24,000 --> 00:08:26,000

While we don't know what happened to the Amber Room,

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00:08:26,000 --> 00:08:30,000

we do know what happened to Konigsberg Castle, and it's not good.

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00:08:31,000 --> 00:08:38,000

In August of 1944, Britain's Royal Air Force heavily firebombs Konigsberg.

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00:08:42,000 --> 00:08:46,000

After that, the Soviets march in and take Konigsberg.

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00:08:47,000 --> 00:08:51,000

But as part of the operation, they bring in a large quantity of heavy artillery,

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00:08:51,000 --> 00:08:52,000

and they shell the city.

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00:08:52,000 --> 00:08:56,000

By the time of their final occupation of Konigsberg on April 9, 1945,

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00:08:56,000 --> 00:08:59,000

90% of the city lies in ruin.

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00:09:00,000 --> 00:09:02,000

The castle suffers tremendous damage,

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00:09:02,000 --> 00:09:06,000

so we have to wonder, is the Amber Room destroyed as well?

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00:09:12,000 --> 00:09:17,000

This would be so embarrassing if the Soviets had actually destroyed the Amber Room.

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00:09:18,000 --> 00:09:22,000

So they send a team to Konigsberg Castle, led by Professor Alexander Brusoff,

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00:09:22,000 --> 00:09:24,000

because they have to be sure.

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00:09:24,000 --> 00:09:26,000

He's able to make it into the castle cellar,

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00:09:26,000 --> 00:09:30,000

where he discovers the charred remains of three out of the four Italian mosaics

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00:09:30,000 --> 00:09:32,000

that were part of the Amber Room.

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00:09:32,000 --> 00:09:36,000

Brusoff thinks the room is toast, and he says as much in a report.

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00:09:36,000 --> 00:09:38,000

He writes, summarizing all the facts,

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00:09:38,000 --> 00:09:44,000

we can say that the Amber Room was destroyed between the 9th and the 11th of April, 1945.

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00:09:48,000 --> 00:09:52,000

Brusoff's report won't be the last word on this mystery.

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00:09:56,000 --> 00:09:59,000

When the Nazis steal the famed Amber Room from Russia,

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00:10:00,000 --> 00:10:02,000

where do they take it?

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00:10:04,000 --> 00:10:07,000

According to some, it's moved to the Konigsberg Castle.

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00:10:08,000 --> 00:10:10,000

Where it's ultimately destroyed.

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00:10:15,000 --> 00:10:17,000

But there at the castle, among the wreckage,

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00:10:17,000 --> 00:10:21,000

there's only a small percentage of the Amber Room that's found.

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00:10:21,000 --> 00:10:23,000

This leaves some to wonder,

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00:10:23,000 --> 00:10:27,000

really, a whole room, and this is all that's left?

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00:10:27,000 --> 00:10:30,000

A room that took crates and crates to pack away?

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00:10:30,000 --> 00:10:34,000

This has many theorists thinking, there's got to be another explanation.

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00:10:35,000 --> 00:10:41,000

What if the Germans move the Amber Room before the Soviet invasion of 1945?

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00:10:41,000 --> 00:10:43,000

Unmoved!

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00:10:43,000 --> 00:10:50,000

We have orders given by Adolf Hitler himself on January 21st and January 24th, 1945.

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00:10:54,000 --> 00:10:56,000

The tide of war has changed.

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00:10:56,000 --> 00:10:59,000

He knows that Allied forces are moving in,

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00:10:59,000 --> 00:11:04,000

so he issues orders that all looted material in Konigsberg Castle be moved.

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00:11:05,000 --> 00:11:10,000

Some speculate that a high-ranking Nazi commander named Eric Koch

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00:11:11,000 --> 00:11:13,000

follows these orders.

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00:11:14,000 --> 00:11:18,000

He was in charge of all civil administration, including police and Gestapo operations

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00:11:18,000 --> 00:11:21,000

in East Prussia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

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00:11:22,000 --> 00:11:24,000

This is a territory that includes Königsberg,

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00:11:24,000 --> 00:11:28,000

so anything that happens at Königsberg Castle is happening under his authority.

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00:11:29,000 --> 00:11:33,000

Then, in January 1945, Koch flees.

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00:11:36,000 --> 00:11:40,000

Koch manages to stay on the run for four years until he's captured by the British.

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00:11:40,000 --> 00:11:45,000

In 1950, he's returned to Poland where he's forced to stand trial for war crimes,

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00:11:45,000 --> 00:11:47,000

at the end of which he is sentenced to death.

