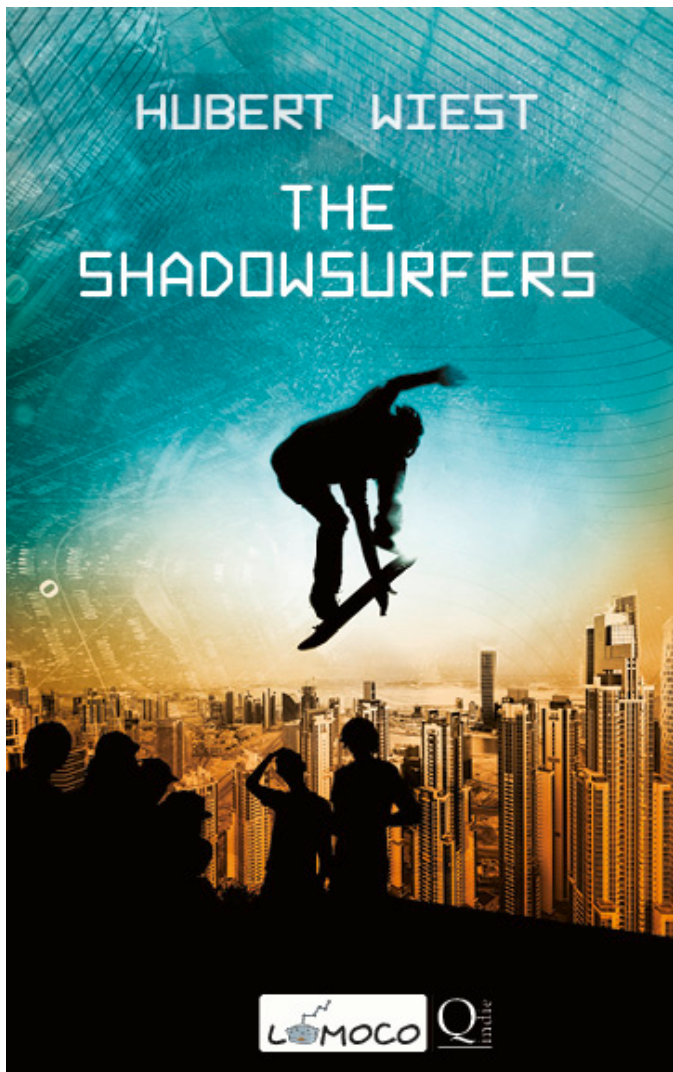


HUBERT WIEST
THE
SHADOWSURFERS



LOMOCO Qindie

HUBERT WIEST
THE SHADOWSURFERS

TRANSLATED FROM HUBERT WIEST'S
GERMAN ORIGINAL
BY MORITZ PISCHEL



Hubert Wiest was born in Germany in 1964, and has written many novels and stories for children and teenagers. Together with Nina von Stebut he produces the German-language podcast Radio Lomoco and audiobooks.

Hubert studied at the Bavarian Academy of Advertising and also took classes in business administration. In the 1990s he founded the internet agency FREIRAUM Multimedia, leading it through the stormy new economy of the millennium. He has also worked as head of marketing and sales in international companies. Hubert lives in Sydney, Australia, with his wife, their three children and their dogs Pepsi and Cola.

The Shadowsurfers is his first book published in English – translated from Hubert Wiest’s German original by Moritz Pischel. For information about Hubert, please check out www.hubertwiest.com.

HUBERT WIEST
The Shadowsurfers

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For Nina, Janek, Ben and Lola

1 THE MATTER OF THE BORROWED MONEY

*"Secrecy is one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity."
Georg Simmel 1907*

Luan pressed himself very closely to the steel column that held the domed porch roof. Loitering here by night, as Mother Eva would probably have called it, was forbidden. The wet concrete road gleamed red then blue. The blinking neon words on the porch roof were reflected on the ground: Happy Kidz. All his life, every day, Luan had to see these ridiculous words. Happy? He was rarely happy. How could he be truly happy? He had grown up in this children's home. He didn't even know his own parents.

Finally the lights in the kitchen went out. He had been waiting for this long enough. In a moment the cook would come out of the side exit and glide home on her scooter. She did that every evening at this time. Luan knew it. This wasn't the first time he'd waited for this moment.

