

(Revised text published at Aquadude's Bunker in February 2015)

Intro by Commander:

Dear friends and fellow admirers of Heroes in Distress,

I am happy to introduce to you my version of the story of the brigand and highwayman Juro Janosik. In Poland and in Slovakia (both central-European countries) he is a hero-figure from history, who is still regarded as a legendary character.

Juro (English: George) Janosik was born in 1688. He lived in an area belonging to North-Slovakia, the Tatra mountains, then a part of the Habsburg Austrian-Hungarian Empire. During his short life, he was part of an insurgency against the Austrian Empire, then was a soldier in the Austrian army, and finally became a highwayman. He was captured in 1713, put on trial, sentenced to death and executed that same year. The manner of his execution was gruesome: a hook was pierced through his left side, and he was left hanging by his rib on gallows until he died.



Figure 1 - Actor as Juro from Polish TV

In Polish and Slovak popular legend, Juro Janosik became a hero figure like Robin Hood or the Swiss Wilhelm Tell. He was said to have stolen only from the rich, in order to help the poor. Also, his conduct as a highwayman was chivalrous. According to the stories about him, he was a tall, handsome and particularly strong young man, who was able to inspire his followers with ideals of justice and freedom. As such, he remains a source of inspiration to Polish and Slovak (popular) art, literature and film until today (See Fig. 1 left).

Some of the legends about him appear to be based in historical fact, as research has shown. My version of the story concentrates on the way Juro Janosik was captured, put on trial and punished. My story is a fantasy, of course, but I have remained close to history, albeit that my ending differs from historical fact.

During the writing process I have imagined Henry Cavill as the model for my Juro Janosik, as he was in his role as Superman (See Fig 2 right).

I hope you enjoy my story, and look forward to your comments, if you care to post them.

Commander

JANOSIK – BANDIT AND HERO

By Commander

CHAPTER 1 – CAPTURED

Juro Janosik woke up alarmed only as the door of the barn burst open. Soldiers and policemen came running in, armed with pistols, swords and sticks. Immediately all alert, Juro rose up from the hay, only to stare into the barrels of pistols. The sharp ends of swords were kept pointed at his lightly hairy chest and abs.

“Surrender, Janosik! The game is over! You cannot escape!”

Juro turned his head a bit and looked into the excited eyes of Johan Litisky, the Chief of Police of Liptov County. His chest rising and falling, Juro tried to make sense of this situation. As far as he could remember, he had fallen asleep next to his beloved Barbara. It had been one of their secret meetings, in the barn behind the Inn owned by her father. How could the Police have known? Barbara would never betray him, he knew that.

“Get up, on your feet! Dog!”



Figure 2- Inspiration: actor Henry Cavill

With a vicious kick of his heavy boot into Juro's ribcage, Litisky barked the order at the still somewhat stunned young man. Juro moved slowly and reached for his shirt, belt and boots. But Litisky stopped him, "No! Leave those!"

Slowly Juro rose from the hay. He stood, circled by soldiers and policemen who kept their weapons pointed at the half-naked young Slovak hero. Juro stood as he always stood... tall, handsome, proud. His posture gave the impression of energy and strength. At 25 years old, he was very strong and muscular. Only dressed in his red breeches, one could see the hard and thick calves, the strong thighs in the tight breeches, and the chiseled upper body. Hard work in the fields while a youngster, some years as a soldier, and the last years as a highwayman had given Juro Janosik a sculpted body. It was one of the reasons why he was so popular with the poor commoners for whom he had fought. They saw in him a hero... young, strong, handsome, and invincible. They had been spreading the rumor that Juro had magic help; that his boots, belt and shirt were gifts from a sorceress. These gifts accounted for the fact that Juro had always been able to escape from the Police, that he was strong as an ox and invulnerable. But now his upper body was naked. Litisky let his eyes roam over that fine specimen of manhood... the narrow, strong waist; the deeply ridged abs, lightly hairy; the thickly muscled pecs, covered with some light black chest hair; the broad shoulders; the strong arms with thick, hard muscle and blue veins showing. Then Juro's face... a noble face, square jaws with a stubble, hazel brown eyes, curly dark brown hair. His eyes spoke tales of his character. Litisky noticed the expression of determination and strength, now combined with anger and a tinge of surprise. For a moment he felt impressed by this young man's presence, but then he shook that feeling off.