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00:11:48,000 --> 00:11:54,000

But here's the strange thing, his death sentence is pretty quickly commuted to life imprisonment.

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00:11:54,000 --> 00:11:57,000

Plenty of Nazis are executed for their war crimes.

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00:11:57,000 --> 00:12:00,000

There's no real reason for Koch to be spared.

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00:12:00,000 --> 00:12:05,000

His crimes are just as bad as any other Nazi, and he's unrepentant about it.

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00:12:05,000 --> 00:12:07,000

He's truly a vile person.

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00:12:08,000 --> 00:12:11,000

Is Koch spared because he has valuable information?

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00:12:12,000 --> 00:12:19,000

Koch's sentence is commuted after a long period of interrogation by Soviet authorities.

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00:12:19,000 --> 00:12:22,000

And we think that during this interrogation,

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00:12:22,000 --> 00:12:25,000

Koch reveals that the Amber Room has survived.

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00:12:26,000 --> 00:12:28,000

And he knows where it is.

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00:12:31,000 --> 00:12:38,000

According to Eric Koch, Adolf Hitler ordered that the Amber Room be packed up and moved in January 1945.

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00:12:38,000 --> 00:12:44,000

He reveals that they packed it up into 24 wooden crates and trucked it 60 miles from Konigsberg

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00:12:44,000 --> 00:12:48,000

to a more fortified Nazi stronghold at Montmerichie, Poland.

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00:12:48,000 --> 00:12:53,000

Keep in mind that throughout this interrogation, he continues to badmouth the Jews and the Soviets,

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00:12:53,000 --> 00:12:56,000

and he's also singing the praises of Hitler and the Nazis.

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00:12:56,000 --> 00:13:00,000

It's not like he was trying to tell the Soviets what they wanted to hear.

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00:13:00,000 --> 00:13:05,000

That loss of credibility, that makes this a more of a believable possibility.

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00:13:06,000 --> 00:13:11,000

This is also a testament to just how important the Amber Room is to the Soviets,

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00:13:11,000 --> 00:13:16,000

that they're going to spare a top Nazi in exchange for a tip, basically,

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00:13:16,000 --> 00:13:19,000

just to keep the hope alive of recovering the Amber Room.

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00:13:20,000 --> 00:13:26,000

But when the Red Army arrives in Montmerichie in the 1950s, they meet an incredible challenge.

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00:13:29,000 --> 00:13:34,000

Montmerichie was the center of the German command on the Eastern Front, and it was a massive complex.

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00:13:34,000 --> 00:13:37,000

And Montmerichie hides a few secrets itself.

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00:13:37,000 --> 00:13:46,000

Above ground, the Germans build about 200 buildings, and the entire fort covers about 600 acres.

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00:13:46,000 --> 00:13:51,000

But guess what? Underneath the ground, it's even more impressive.

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00:13:52,000 --> 00:13:56,000

There are miles and miles of underground bunkers and tunnels.

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00:14:01,000 --> 00:14:06,000

It's a hidden maze, and that's because of the fact that during the course of the war, the Nazis backfill.

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00:14:06,000 --> 00:14:10,000

They fill in some of the tunnels that they had built earlier in the conflict.

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00:14:10,000 --> 00:14:14,000

Then, with the passage of time, Mother Nature works her magic,

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00:14:14,000 --> 00:14:19,000

making this underground complex an extraordinarily difficult place to search.

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00:14:20,000 --> 00:14:24,000

The Russians spend years searching Montmerichie with no results.

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00:14:25,000 --> 00:14:29,000

So after two decades of searching, the Soviets are so desperate,

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00:14:29,000 --> 00:14:36,000

they take Koch out of prison in 1970 and bring him to Montmerichie to try to find the Amber Room.

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00:14:36,000 --> 00:14:42,000

He points at a particular bunker where he thinks the Amber Room was taken, but it's not there.

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00:14:43,000 --> 00:14:47,000

To that, you could say that maybe Eric Koch's memory had lapsed.

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00:14:47,000 --> 00:14:52,000

Or he's just trying to survive, because after all, if the Soviets do find the Amber Room,

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00:14:52,000 --> 00:14:55,000

they have no more reason to keep Eric Koch alive.

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00:14:56,000 --> 00:15:01,000

Playing the Soviets the way that he did, Eric Koch manages to stay alive for almost another 20 years

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00:15:01,000 --> 00:15:05,000

until he dies of natural causes in 1986 at age 90.

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00:15:06,000 --> 00:15:10,000

Even so, the search for the Amber Room continues.