The door hissed. The cook stepped out. Luan

heard her close the door behind her and lock it with the code. A beep confirmed the activation. Luan grinned at the outdated system that Mother Eva evidently thought secure. He had been able to crack it for the last eight years. He was fifteen now.

The cook mounted her scooter and closed the glass dome. The scooter floated down the access road with a buzz.

Luan looked around again. In the main building everything was quiet. By now everyone was asleep. Even Ms Evanowa, the home's superintendent. Mother Eva, as the children called her, made sure the curfew was obeyed without fail.

Luan's pulse throbbed, even though he had done this several times before. There had never been a problem.

Luan pushed away from the steel column. Like a rabbit he zigzagged across the concrete path. Luan knew exactly where the cameras couldn't catch him. Very old cameras. Luckily Mother Eva didn't think much of modern technology.

His breath raced when he stood before the door, and not just because of the sprint. He swept his right hand across the flexible screen he was wearing like a wide band around his wrist. You could have mistaken it for a ceeBand, but Luan had made it himself. He would never have been able to afford a real one. No one got pocket money at Happy Kidz. Mother Eva was of the opinion that the kids didn't need money. After all, they got food and drink, clothes, and whatever else they needed. Mother Eva was really not from this world. It was because of this, her fault, that Luan had to borrow money from time to time.

Next to the door there was an old-fashioned glass plate set into the wall. A numerical keyboard lit up.

He held his ceeBand next to it. As if cloned, the exact same bright blue numbers from 0 to 9 appeared on his band. For a moment nothing happened. Luan held his breath. Then the numbers 8-7-3-4-7 started blinking on his ceeBand. Luan pressed them in the same order on the glass monitor. And with the final 7 the steel door opened with a hiss.

Luan grinned. With his ceeBand he could get in anywhere. It was way better than the original.

After all, no one comes to any harm, Luan tried to reassure himself. With an agitated movement he shoved a stubborn strand of hair out of his eyes. He crept through the airlock and made his way forward along the smooth wall. With his elbow he finally felt the opening to the kitchen. He carefully pushed down the handle and opened the door. He snuck inside. In the huge glittering pots he could see the reflection of the red and blue fluorescent letters outside. Luan's nose was assaulted by the pungent scent of the kitchen cleaners blended with the smell of pickled gherkins. Luan hated pickled gherkins. Every Friday they served pickled gherkins. Once again he had only eaten potatoes for lunch.

Luan thought he heard a quiet hissing sound. He stood still, not daring to breathe. His heart thumped.

He must have been mistaken. Nothing was there, definitely nothing at all.

Luan walked around the big stove that jutted out of the centre of the kitchen like an iceberg. Over the sink on a shelf it stood, the yellow cocoa tin. The label was completely worn away and the old-fashioned image of a boy decorating the tin had almost disappeared.

The cook always hid her pay card in that tin. Luan knew that, of course. He stood on tiptoe. Was there a noise?

No, nothing. Everything was silent. With his fingertips he could reach the side of the tin and tried to pull it towards him. By doing so he pulled a bag of pasta with it. The bag slipped over the edge of the shelf, hit the clean scrubbed floor and burst. Like marbles the macaroni shot over the floor.

Dammit! Luan tore open the lid of the cocoa tin. He reached inside. Yes, he could feel it, the small plastic card. With nervous fingers he grasped it. Hopefully there was enough money on it. This time he needed \$100. He would give the money back. Just like he had always done.

That money could buy parts to build a computer for someone he knew, who'd promised him a lot of money. Luan could repay the debt and he would still have some money left.

Luan pushed the card into the slot on his ceeBand.

There was that noise again. It sounded like someone breathing. Or was it just the pressurised air from the airlock?

Luan's ceeBand lit up. Five one hundred dollar notes appeared on the display. Luan swept over one of them and pressed the button marked "charge". The note fluttered onto his bank account. That money would allow him to buy the parts he needed. And he would most certainly return the money. He never forgot a debt.

With a bang the kitchen door was flung closed. Shocked, he let the cocoa tin slip out of his fingers. It fell to the floor with a clang.