"Put the shackles on him! Let's get him to prison."

Two soldiers walked up to Juro, carrying a heavy wooden beam. It had been fitted with iron rings at its ends and middle, and from the rings there were short pieces of chain with shackles. They put it on Juro's broad shoulders and forced his arms up. Resisting slightly, Juro's muscles flexed as he was forced. But the sharp sword ends at his abs prevented him from fighting back. Quickly the shackles were fastened on his wrists and neck. Then they fastened shackles on his ankles, connected with a piece of chain.

Now Juro suddenly felt the impact of what was happening. He was captured. No longer free. At the mercy of his enemies. Chained. Half-naked.

Litisky pushed him forward. With difficulty Juro stepped outside the barn, into the warm sunlight. Even more soldiers were gathered. The chains rattled between his ankles as he walked. The heavy beam pressed on his shoulders. The soldiers mounted their horses, and now kept their lances pointed at the prisoner, the sharp ends dangerously close to his naked skin.

Then, there she was. Barbara! She came running, breaking free of her father's clutch. She ran up to her beloved Juro, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Oh Juro! Juro! My love, what have I done? I never should have said anything to Huncaga..." She fell at Juro's feet, then flung her arms around his waist. "Captain Litisky! I beg you, let him go. Please, please, don't hand him over to Lord Skalka! Please, I beg of you..."

Johan Litisky was not an evil man. He knew that Juro Janosik would never have been captured if it were not for the treachery of Huncaga, one of the highwaymen. He was moved by the scene... the beautiful girl pleading at the feet of the chained and shirtless young handsome bandit. He knew that Juro was a thief, but not a murderer and church-looter. But he had no choice. Lord Skalka wanted this man, for personal reasons. He braced himself.

"Enough, girl! This bandit and murderer is wanted by the authorities! He will be tried and punished. Now, stand aside! Soldiers! To Vranov Castle!"

A soldier pulled Barbara aside, and from behind Juro was lightly stabbed in the back by the lances. He started walking again, leaving his beloved Barbara behind. He fought down a few tears welling up in his eyes. Tears of sorrow for Barbara, and of anger for Huncaga. That evil traitor!

Slowly but certainly the group of soldiers and their helpless prisoner made their way to Vranov Castle. That was the seat of Lord Skalka, the evil and hated landowner of Liptov County. It was his Castle that they were bringing Juro, and not the Police station. Juro swallowed, as he knew that this was very bad news for him.

CHAPTER 2 – THE CELL IN VRANOV CASTLE

How many hours it had been since he was taken to his cell Juro could not tell. It was dark all around him. He could hardly make out the thick wooden cell door across from him. His hands were numb. His shoulders ached. He had been chained to the wall of the cell, his arms spread wide. The skin of his back sensed the damp, cold stones of the cell wall. His bare feet stood on some straw, but the coldness of the stone floor made itself felt as well. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was alone. And he was prisoner of his archenemy, the cruel Lord Skalka.

Then he heard footsteps approaching. Soon the heavy lock on the cell door clanked and the door swung open. The light of torches blinded Juro for some seconds as a group of people entered the cell. When his eyes adjusted to the light, he looked into the eyes of Lord Skalka. Juro's body tightened up.

“Juro the bandit and murderer! Finally brought to justice!” With a quick movement Lord Skalka swung his arm, and his leather gloved hand slapped hard over Juro's right cheek. He gritted his teeth in reaction, and pulled hard at his chains, biceps flexing and bulging. “Hohoho, my young bandit! What is that? Such fiery reaction to just a slap! Well, let me tell you, dog, you will have so much more to take soon!”

Juro's chest heaved with anger. That slap had not hurt at all, but it was the humiliation that had bitten. He was so much stronger than the weak and overfed landowner. If only he was not chained like this!