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00:15:11,000 --> 00:15:14,000

These days, Montmerichie is overgrown and falling apart,

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00:15:14,000 --> 00:15:20,000

but parts of it are run as a museum by a Polish man named Bartek Plabancik.

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00:15:20,000 --> 00:15:23,000

And he fully believes that the Amber Room is still there.

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00:15:24,000 --> 00:15:27,000

They even have a replica of the Amber Room inside of the museum.

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00:15:27,000 --> 00:15:32,000

And every year, Bartek excavates a different bunker in Montmerichie.

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00:15:32,000 --> 00:15:38,000

It's all he can afford to do one a year, but he's going to keep going until he finds the Amber Room.

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00:15:39,000 --> 00:15:44,000

So far, they have found tons of Nazi and Soviet artifacts,

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00:15:44,000 --> 00:15:48,000

but it's estimated that only 1% of the entire compound has been searched.

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00:15:48,000 --> 00:15:54,000

That means that there could be tunnels and bunkers still in that complex,

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00:15:54,000 --> 00:15:58,000

just waiting to be explored and waiting to produce discoveries.

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00:15:58,000 --> 00:16:02,000

These tunnels and chambers have been unexplored in over 70 years.

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00:16:02,000 --> 00:16:07,000

So each dig could be the one that turns up the Amber Room.

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00:16:09,000 --> 00:16:14,000

For decades after World War II,

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00:16:14,000 --> 00:16:20,000

a global army of treasure hunters searched for the lost Amber Room.

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00:16:21,000 --> 00:16:26,000

It's become the obsession of thousands of people across Europe, across the Americas.

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00:16:26,000 --> 00:16:29,000

People have even gone looking for the Amber Room in Japan.

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00:16:29,000 --> 00:16:32,000

While some believe it could be in Poland,

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00:16:32,000 --> 00:16:37,000

two German historians think they know the truth.

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00:16:37,000 --> 00:16:40,000

The Amber Room.

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00:16:43,000 --> 00:16:48,000

Eric Stenz and George Mederer see this news story coming out of the Czech Republic in 2007.

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00:16:48,000 --> 00:16:54,000

A former cook who used to work in Czechoslovakia's Friedland Castle when it was under Nazi rule

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00:16:54,000 --> 00:16:57,000

tells a fascinating tale.

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00:16:57,000 --> 00:17:03,000

Back near the end of the war, the cook says that she sees hundreds of SS soldiers arriving at the castle,

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00:17:03,000 --> 00:17:05,000

bringing in crates.

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00:17:05,000 --> 00:17:09,000

Every night for two weeks, they carry these crates into the cellar of the castle,

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00:17:09,000 --> 00:17:11,000

and then they're gone.

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00:17:12,000 --> 00:17:17,000

Stenz and Mederer immediately think that these are the crates that could hold the Amber Room.

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00:17:17,000 --> 00:17:21,000

When Adolf Hitler orders the Amber Room's evacuation from Konigsberg,

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00:17:21,000 --> 00:17:25,000

if it was moved to Memeriki, it's still dangerously close to the front lines.

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00:17:25,000 --> 00:17:28,000

It would make sense for it to be moved to Friedland Castle,

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00:17:28,000 --> 00:17:31,000

which is much deeper in German territory.

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00:17:32,000 --> 00:17:36,000

So they go to Friedland Castle down into the cellar.

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00:17:36,000 --> 00:17:43,000

They see these two large areas that have been walled off with modern bricks and cement.

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00:17:43,000 --> 00:17:48,000

They think this seems suspicious, so they go to the Czech authorities.

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00:17:48,000 --> 00:17:52,000

Who tell them initially that the cellar in the castle doesn't even exist,

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00:17:52,000 --> 00:17:56,000

but of course they were just there, so this feels like a ridiculous bluff.

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00:17:56,000 --> 00:18:00,000

At this point, Stenz and Mederer feel like they're getting the run around from the Czech authorities.

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00:18:01,000 --> 00:18:06,000

But they press on, and they have photographs of the cellar and the walled off areas,

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00:18:06,000 --> 00:18:09,000

so they go back to the Czech authorities, who basically have to say,

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00:18:09,000 --> 00:18:11,000

oh, you mean that cellar?

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00:18:11,000 --> 00:18:15,000

Nothing to see there. There's just some books from a Berlin library behind there.

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00:18:17,000 --> 00:18:23,000

Unsatisfied with this response, Stenz and Mederer ask permission to keep searching Friedland Castle.