The buzzing neon lights went on. Luan screwed up his eyes. The kitchen shone in glittering white. A dark shadow, wrapped in a greyish brown bathing robe, broke away from the door. The figure's hair

was held together by a net. In its hand the shadow was holding a sword. No, it was an umbrella. Luan was clutching the kitchen counter. Mother Eva was standing there, Mother Eva of all people. If only it had been the cook!

“Luan, you thief,” Mother Eva barked at him icily.

A heavy lump as if from sour milk formed in Luan’s stomach. He dared not look into Mother Eva’s eyes. He looked instead at the pasta scattered across the floor. “I was still hungry. The only food on Fridays is pickled gherkins. That doesn’t agree with me,” he murmured and bent down to collect the pasta. He hid the hand with the ceeBand behind his back.

“I wasn’t talking about the noodles. Give me the pay card.”

There was no point in lying. Luan pulled the blue and red card out of his ceeBand and gave it to Mother Eva across the stove.

“Get over here,” Mother Eva growled and grabbed Luan’s arm. She roughly pulled him to her. She checked the card with a reader. \$400 lit up.

“Luan, you’ve stolen from the community,” Ms Evanowa spat the words out like rotten meat.

“I can explain,” he stammered and stared at Mother Eva’s slippers.

“There’s nothing to explain. You’ve stolen from us. You’ve abused the community’s trust.”

“But Mother Eva, it’s not like you think. I ...”

“Silence. I don’t want to listen to your lies. I’m no longer Mother Eva to you, remember that.”

“Please, just two minutes,” Luan begged.

“No, you should have thought of that sooner,” said Ms Evanowa. She swiped her umbrella through the air, as if to cut off any objection. “You deceiver, you are shut out from the Crystal Celebration. You

are never going to become a useful member of society. You haven't earned the Crystal Celebration. And you never will."

The Crystal Celebration shot through Luan's mind. For months he had been preparing for the Crystal Exam. Finally he could prove what he could really do. No one could beat him on the subject of computers. He was the best in his class, maybe even in the whole school. His teacher had once told him that he had it in him to become someone really remarkable.

Ms Evanowa's voice reached his ears as if through cotton. The whole kitchen was spinning around him. Then, as if after a flash of lightning, he descended into a deep darkness.

2 NEVER HAPPY AGAIN

Luan had no idea how he had arrived in his bed. He didn't know how long he had been unconscious. Minutes, hours or days? His head felt as though a motorway ran straight through it. It felt as though it had swollen to twice its usual size. The bandage looked like a giant turban. "You have a severe concussion," the nurse told him.

After ten days the banging in his head finally subsided. Luan could barely lie down any more. Everything hurt, no matter whether he lay on his stomach, his back or his side. He spent hours each day staring at the two posters in his room: Marc Bodin and Eva Hanberg, the best computer programmers in the world. Both of them were only 20 years old. Eva Hanberg was working as head of programming for the IT company Mermox. Marc Bodin had vanished a year ago and had been missing ever since.

Computer parts were piled up on Luan's desk. Luan used them to build new computers, programming or repairing the devices of acquaintances. It was important to him that they were acquaintances because

he had no friends. Luan trusted no one. He had been disappointed too many times. The others at Happy Kidz often treated him badly. They only came to him when they had trouble with their computers.

In the past couple of days Luan had often thought about what he could say to Mother Eva to defend himself. He had planned it, sentence by sentence.

But Mother Eva never came. After a while Luan decided to go to her.

On wobbly legs he stood before the little sink in his room. He started to peel the bandage away from his head. On the left side of his forehead there was an encrusted wound. Luan tried to smile at his reflection and narrowed his eyes to little slits. He slipped on his favourite T-shirt, the one with the ceeBand ad on the front.

He went to the door. He reached for the round knob. But the knob wouldn't turn. The door was locked, just like a cell. Luan shook it, tore, wrenched and pressed. He threw himself against the door. He thundered against the heavy plastic with his fists and screamed: "Open up. I need to get out of here." Louder and louder, but no one seemed to hear him, as if no sound could penetrate the door.

Suddenly the screen hanging above the desk lit up. From the speakers came the sound of a throat being cleared and Mother Eva smiled at him from the screen, or at least she had pulled her razor-thin mouth a little wider.