Lord Skalka took a step away from him and, as always, unwittingly he touched a scar he had on his left cheek. Juro noticed. And remembered. The memory was as vivid as the moment then had been, and it filled him again with hate and anger. That day he had returned from military service, and he had finally reached his parents' house. But it was no happy homecoming. When he entered the hut and called for his father and mother, he only found his mother. She was very ill. But she clasped his hands, cried, and told him how his father, Martin, had been taken away by the overseer of Lord Skalka and his men. His father had refused to go work on the fields as always, and as Juro, merely a boy, had been forced to do. His father had said he wished to remain with his wife and take care of her. But now he was gone, taken to the village. Juro ran. As fast as his strong legs could carry him, he ran. And when he reached the village square, horror seized him.

There was his father, stripped to the waist, and bound to a whipping post. And there was the overseer swinging and bringing down his leather horsewhip on the broad back of his father. Each time the whip lashed into him, he groaned and moaned. His back was bloody. He was hanging from his wrists; his legs could no longer sustain him. And there was Lord Skalka, sitting in his elegant carriage, tapping his walking stick with each whiplash. Juro screamed in rage. His attack was furious. The overseer and Lord Skalka were taken by surprise. The young man showed enormous strength as he overran the few of the overseer's men. Before he knew it, that young man in his fury had ripped the whip from his hand. With fiery eyes he then attacked Lord Skalka, who ordered his driver to go quickly. But for Juro there was just time enough to lash out at the cruel and evil landowner, the whip end biting into his face. As the carriage sped off, Lord Skalka took his satin handkerchief and wiped a little blood away. But Juro ran back to the whipping post and untied his father. He collapsed in his arms. He could not speak; such was his agony. But Juro saw in his eyes that his father recognized him. But he had come too late. His father died in the strong arms of his son. From that day, Juro had hated Lord Skalka and he had gladly taken any opportunity to steal from that man in order to provide some little comfort for the poor.

Lord Skalka turned back to Juro. “I could have you killed here and now, Juro. And I could make your death slow and painful. But it will not happen, not now. Believe me, your death will be painful. Oh yes, you will suffer. First, however, I have ordered for you to be tried, here at my Castle. So, the people can see that Lord Skalka is a man of justice.”

A leather gloved hand lightly touched Juro's left solid pec. The muscle flexed in response. Lord Skalka smiled. "And I myself will preside over the tribunal. That means that I preside over every part of the trial, dog, also over the interrogations. And when you have confessed, and the charges against you are proven, then the tribunal will sentence you. Finally, I will witness the agonizing end of Juro, son of Martin, a murderer and bandit!"

Juro swallowed deep, and said, "I am no murderer! You know that! I would never kill a man. Everybody knows that."

Lord Skalka smiled. "You yourself will tell them, dog. At the trial you will confess. And when you are not able to stand and speak because it took tortures to get at the truth, then your signature will suffice. But confess you will!"

Again, Lord Skalka let his gloved hand rest on Juro's chest. And now the hand moved slowly downward, feeling and now and again, probing the firmness and hardness of that young, muscled body. "The service for our Emperor and the life of a bandit has done you good, Juro. You are even more muscular than when I observed you as you worked on my fields. Yes, I saw you often, you had taken off your shirt and your peasant-slave body was glistening with sweat. You were handsome and strong then, and even more so now. What pleasure will it be to witness your painful interrogation! Oh, and to let you know, on my orders the dungeon has been prepared with some special equipment. Soon you will learn the real meaning of the word 'pain,' dog!"

A leather gloved finger ran through the deep ridge between Juro's chiseled abs, and it sensed the tightening as Juro spoke. "You evil man! You bastard! You know I never killed! Never! And I will never confess to that!"

Lord Skalka laughed at the helpless, half-naked young man in front of him. Such energy. Such strength. Such youth and determination. Such beauty. Lord Skalka shivered as he looked at his prisoner one more time, letting his eyes feast on that specimen of young masculinity, now chained to his cell wall. Then they left Juro alone. The heavy door shut, and the lock snapped. It was dark again, and Juro was very alone.