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00:18:24,000 --> 00:18:29,000

Surprisingly, the authorities say yes, and they allow them to continue their investigation.

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00:18:29,000 --> 00:18:33,000

However, they forbid them from bringing in any kind of special equipment

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00:18:33,000 --> 00:18:37,000

that would allow them to see past these modern walls in this old cellar.

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00:18:40,000 --> 00:18:44,000

Is it possible the Czech authorities have something to hide?

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00:18:45,000 --> 00:18:50,000

There is one incident that suggests that the Czechs are trying to keep a secret from the rest of Europe,

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00:18:50,000 --> 00:18:53,000

and it dates back to before the war.

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00:18:54,000 --> 00:18:59,000

In 1938, as part of a notorious treaty called the Munich Agreement,

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00:18:59,000 --> 00:19:06,000

this region of Czechoslovakia was ceded to Hitler by Britain, France and Italy to avoid war.

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00:19:07,000 --> 00:19:10,000

It's considered one of the greatest betrayals in history.

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00:19:11,000 --> 00:19:17,000

Six months later, Hitler violates the pact and invades the rest of Czechoslovakia.

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00:19:20,000 --> 00:19:25,000

The Nazis and the Munich Agreement are still a sore subject in all of the Czech Republic,

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00:19:25,000 --> 00:19:29,000

but particularly in the region where Friedland Castle is located.

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00:19:32,000 --> 00:19:36,000

Stenz and Mederer are convinced that the amber room is hidden behind the castle's walls,

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00:19:36,000 --> 00:19:41,000

and their theory is that the Czechs are hiding it because of the Munich Agreement back in 1938.

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00:19:43,000 --> 00:19:46,000

The Germans betrayed them and all of Europe was in on it.

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00:19:46,000 --> 00:19:50,000

After the Nazis are kicked out, the Czechs decide not to give the loot back.

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00:19:51,000 --> 00:19:56,000

They wall it up and hide it, sitting on these national treasures as an act of revenge.

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00:19:58,000 --> 00:20:03,000

Stenz and Mederer continue to pressure the Czech authorities to reveal what's behind those walls,

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00:20:03,000 --> 00:20:06,000

and the Czech authorities continue to resist.

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00:20:08,000 --> 00:20:13,000

While they still haven't revealed what's behind those walls, they insist it is not the amber room,

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00:20:13,000 --> 00:20:20,000

and they say Stenz and Mederer are just a couple of diluted treasure hunters trying to spin fantasies.

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00:20:23,000 --> 00:20:27,000

But what if the amber room is not behind any walls?

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00:20:28,000 --> 00:20:32,000

Once again, let's assume that the Nazis did pack up the amber room into 24 crates

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00:20:32,000 --> 00:20:36,000

and remove it from Konigsberg Castle under Adolf Hitler's orders.

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00:20:36,000 --> 00:20:40,000

The thing is that at this point in the war, in January 1945, when Hitler gives that order,

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00:20:40,000 --> 00:20:44,000

the Nazis are expecting to lose a lot of territory in East Prussia.

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00:20:44,000 --> 00:20:46,000

And so they're not going to just move back a few miles.

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00:20:46,000 --> 00:20:53,000

They need to trigger an overall broader evacuation, and that becomes Operation Hannibal.

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00:20:55,000 --> 00:21:02,000

So Operation Hannibal is an attempt to evacuate all of East Prussia via the Baltic.

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00:21:02,000 --> 00:21:07,000

We're talking the German army, civilians, anything they can evacuate.

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00:21:08,000 --> 00:21:13,000

And some eyewitnesses think they also attempt to rescue the amber room.

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00:21:13,000 --> 00:21:23,000

Thousands of people descend on the harbor of Gotenhafen, where the converted luxury liner Wilhelm Gustloff is standing by to provide an evacuation.

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00:21:24,000 --> 00:21:28,000

People are just cramming into this area. They're desperate. There's no turning them back.

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00:21:29,000 --> 00:21:34,000

They eventually get on the Wilhelm Gustloff. I'm talking about 10,000 people,

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00:21:34,000 --> 00:21:39,000

and they think this is Noah's Ark. This is their salvation. This is going to get them to safety.

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00:21:41,000 --> 00:21:46,000

The boat departs on January 30th, 1945.

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00:21:48,000 --> 00:21:53,000

But the Soviet Navy is waiting for any transports moving back and forth on the Baltic.

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00:21:53,000 --> 00:21:59,000

And with an hours of departure, the Wilhelm Gustloff is torpedoed and sunk.

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00:22:00,000 --> 00:22:04,000

So we wonder, was the amber room inside of it?