Luan started. Never before had Mother Eva used the computer cam. She refused to use it out of principle. She preferred looking people directly in the eye, not through a plate of glass. She had mentioned that often enough.

Luan went over to the screen. The red camera

lamp was blinking. Mother Eva looked at him without moving.

“Mother Eva,” Luan said hastily, “I know I wasn’t allowed to do what I did. I swear I’ll pay back the money. I’ve always paid my debts. I’ve borrowed money five times already. But I’ve never ended up owing even a single cent. Please verify that! Ask the cook! Nothing is missing. Nothing at all. And I would’ve paid the money back this time as well. All of it. Trust me!”

Luan’s confession didn’t seem to impress Mother Eva. She was staring down at him sternly from the screen. Luan was certain that she was at least smiling a little. That encouraged him. He took a deep breath and kept going. “You know that I repair computers, help people I know, and I need to buy parts: processors, memory bricks, control chips and all the other millipedes. Millipedes, that’s what the electrical components are called. Black chips with lots of silver legs.” Luan laughed uncertainly.

“Luan you’ve lied to us and stolen from us. Not just once, but over and over again. I have verified that. You are no longer a part of our community and you don’t belong to Happy Kidz any more.”

“That’s not true,” Luan yelled. He jumped up and met Mother Eva’s glare. She took no notice of him.

“Luan, you know we give everyone a second chance,” Ms Evanowa said calmly, as though she were reading from a manual. “But not a fourth or fifth. My decision is final. You will be excluded from the Crystal Celebration. Cheaters don’t get a place in our community. You will have to lead a life without computers.”

Luan clawed at the table for support. Now he was begging. “No, Mother Eva, please don’t. I’ve never

stolen. Ever!”

But Mother Eva disappeared into the dark glass of the monitor. She had just hung up, hadn't given him the smallest chance. The monitor glowed dully.

Luan flung himself down on the bed. He bawled and screamed. He grabbed his pillow and thumped it against the wall again and again until it burst and the stuffing erupted into the room.

Without the Crystal Celebration he could forget about ever becoming a programmer. He wouldn't even be allowed to own a computer and they would take away his ceeBand. Those who hadn't managed to take the Crystal Exam were barred from computers forever. Their thoughts disturbed the spirit of the community. They were fouled, like garbage, he had learned in school.

He couldn't stay with Happy Kidz and wait for his seventeenth birthday to pass by without his Crystal Celebration. He had to get away from here, disappear. Today. Someone had once told him that there was always the possibility of hiding out in the Lunapark. No-one in the Lunapark asked where you were from, when rides had to be cleaned or potatoes had to be fried in the canteen. The Lunapark was his last shred of hope. He would flee and hide out there. Luan made a plan.

As if he were going to sleep, he took off his trousers. Folding them neatly, he placed them on the chair, like he did every night. Then he clambered into bed and pulled the blanket over his head, like he did every night. He waited for a few minutes, then rolled over onto his side, to and fro, just like every other night. He snored. It had to look as if he was sleeping. As he did so, he checked the time on his ceeBand under the blanket: 6:35pm.

Luan established a connection to the Happy Kidz security cameras. After three attempts the ceeBand cracked the password and he was in. He selected his room's camera. Now all he had to do was switch from the live feed to the recording from 6:32 to 6:35. Again and again in an endless loop. The team of guards would see Luan in his bed, tossing, turning and sleeping. They would notice something was wrong tomorrow morning at the earliest, when he didn't get up. And by then he would already have disappeared into the Lunapark.

Luan got out of bed and got dressed. He went over to the window. It was secured by a steel bolt as thick as a finger from the outside. Immovable by force. Luan set a strong electromagnet against the inside of the window, concentrated the magnetic energy on the bolt and moved it away. Now he could open the window without any difficulty.

Luan jumped out of the window. He caught himself in the huge leaves of the banana plant and slipped down onto the soft ground. Nervously he surveyed the Happy Kidz park. No-one was there. They were all at dinner. He had timed it just right. Luan jumped up and zigzagged through the park at a run. He knew where he would stay hidden from the security cameras. His ceeBand displayed the path to the gate.

