

# Guide to Scenes and Plot

BY BURGHARD CIESLA

## 1) Baltic Sea, 1968

During the opening credits, we see a modern-day scene with, as the soundtrack, a song with lyrics from “Dass du mich liebst, das wusst’ ich” (1844, “I Knew You Love Me”), a poem by Heinrich Heine. Two teen-aged boys, carrying a guitar, trek through a small seaside resort on the Baltic Sea coast, enjoying a carefree, summer day at the seaside in 1968.

These are the two main actors in the movie set in the spring of 1945: one plays Günter, a member of the Hitler Youth; the other plays both a young Russian forced laborer, and Igor, a Red Army soldier.



## 2) Baltic Sea, 1945

A Baltic Sea beach in spring 1945: 16-year-old Günter and his girlfriend, Christine, are walking along the beach. They encounter a Russian forced laborer, who is around their age, and notice a corpse in the water. As Günter and the Russian retrieve it together, the latter declares: “Greater Germany, kaput!” Günter does not believe that Germany will lose the war; he is a firm believer in Nazi ideology and wants to fight for victory and become a hero.



## 3) Manhunt

Soon thereafter, Günter and other girls and boys help hunt down a fugitive forced laborer. When Günter finds him, he sees it is the young Russian from the beach. Günter entraps him and extends him a helping hand... but at this moment, a policeman shoots without warning. Günter is awarded a medal, an Iron Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, for catching the fugitive. Günter’s Latin teacher—who is also Christine’s father—is proud of him; he himself was awarded the Iron Cross in WWI, just “without the cross” (i.e., the swastika). The teacher is against the Nazis, but also against the Russians; he tells Günter that the Germans cannot win the war.



### 4) Last-Ditch Defense

Günter ignores what his teacher has told him. At the movies with Christine, he is deeply impressed by the latest Nazi movie, *Kolberg*, which calls on Germans to persevere and argues that the best defense is an offense. Günter wants to fight, like in *Kolberg*, and the next day he volunteers with the other boys. His mother wants to stop him from leaving, but Günter doesn't want to be a coward. Shortly before his departure, Christine appears; she, too, says the war is lost and wants to protect and hide him. Günter declines and leaves with the others.



### 5) Deserters

Günter and a few others spend the night on watch duty near the front. Günter dozes; he dreams of girls on a merry-go-round and of his father, who died on the eastern front. When he awakens, he is alone; his comrades have deserted. He feels abandoned and confused. Red Army soldiers appear in a jeep; they take Günter prisoner, but treat him amiably. The jeep hits a mine, and Günter is the only survivor. Traumatized, he makes his way to Christine's home.



### 6) End of the War

Christine's parents disagree on what to do with Günter. The residents of the small Baltic Sea resort are safeguarding their possessions and getting rid of their Nazi past. There is looting in the village. For Christine's father, the arrival of the Russians signifies the end of all hope for German renewal, and he commits suicide. Christine stops her mother from doing the same. At home, Günter's mother is packing up and has removed all traces of her fallen husband. She tries to tell Günter the truth about his father, when the Russians arrive.



### 7) Arrest

The Russians arrest Günter. An officer questions him about his medal and the fate of the young forced laborer. Imprisoned in the cellar of Soviet headquarters, his dream images begin to reappear and increasingly haunt him. In his waking dreams, the murdered forced laborer now appears as a friendly Red Army soldier named Igor Pavlovitsh Rypkyn.



### 8) Interrogation

In the cellar, the Russian officer interrogates Günter a second time; again, Günter refuses to identify the policeman who shot the young Russian. The officer reads his father's last letter from the front aloud to Günter. In it, Günter's father describes crimes perpetrated on Russian civilians "in the name of Germany" and calls his own Iron Cross a "Cross of Shame." He writes that he is determined that this will be his last deployment.



### 9) Waking Dreams

Christine comes to the garrison headquarters, where there is a party, for a permit to bury her father. The Russian officer asks her about her father's suicide and about Günter. Meanwhile, the Red Army soldier Igor once again appears to Günter in the cellar. He carries a box under his arm, but cannot open it. Günter opens it with the incantation *Abacadabra* and makes a devil jump out. He can also make the devil disappear again.



### 10) Maddening

Upstairs, the party continues. A man enters the cellar, wearing civilian clothing. He introduces himself as Adolf Premminger and says he was denounced as being a policeman, though he is not one. Günter recognizes him and confronts him with the murder of the young Russian forced laborer. The man calls on Günter's loyalty as a German and menaces him. Desperate, disillusioned and overwhelmed, Günter breaks down and, in the heat of the moment, kills the man. On the day the Germans capitulate, a Red Army ambulance takes him to the hospital.



### 11) Abracadabra

While Günter is being brought away, the young Red Army soldier Igor follows orders and brings Christine home. The two discover they can communicate in English. Igor tries to cheer Christine up, rejoicing in the end of war and fascism, and gives her the magic box he has been carrying. At the end of the movie he walks alone on the beach by the Baltic and shouts: "People, where are you? People? Hello?!"