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00:22:07,000 --> 00:22:16,000

With a death toll of more than 9,000 killed, the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff is the greatest maritime disaster in history,

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00:22:16,000 --> 00:22:20,000

greater than the Titanic and the Lusitania combined.

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00:22:21,000 --> 00:22:24,000

But was the amber room actually on board?

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00:22:25,000 --> 00:22:31,000

Evacuaries there report seeing the 24 crates containing the amber room being loaded aboard the ship.

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00:22:32,000 --> 00:22:41,000

The Russians believe any number of valuable stolen goods are on the Wilhelm Gustloff, including the most valuable one of all, the amber room.

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00:22:44,000 --> 00:22:47,000

So several months later, the Russians conduct a dive.

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00:22:48,000 --> 00:22:53,000

They find bodies, equipment, and crates, but no amber room.

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00:22:53,000 --> 00:22:58,000

But they find something suspicious. It looks like someone has gotten there first,

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00:22:58,000 --> 00:23:03,000

because there's this large panel that's been removed from the hull of the ship,

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00:23:03,000 --> 00:23:11,000

and behind that is this big cargo hold that could have held the two dozen or so crates holding the amber room, and it's been emptied out.

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00:23:12,000 --> 00:23:18,000

They think a theft has taken place, because most of the wreckage is pretty much undisturbed.

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00:23:18,000 --> 00:23:23,000

So it really looks like someone who knew what they were doing went in and looted this specific area.

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00:23:24,000 --> 00:23:31,000

For the dive team, this discovery is bittersweet, because on the one hand, it means that the torpedo didn't destroy the amber room.

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00:23:31,000 --> 00:23:33,000

But where is it?

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00:23:34,000 --> 00:23:41,000

The Wilhelm Gustloff is now classified as a war grave, making future expeditions illegal.

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00:23:42,000 --> 00:23:50,000

If the ship wreck contains more clues to the amber room's whereabouts, they will remain hidden forever.

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00:23:54,000 --> 00:23:58,000

For over 50 years, the search for the amber room started with one question.

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00:23:58,000 --> 00:24:01,000

Where did it go after the Nazis stole it?

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00:24:01,000 --> 00:24:08,000

There was no reason to challenge the belief that Hitler's army took the artwork to Königsberg Castle for display,

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00:24:08,000 --> 00:24:13,000

until a radical new theory emerged with a shocking twist.

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00:24:13,000 --> 00:24:17,000

What if the Nazis stole the wrong amber room?

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00:24:19,000 --> 00:24:29,000

In 1995, a Russian historian named Vladimir Lapsky reveals this new extensive research that he's done, and potentially a new finding.

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00:24:31,000 --> 00:24:39,000

Lapsky claims to have uncovered proof that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin created a ruse to trick the Germans.

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00:24:40,000 --> 00:24:49,000

According to Lapsky, it starts out not as a trick at all. It starts out as an act of good will, because in 1939, the Germans and the Russians aren't enemies yet.

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00:24:49,000 --> 00:24:56,000

They're close neighbors, and they actually have really good reason to try to keep the peace after the devastation of World War I.

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00:24:56,000 --> 00:25:05,000

They signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, which has also been called the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

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00:25:05,000 --> 00:25:13,000

It's technically a partition of Poland by the two countries, but it serves to try and slow Germany's rapid progression toward war.

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00:25:13,000 --> 00:25:20,000

To commemorate signing the pact, Stalin orders a copy of the amber room to be made for Hitler.

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00:25:21,000 --> 00:25:25,000

Stalin intends to give it to Hitler when he finally visits the Soviet Union.

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00:25:25,000 --> 00:25:30,000

It'll be a nice version. It just won't have all of the precious metals and gems as the original.

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00:25:30,000 --> 00:25:36,000

It won't be worth about half a billion dollars. It'll be worth more like 10 to 12 million.

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00:25:37,000 --> 00:25:44,000

Stalin commissions Anatoly Baranovsky, Russia's most famous amber craftsman, to make the copy.

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00:25:45,000 --> 00:25:51,000

So Baranovsky actually makes a copy, and in addition to that, his apprentices make another copy.

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00:25:52,000 --> 00:26:01,000

But Hitler never receives the gift. Instead, he breaks the non-aggression pact and invades Russia.

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00:26:01,000 --> 00:26:10,000

Of course, Stalin knew the reputation that Hitler had. The reputation for stealing art and treasures and taking them back to Germany.

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00:26:10,000 --> 00:26:13,000

And he knows that Hitler wants the amber room.