Ms Evanowa's scooter was parked at the entrance. A burgundy-coloured two-seater. The seats were covered with brown velvet and the gold-plated Bersol-Engine glistened in the light of the streetlamp. He could easily hack the code. Stealing, the thought crossed Luan's mind. Then perhaps Evanowa would have been right to exclude him from the Crystal Celebration after all.

No, he would not give her that satisfaction.

He took a deep breath. His ceeBand displayed the pedestrian route to the Lunapark. It would take him 57 minutes and 12 seconds.

3 IN THE LUNAPARK

Sansibar snapped the clasps of her shoes shut and threw her bag over her shoulder. In front of the mirror she tugged at a few strands of purple hair that stood out among her smooth, hazelnut-brown hair. Fastidiously she made sure that her hair covered her left earlobe. Sansibar didn't like it, when people saw her earlobe, because it had that strange little notch. When she was little, she had had an accident. She couldn't remember it now, but Dad had told her about it. As she was playing, her earring had got caught on a screw of a jungle gym. She hadn't noticed it and had jumped down into the sand. Her earring been torn out of her ear. It would have hurt a lot, and maybe that was the reason why she could no longer remember it. She still wore the other golden earring in her right ear.

Sansibar stroked over the screen that curled around her wrist like a wide bracelet. A twaddleBand. Not exactly the newest model, but more than sufficient to be used as a communicator.

“Dad, Marella and I are going to the Lunapark.

She's taking me with her on her new scooter," Sansibar typed; she knew her father wouldn't mind. Her father never forbade her anything. He could trust her not to get up to any mischief. She was far too sensible for that.

A man with grey-streaked locks appeared on the screen. He had forced his stubborn hair into an orderly style with gel. A dark red crystal shimmered on his black headband. Corrado Arbani smiled at Sansibar through his horn-rimmed glasses: "Have fun, sweetheart. Please remember to be home by 10pm, even though it is a Friday night. And send me a couple of pictures of the Lunapark. You know I met your mother there."

"Sure, I will," Sansibar said. She thought of her mother. She only had one memory of her: Mum in an orange T-shirt. A large purple flower printed on it. That was ten years ago, at night.

"It's going to be a late night for me. I still have a mountain of files on my desk," Mr Arbani said." The application for the insurance of the administration agreement needs to be taken care of today. Actually, it's a really interesting case: an agreement on a regional level that is made without any insurance..."

Sansibar swallowed. Once Dad got started with telling a story there was no way of stopping him. He was the dearest dad in the world, but he was quite a chatterbox.

A picture of a blond boy started to blink on Sansibar's twaddleBand and tried to push Sansibar's father away to the side. In doing so it changed its shape like a rubber ball hitting the floor.

"Got to go, dad, Mika's calling."

Sansibar swiped over the screen. Her father's picture faded away.

“Can you get some caramell sticks for me at the Lunapark please?”

“Yeah, sure, Mika”

“Some for me too, please. Love, Hannah,” a line of text appeared on Mika’s picture. The video of a girl wearing a helmet pushed its way into the foreground: “Are you coming down, Sansibar? I’ve been waiting in front of your house for ages.”

“Hi Marella, I’ll be right down.”

Sansibar opened the apartment’s door and walked out into the snow-white hallway. It smelled as though it had been freshly cleaned, like chewing gum. Sansibar thought of the past. Mum had used the same detergent. I love chewing gum-scent, she typed on her screen. A few friends sent a thumbs-up.

Sansibar rode the glass lift capsule to the ground floor. The doors hissed open and Marella stood right in front of her with her new scooter. It was hovering a hand’s breadth above the ground. As if swimming in water, it gently swayed in the air. The body shone in a light coffee-brown. Bright blue flower designs snaked around it. They were glowing. Marella held the upward-swung handlebars casually, as though she had been driving a scooter for years already. Brightly glittering blue tassels hung from the grips.

Marella grinned happily. Her parents had given her the scooter for her Crystal Celebration.

But far more important was the brand-new lacquered headband with a clear crystal. It was perched on her forehead, smack in the middle. Everyone got a crystal like that for their Crystal Celebration. Marella had successfully passed the test. She was now a part of society. Part of CHA. The crystal was still colourless for now, as clear as a window pane. Sansibar knew that the crystal would change its colour when

Marella helped society. But it would still be months before it would take on the first yellowish shimmer. And by the end of school most people had only achieved a strong lemon-yellow. Barely anyone achieved egg-yolk-yellow or even orange. Orange was the next level. Some adults never achieved anything above lemon-yellow in their whole lives. Dried up lemons, they were called, had done barely anything for society. A piece of granite would have served them just as well. The Protector sat at the back of the headband, the technical heart. It sent thoughts to CHA.