CHAPTER 3: BEFORE THE TRIAL

When the heavy cell door opened again, Juro at first hardly noticed. He was exhausted, hanging from stretched arms against the cell wall. His mouth was parched, he felt nearly sick with hunger, and his arm muscles cramped. He slowly opened his eyes, with an effort trying to pull himself up. He saw Johan Litisky, a few soldiers and another heavy-set man, unknown to him. Litisky said "Lengthen his chains, so he can lie down!"

As the soldiers followed the order, Juro sank down on his knees, and then sat down on the thin layer of filthy straw. Litisky offered him water and a bowl of thick porridge, and he even gave him some fruit. Juro attacked the food and water, his chains clanking as he grabbed it and moved it to his mouth. Litisky looked down on him and said, "Listen, thief. You are in a very bad situation. Lord Skalka wants your hide, and there is little hope for you left. The charges against you are very serious. Not only theft and robbery, but also looting of a church and murdering a priest. Now, to tell you the truth, I believe you are not a church looter and murderer. I know you served well in the Emperor's army. But there is not much I can do against Lord Skalka... I am not able to protect you against him. And I think you deserve to be punished as a thief and robber."

While Litisky spoke, Juro looked up at him. He knew that Litisky had a strong sense of duty, and he was relentless in pursuing criminals. But he was not, unlike Lord Skalka, a man who enjoyed another man's pain. Juro knew how Litisky had sometimes done his best to provide some mercy for a bandit or thief, when Lord Skalka demanded the harshest and most cruel punishments such as being whipped to death or broken on the wheel. Litisky believed in punishment, but just for the sake of punishment, not of justice.

"Now, Juro, this is what I can do. I will send a messenger to the Emperor's Court to inform His Majesty about you, and to ask for a fair trial. If you are innocent of the charges of looting that church and of murder, the truth will be established. In the meantime, I can provide some comfort for you in this cell."

Juro nodded. He looked at Litisky again and said, "I am grateful to you, Commander Litisky. It is true that I am innocent of these charges. The truth must come out. And I am confident that it will, when the Emperor demands a fair trial."

Now the heavy-set man stepped forward and as he did, Juro smelled the odor of sweaty old clothes and wine. "I am Balthasar Palugay, advocate and expert at criminal law and Lord Skalka, in his mercy, has assigned me to you, thief. I will be your advocate in this trial. I applaud Chief Litisky for his sense of duty on your behalf, but I must warn against any false hopes."

At that moment, Doctor Palugay put his arms around his voluminous belly, and he belched. "Oummpf. Well then. Lord Skalka has instituted the trial as a criminal trial to be conducted under the rules of the Criminal Constitution for rebellion. That means..."

"No!" Juro exclaimed. "I am not a rebel against the Crown! That is a lie!" Litisky was also surprised, he had not heard this yet. The advocate continued, "Lord Skalka is convinced that the robber, looter and murderer Juro Janosik committed his crimes in preparation of a rebellion against himself, and therefore against the order of society as it is safeguarded by the Crown."

"But, but..." Litisky began, "That means His Lordship can conduct the trial as he wishes! He is no longer constrained by the common rules of conduct for a criminal trial. That means..."

Doctor Palugay nodded. "You are correct, Sir. And already Lord Skalka has set the date for the trial to begin. In three days."

Johan Litisky understood fully now Lord Skalka's plans. He wanted Juro at his mercy, for him to torture and abuse. He was not interested in justice, only in having the opportunity to make this strong handsome young man suffer and scream out in agony. "Juro, I must act immediately. I send out the messenger now and hope he will arrive back in time. In the meantime, don't lose hope. I will do what I can to make sure the rule of law is upheld, also for you!"

With those words he left the cell.

Doctor Palugay stepped closer to Juro. "Now then, thief, as to your defense. The Criminal Constitution rules deprive the rebel of the right to speak in court himself. That would be a desecration of the Court, of course. Instead, I will speak for you as your advocate. Also, any statement you make through me will be verified, if necessary, by the Sharp Degree of Testifying. Of course, if you confess to the charges against you, that very painful procedure will not be necessary."

Juro felt his body tensing up as he was listening. The food and water had given him some of his strength back. He shook his head. "No! I will not confess to anything I have not done."