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00:26:13,000 --> 00:26:18,000

So according to this theory, Stalin plays a brilliant trick on his former ally.

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00:26:21,000 --> 00:26:30,000

The theory goes like this. Before the Nazis were able to get to the Catherine Palace, the Russians were able to swap the original amber room for the reproduction.

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00:26:30,000 --> 00:26:36,000

And that's what the Nazis steal. The wrong room. The copies of the amber room were made in May 1941.

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00:26:36,000 --> 00:26:43,000

But the Germans don't get to Leningrad until September. And it was during that time that the switch is made.

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00:26:43,000 --> 00:26:49,000

Vladimir Lapsky says that the Soviets do actually pack up the amber room panels and hide them away.

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00:26:49,000 --> 00:26:57,000

And they leave the apprentice copy in its place. So it's a bait and switch, the eighth thunder of the world.

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00:26:58,000 --> 00:27:04,000

So the Nazis were duped. The amber room that they took back to Konigsberg is the fake amber room.

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00:27:04,000 --> 00:27:11,000

So all of these people who are chasing theories from there, they are chasing the copy, not the original amber room.

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00:27:11,000 --> 00:27:18,000

From the Russian perspective, this story is a phenomenal bombshell because it would provide relief for Russian authorities.

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00:27:18,000 --> 00:27:23,000

Because it would be proof that they did not lose or destroy the amber room.

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00:27:24,000 --> 00:27:29,000

But if this is true, where's the real amber room?

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00:27:29,000 --> 00:27:40,000

So some believe that in November of 1941, the original amber room was packed up and sent to a pro-Soviet billionaire in the United States named Armand Hammer.

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00:27:42,000 --> 00:27:49,000

Armand Hammer was a pharmaceutical and oil magnate, and he was the son of Russian immigrants who were big supporters of Lenin.

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00:27:49,000 --> 00:27:55,000

So Hammer's strong Soviet ties lead to this nickname, Lenin's Chosen Capitalist.

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00:27:57,000 --> 00:28:07,000

Hammer has this world famous art collection, and it's alleged that the amber room became part of it, maybe as some sort of collateral in his business deals with Russia.

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00:28:07,000 --> 00:28:11,000

Others think it ended up back where it started.

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00:28:11,000 --> 00:28:15,000

In 1979, the Soviet government orders yet another copy of the room.

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00:28:15,000 --> 00:28:23,000

24 years later, this new copy of the amber room is completed, partly paid for by the Germans for a total cost of \$11 million.

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00:28:23,000 --> 00:28:28,000

It is ultimately installed in the Catherine Palace, and that's where it is on display to this day.

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00:28:28,000 --> 00:28:38,000

But there are some who believe that this is actually the real original amber room, that it was pulled out of storage and reinstalled by the Russian government decades later.

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00:28:40,000 --> 00:28:49,000

That would be an incredible story if it were true, but unless there was a confession by somebody who truly knows, we will never know.

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00:28:50,000 --> 00:29:04,000

For 75 years, some experts believe the amber room was lost at sea when a German ship called the Wilhelm Gustlov was torpedoed.

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00:29:04,000 --> 00:29:14,000

But early searches of that turned up nothing, and there's another ship that the Nazis used during the evacuation, and that ship was thought to be lost until now.

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00:29:15,000 --> 00:29:22,000

Could the amber room actually be on that long lost vessel? The SS Karlsruhe?

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00:29:24,000 --> 00:29:33,000

The Karlsruhe was made in 1905 as a ship with a 218 foot overall length and a beam of 33 feet.

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00:29:33,000 --> 00:29:43,000

It was a part of Operation Hannibal in 1945, which was the seaborne evacuation of German military personnel and civilians as the Soviet military approached.

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00:29:44,000 --> 00:29:48,000

And here's the thing, the Karlsruhe departed from Königsberg.

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00:29:48,000 --> 00:29:57,000

A lot of people have focused on the Wilhelm Gustlov, which was a much larger ship, and that left from Gotenhafen, which was about 100 miles away.

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00:29:57,000 --> 00:30:02,000

The Karlsruhe was practically within walking distance of Königsberg Castle.

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00:30:04,000 --> 00:30:11,000

The ship departs at nearly the same time the Allies destroy Königsberg Castle in air raids.

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00:30:12,000 --> 00:30:24,000

The wreckage of the Karlsruhe has never been found, so in 2020 this Polish diving team decides they're going to go for it, because there could be the most interesting story sitting at the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

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00:30:26,000 --> 00:30:30,000

The team is led by salvage diver Tomek Stetura.