Sansibar walked around the scooter admiringly: “This is really cool,” she said and whistled through her teeth. “I’ll ask for a scooter for my Crystal Celebration too.”

“It’s an Aeroflair 125,” Marella breathed. “The newest model with a Pertussek-Engine.”

“I’m sure it’s really fast.”

Marella nodded: “It is, technically. But my parents got the safety pack installed. It’ll be deactivated for my 16th birthday, though. They promised.”

Sansibar carefully stroked the bright blue shapes of the flowers. The paint felt smooth.

“Come on,” Marella urged. “You’ll see, it flies wonderfully.”

Sansibar swung herself up onto the seat behind her friend. The scooter cushioned them gently. Marella started the humming motor and accelerated softly. She leaned into the bend and entered the scooter-lane. As if she’d been doing so all her life Marella floated among all the other scooters. Nonchalantly she took one hand off the grip.

The airstream let them forget the heat of the day. Sansibar leaned to one side, past Marella, to breath in

more of the lovely air. She dreamt of finally turning fifteen, she couldn't wait for her own Crystal Celebration. Dad had already hinted that she might get a scooter as well. Not an Aeroflair, of course, but even an old scooter with a Bersol-Engine would be fantastic.

Sansibar activated her twaddleBand's camera. Huge buildings rushed past them, their tips too high up to fit into the picture. Sansibar pointed the camera at Marella. Her friend laughed as if the whole world belonged to her.

"You have to take me with you next time," Hannah complained. A lot of Sansibar's friends sent messages on her twaddleBand. Sansibar knew many of her best friends only through the screen, she had never met them.

Marella parked the scooter in front of the Lunapark next to all the others. But only a few scooters looked as cool as the Aeroflair.

Inside the Lunapark, rollercoasters shot through the air like winding dragons. They constantly seemed about to collide but then dodged at the last second. At the same time flames of light erupted from them and they turned this way and that or rolled to the side. Sansibar loved the hellish rides through the air. She knew how the Lunapark had looked long ago from old pictures. Rollercoasters had moved terribly slowly and clumsily. They had been tied to stiff metal frames, unable to alter their course. That must have been dull.

The entranceway led through a huge, orange-coloured moon sculpture. Employees in purple uniforms greeted every visitor separately. A boy, no older than sixteen, with his red hair spilling out from under his purple cap, rushed towards the two of

them. A pale yellow crystal gleamed on his forehead. The boy smiled at Marella: "I wish you a wonderful evening, Marella. We're happy to see you visiting the Lunapark. We specially recommend the Golden Surfer for you today. You'll love it."

"How do you know him?" Sansibar asked, feeling a little jealous, for the boy did not know her name.

Marella tapped her limpid crystal. "I'm always logged in: They know who I am and which ride suits me best."

"Cool," Sansibar nodded.

"The crystal already helped me this afternoon," Marella told her excitedly. "I forgot my shopping list at home, but the crystal knew what I needed to buy. And I've already got my first twenty points from CHA. It's not difficult at all. You don't even notice your thoughts working for society."

The redhaired boy pressed a form into Sansibar's hands. "Unfortunately you don't have a crystal yet. You need to fill in this form, please."

Sansibar entered all the necessary information. She was surprised by all the things they wanted to know about her. And yet the boy could still not recommend a single ride. "I'm sure you'll find something," he said curtly. Then he vanished behind a moonstone counter. He reappeared carrying a large bag full of blue clumps. Without so much as a glance at Sansibar, he approached Marella with a smile.

"Here you go, Marella, your favourite popcorn, plum-blue, double sugar and almond flavoured. Recommended by the Lunapark."

Marella smiled at her friend and said: "This is what it's like, when you're a part of society. You give to, and get back from, CHA."

Sansibar was about to explode with jealousy.