Doctor Palugay sighed. "Listen, young thief. If you do not confess immediately, not only will you be tortured to make you confess, also your punishment will be so much worse. You must know you are risking the most terrible corporal punishments! Just think of that!"

While Palugay spoke, Juro heard footsteps in the corridor. A moment later the soldiers made way for Lord Skalka. He stepped into the cell, grinning. "Well, Juro, I see you have had the opportunity to speak to your advocate, the eminent Doctor Palugay. You see, I make sure you have all your rights and privileges as a robber, murderer and rebel respected! Hahaha!"

The lengthened chains gave Juro his chance. He jumped up, cat-like and supple, and in less than a second his strong hands were around Lord Skalka's neck. His ruggedly handsome face close to Lord Skalka's weak and flabby one, he hissed, "You bastard! I only stole from you for the poor peasants you treat as slaves! I am no murderer, no looter, and no rebel! Say it, or I break your neck here and now!"

Panic and fear filled Lord Skalka's eyes as he felt Juro's fingers as tight as an iron ring around his neck. But just as Juro wanted to tighten his grip, a searing pain exploded in his lower back, as a soldier smashed the butt of his rifle into Juro's kidney area. Immediately a second blow followed, and with a raw scream Juro let go of Lord Skalka, his back arching in pain, his strong arms stretched out. As Lord Skalka staggered back, another soldier next to him sent his rifle butt full force into Juro outstretched abs, making him double over with a deep groan. The soldiers started to batter the half-naked, chained young man who tried to protect his face from the blows, leaving his back and sides open to the rifle butts.

"Enough! Enough!" Lord Skalka shouted, "Lift him up, and hold him!" The soldiers stopped the brutal punishment, and two of them grabbed Juro by his arms and violently forced him to his feet. His arms pinned behind him, his chest heaving, his abs flexing with his heavy breathing, Juro looked with fiery eyes at Lord Skalka.

"For that, your suffering will be even worse, thief! I will have you in my dungeon and will hear your endless screaming when you can no longer endure the pain, and then I will order my torturers to give you even more pain! And more! AND MORE!"

With these last words, Lord Skalka let his hand rest on Juro's hard and tight abs, then moving it to his strong thick pecs. Finally, he played with his nipple, pinching it ever so slightly, and smiling. "Give him the comforts promised to him by that weakling Litisky! And give him sufficient water and food, to make sure he is in the best condition to be tortured, eh... I mean, to stand trial! Hahaha!"

With that, Lord Skalka left. The soldiers dropped Juro to the floor, and he lay down on the hay, panting. His mighty, hairy chest heaved slower and slower as he tried to relax his breathing. He did not notice how his advocate took a final look at him and said, "Well, I can only say this. Plead guilty and spare yourself the pain. But I doubt that after this little performance you will escape the torture room at all, thief. Have it as you will."

Shrugging his shoulders, the eminent Doctor Palugay left Juro behind. The last thing he saw was a half-naked young man, chained, his eyes closed. He saw that impressive specimen of young and masculine muscularity, and he could not help himself to feel some pity at the thought that this young man would soon be stretched out in the torture room of Lord Skalka, his strong body unprotected and open to the horrific devices and equipment of the torturers.

CHAPTER 4: THE TRIAL AND THE SHARP DEGREE

It was a warm day. Many villagers and peasants had gathered in the space in front of Vranov Castle to be present at the trial of their hero, Juro Janosik. On orders of Lord Skalka, police and guardsmen kept the spectators at some distance from the enclosed platform where the Tribunal had taken their seats. Lord Skalka, wearing the dark red colored robe of a judge in a criminal case, was seconded by two of his courtier friends. He lifted a sword, symbol of his power over life and death, to get silence. "Silence! This Tribunal is now in session. The case to be heard is the charges of rebellion against the Imperial Crown, directed against the brigand and murderer, Juro Janosik, son of Martin. Bring forward the rebel!"