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00:30:31,000 --> 00:30:39,000

SS Karlsruhe was one of the 247 ships which sank during the Hannibal operation in 1945.

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00:30:41,000 --> 00:30:49,000

We were looking for this wreck a few months when we realized that maybe on the deck of this wreck something important.

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00:30:49,000 --> 00:31:04,000

We didn't want to be too excited, but we have to admit that maybe it's amber room over there, because if the Germans want to send something valuable or something important to them to the west, the Karlsruhe was last chance for them.

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00:31:06,000 --> 00:31:10,000

So the ship departs Konigsberg on April 11th, 1945.

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00:31:11,000 --> 00:31:17,000

It was part of a convoy that was headed to the German port of Swinemünde, which is now part of modern day Poland.

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00:31:18,000 --> 00:31:26,000

According to Nazi Navy reports, the ship is carrying 1,083 people, mostly German civilians.

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00:31:27,000 --> 00:31:33,000

The Karlsruhe also appears to be carrying about 360 tons of other goods on crates.

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00:31:34,000 --> 00:31:39,000

So the diving team thinks there's a good chance that the amber room is among those crates.

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00:31:41,000 --> 00:31:50,000

So the reports say that the ship was overloaded, which means it probably fell behind the rest of the convoy, making it a perfect target for the Soviet Navy.

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00:31:52,000 --> 00:32:04,000

It's going to meet the same fate as the Wilhelm Gurslaw. It's going to be torpedoed, it's going to go underwater, everyone on board, everything inside of it goes down with it.

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00:32:05,000 --> 00:32:12,000

Now Stature's job is to figure out where that happened.

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00:32:13,000 --> 00:32:18,000

The Baltic is an incredibly challenging place to conduct any kind of an underwater expedition.

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00:32:19,000 --> 00:32:22,000

It's because of the fact that you have very difficult temperatures during the winter months.

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00:32:23,000 --> 00:32:27,000

Howling winds and the howling winds churned up extremely heavy surf.

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00:32:28,000 --> 00:32:33,000

And these are all things that are enemies of conducting any kind of an underwater search.

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00:32:35,000 --> 00:32:44,000

We had the access to the Russian archives, which said that, 13th of April 1945, Russian aircraft sank SS Karlsruhe.

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00:32:45,000 --> 00:32:54,000

But the problem was that they show five different positions in the distance between each other, it was between 10 to 15 miles.

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00:32:56,000 --> 00:33:03,000

The problem here is that this ship may have actually engaged in evasive maneuvers, so it could basically turn up anywhere.

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00:33:04,000 --> 00:33:13,000

But the search team has some original documents, and that's because when the ships sank, the Germans were able to rescue 113 survivors from the wreck.

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00:33:14,000 --> 00:33:20,000

In addition to that, the British intercepted and decoded transmissions relating to the sinking.

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00:33:21,000 --> 00:33:24,000

And the British intercepted a German telegram about the rescue as well.

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00:33:26,000 --> 00:33:32,000

All of the evidence points to an area a few dozen miles north of the Polish town of Ustka.

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00:33:33,000 --> 00:33:44,000

The ship is about 300 feet down. So this is a dangerous mission, it's an expensive and resource-intensive mission, and it's going to take perfect weather and a whole lot of luck.

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00:33:47,000 --> 00:33:52,000

In June 2020, the Baltic team finally launches their expedition from Gdansk.

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00:33:53,000 --> 00:34:05,000

We have 300 feet of water, cold, dark water. This dive is very demanding, and we don't need only to dive, we have to work underwater.

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00:34:06,000 --> 00:34:17,000

We have a lot of good equipment, we have underwater drone, we have multi-beam, we have sonars, and we have 10 very well-trained divers.

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00:34:18,000 --> 00:34:21,000

This is like an amazing moment in the history.

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00:34:23,000 --> 00:34:34,000

You know, this is the kind of expedition that truly just lights up the imagination, because there's so much history down at the bottom of the Baltic Sea and potentially the Amber Room.

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00:34:37,000 --> 00:34:41,000

And it could all resurface for the first time in 75 years.

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00:34:48,000 --> 00:34:58,000

It's June 2020, and an expedition led by Tomek Stachura is heading into the Baltic Sea on a treasure hunt.

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00:35:00,000 --> 00:35:09,000

Its mission? Locate the wreck of the torpedoed Nazi steamer SS Karlsruhe and see if the Amber Room's on board.