Plum-almond popcorn given to you, just like that, as a gift. Next week she would begin her own classes for the Crystal Celebration. She could hardly wait. Finally. CHA is cool, she typed into the screen on her wrist. Scores of outstretched thumbs popped up.

Sansibar handed the filled-out form to the boy. It took him a while to register everything, but then they could finally dive into the fun.

Marella's plum-blue popcorn tasted fantastic. Next time Sansibar was going to order the same flavor.

"Let's go on the space-pigs first. Then we'll ride the Golden Surfer," Marella decided excitedly. Sansibar nodded. Crowds of people were making their way through the park. Most of them were terribly excited, red-faced, and babbling away without pausing for breath. Sansibar stared at a chubby couple wearing inflatable suits and, over there, the teenage boys dangling from lianas in the little jungle. Holding on with only one hand, they swung from branch to branch like monkeys. Sansibar realised only now that it wasn't the boys themselves who were reaching for the lianas, instead the lianas wrapped themselves around their arms and lifted them through the forest until the next one took over.

"We'll go to the snake-lianas later," Marella urged and hurriedly pulled at Sansibar's arm as if it was a liana itself. She pushed Sansibar into a narrow alley next to the jungle. A long line of people was waiting in front of a building that looked like a pigsty. A load of dung was heaped up next to the entrance. At least it didn't stink. Grunts and squeaks filled the air.

Finally it was their turn. Sansibar got a purple space pig with shaggy fur and an astronaut's helmet. She climbed onto the bright blue saddle. The pig felt like a real live animal, warm and soft, but Sansibar

knew it was just a machine, though she could even see a flea hopping over the fur.

A Lunapark employee, dressed like a farmer, pulled a harness over her and fastened it to the saddle. Then he wished her a “wild ride” and smacked his stick against the pig’s rear.

The shaggy purple pig shot out of the sty like a rocket. It flew straight up into the air, spinning around its own axis all the while. Then it made leap-frog jumps at a dizzying height.

Sansibar shrieked and screamed. She clung to the shaggy fur. Her heart was racing. She was terribly afraid of suddenly falling. Right then Marella blew past her, coming so close that Sansibar was nearly thrown off. Marella stretched out her arms and cheered. Suddenly Sansibar’s pig plummeted. It plunged and flipped over, spinning like a propeller. Sansibar was losing her grip, threatening to slip off. She screamed. For a split second she thought she was falling. But with a jolt she was caught by the harness that held her safely. The ride was absolutely insane. After far too short a time the space pig landed. Sansibar’s face was glowing like lava. She was gushing. “I love the space pigs,” Sansibar typed into the screen on her wrist.

“Very brave,” her father chimed in.

“Come on, let’s go to the Golden Surfer, that’s even better,” Marella pressed.

The two girls pushed and shoved their way through the crowd to the other end of the park, where a glittering white mountain towered over the entire Lunapark. Three-dimensional hologram letters sparkled above it: Golden Surfer.

Hundreds of people were waiting in front of it. Four Sepos stood next to the entrance.

“What are they doing here?” Sansibar asked. Even though Sansibar hadn’t done anything wrong, the sight of security policemen always made her feel a bit guilty. Sepos were remarkably polite. They were trained to be extremely friendly in their dealings with the citizens. Their lips were always drawn up in a smile and often they even had time for a quick joke. They gladly helped you with any problem. Sepos didn’t wear a military uniform with shoulder flaps, cap and gun belt. Instead they wore a likeable blue tracksuit with a zigzag pattern on the sides together with blue, mirrored sunglasses. Their crystals sat on terry cloth headbands. None of the four in front of Sansibar had managed to achieve anything higher than orange.

“Good thing the Sepos are here,” Marella said happily and nodded encouragingly. “They ensure our safety. If they weren’t here, my parents would never let me go to the Lunapark by myself.”

Of course Marella was right, but somehow Sansibar had a strange feeling about the Sepos. She didn’t want to come too close to them. Whenever she saw them in the city, she crossed to the other side of the street. But now she had to pass close by them. Sansibar thought of her mum. The picture of the orange T-shirt appeared in her mind.

“Let’s have some ice cream in the surfer bar. If we spend more than \$30, we can use the V.I.P. entrance to the Golden Surfer. That’s much quicker,” Marella suggested.