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00:35:10,000 --> 00:35:25,000

We don't know exactly what we can expect on the bottom. Maybe the current will be huge, maybe the visibility will be close to zero, or the wreck will be covered by nets.

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00:35:26,000 --> 00:35:31,000

All of them are very dangerous, so we must be prepared for all conditions.

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00:35:39,000 --> 00:35:50,000

For 75 years, no one has seen this ship. It's just been lost. But we know that it carried hundreds of tons of Nazi goods. So could the Amber Room be among them?

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00:35:51,000 --> 00:35:56,000

As the divers descend to 288 feet, the search conditions grow more challenging.

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00:35:57,000 --> 00:36:11,000

In a safe way, we have to use a lot of equipment. We have to use very high quality drysuit, special underwater heating system.

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00:36:12,000 --> 00:36:16,000

We have to survive more like three hours underwater.

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00:36:17,000 --> 00:36:27,000

We have 300 feet of cold, dark water. It's not easy dive, and we have to do it in a very, very safe way.

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00:36:28,000 --> 00:36:37,000

After a careful 20 minute descent, the divers pinpoint the SS Karlsruhe.

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00:36:38,000 --> 00:36:47,000

This is the first time the ship has been seen since 1945.

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00:36:48,000 --> 00:36:54,000

So this is the moment. After 75 years, we salvaged Karlsruhe from the dark.

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00:36:55,000 --> 00:37:12,000

We saw the beautiful wreck, if you can say about the wreck beautiful. I have never seen so many

artifacts, so many crates, so many things on the wreck on the bottom. This is amazing.

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00:37:13,000 --> 00:37:24,000

It's a treasure trove of material. They find china plates that are in great shape. They find military vehicles still intact with the rubber still on the tires.

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00:37:32,000 --> 00:37:34,000

But what about the Amber Room?

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00:37:35,000 --> 00:37:42,000

Beneath a large pile of debris, the divers make out what appears to be dozens of sealed crates.

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00:37:48,000 --> 00:38:00,000

Now that's the most interesting thing, of course. Here we have crates that match the description of the Amber Room. Of course, they might just contain ammunition or silverware, sundries, but what if?

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00:38:01,000 --> 00:38:09,000

Unfortunately, the team is unable to safely transport the crates. They'll have to return with additional equipment.

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00:38:12,000 --> 00:38:24,000

So unfortunately, they can't search the crates on this trip. At those depths, you really only have about 30 minutes max down there. The last thing they want to do is potentially damage the Amber Room in the process.

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00:38:25,000 --> 00:38:39,000

This expedition is step number one to identify the wreck to check what is this. But definitely we need expedition number two when we can check exactly what cargo contains.

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00:38:41,000 --> 00:38:46,000

Plans are moving forward for a salvage and recovery mission in the next few months.

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00:38:47,000 --> 00:39:06,000

To check cargo on the car thru it, we need to do it on the proper way. On the proper way, that means that we have to spend days or even weeks on the position that we have to anchor permanently the boat with special equipment for the divers.

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00:39:07,000 --> 00:39:18,000

This time they'll be bringing many more resources to the effort. They'll have divers that can work on a rotating basis. They'll have equipment that can float large objects.

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00:39:20,000 --> 00:39:24,000

If they find a crate, they'll need to leave it sealed until they get it to the surface.

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00:39:25,000 --> 00:39:31,000

The dive team is also going to be bringing a representative from the National Maritime Museum in Gdansk, Poland as an advisor.

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00:39:32,000 --> 00:39:41,000

It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to bring something as rare and as valuable a cultural resource as the Amber Room to the surface.

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00:39:45,000 --> 00:39:53,000

This is a mystery on par with the Dead Sea Scrolls and the discovery of King Tut's tomb. Is it down there? I don't know.

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00:39:53,000 --> 00:39:59,000

But I certainly hope it is because I would love to see this thing finally revealed. I would love to see this mystery solved.

403

00:40:02,000 --> 00:40:15,000

I couldn't imagine how would we feel when we find hard proof on the Carthwares ship that we find Amber Room. This is absolutely out of my imagination.

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00:40:15,000 --> 00:40:24,000

But perhaps it will be something special and unique and maybe I remember this moment till the end of my life.

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00:40:24,000 --> 00:40:44,000

Could the Amber Room lie in crates at the bottom of the Baltic Sea? If the dive team is successful and can salvage what's aboard the SS Karlsruhe, we may soon know the answer to this enduring mystery.

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00:40:44,000 --> 00:40:50,000

I'm Lawrence Fishburne. Thank you for watching History's Greatest Mysteries.