The row of guards parted, and there Juro was, stepping in front of the platform. He was still only wearing his red breeches. Heavy shackles had been put on his ankles, a chain connecting them. And once again a heavy wooden beam was pressing down on Juro's strong broad shoulders. His wrists were shackled to the ends of the beam, and a tight chain was fastened around his neck, forcing his head up as the chain was also connected tightly to the beam. His chains rattling as he walked. Juro presented an impressive sight. The days in the dungeon had not visibly affected his strength and determination. Although he was the only one there half-naked and chained like a beast – a stark contrast with the lavish clothing of the aristocrats and the uniforms of the policemen and guards surrounding him – he stood proud and tall.

Lord Skalka spoke, "Before us stands the rebel, Juro. He has committed hideous crimes. He has stolen and ravaged possessions of his betters, the noble families that provide him and his sort with a living and protection against foreign attacks within the safety of the Empire. He has plundered and looted the church of Orava. And, finally, he has barbarously murdered Father Vitko, the priest of Orava, when he defended the sacred church with his life against the murderous onslaught of this rebel who knows no God or mercy!"

While Lord Skalka spoke, Juro felt deep anger rise inside him. He clenched his fists, his muscles tightened all over his body, his biceps bulged as he pulled against the chains holding his wrists. Such injustice! Yes, he had stolen from Lord Skalka's estate, but only to ease the poverty and hunger of his family and fellow villagers. They were all oppressed by the aristocratic families into nothing less but slavery, and the backs of the men forced to work on their estates often carried the marks of the whip. Never had he laid a violent hand on the possessions of the Church, and certainly he was not a murderer! As his body tightened all over, the guards around him lifted their lances and pointed them at Juro's naked upper body... the sharp points close to his unprotected skin at his lower back, sides and ridged abs. Juro could not move without being injured.

Lord Skalka noticed how Juro reacted and smiled an evil smile. He said, "Clearly the crimes committed by this brigand are directed against the Imperial Crown. Therefore, this Tribunal will pass sentence on this menace to the welfare and peace of our beloved homeland under the rules and regulations of the Criminal Constitution. This means that the accused rebel will not speak! He will keep his tongue or be punished with 30 lashes!"

Lord Skalka motioned to his left, and at that side of the platform a tall, heavy-set figure stepped forward, wearing a thick black and brown leather costume and a hood. It was one of Lord Skalka's feared henchmen, the torturers of his chamber of pain, deep down under the Castle. The torturer menacingly carried a heavy leather whip. Juro took a deep breath, his chest rising, and gritted his teeth.

"That being clear," Lord Skalka said, "I will allow the rebel to be represented by an advocate. This shows the strong intention of this Tribunal to be just and fair. We will not pass sentence on him, until his advocate has spoken in his defense. I invite the learned Balthasar Palugay to step forward!"

Juro's advocate got to his feet with some difficulty. Clearly, he had recently enjoyed a copious meal and good wine... "My Lord, I thank the Tribunal. On behalf of the accused rebel, I can say that he confesses to being a thief, but that he refuses to confess to the looting of the church and the foul murder of Father Vitko. I also like to say on his behalf that he has been a good and brave soldier to His Majesty the Emperor. I hope this will move the Tribunal to clemency and render his death sentence less cruel."

With the last words of his half-drunk advocate, Juro could hardly control himself. Palugay spoke of him as if he was already guilty! Again, his body stirred, but the lance points pressing against his skin prevented him from moving. Lord Skalka raised the sword and said, "We thank you, Master Palugay. The case is clear, then. The rebel refuses to confess to all of his crimes. In the interest of the common good, the Criminal Constitution provides the Tribunal with the appropriate means to satisfy the basis of judgment. The rebel will be subjected to the Sharp Degree of Testifying. He will be interrogated on the questions of the looting of Orava church and the murder of Father Vitko, each question to be verified separately to the satisfaction of this Tribunal. The rebel shall be taken to the torture chambers of Vranov Castle. The Tribunal, in the person of its Chairman – that is, myself! – shall supervise this Sharp Degree of Testifying. The Tribunal will meet again after the confession of the rebel has been obtained!"

As the Tribunal rose, the spectators became unruly. They were well aware of Lord Skalka's plans to torture their young hero and they were angry. But against the lances and weapons of the guards, they were helpless. Juro was dragged off, back to the Castle. His anger now burst out, "I am no murderer! No looter of the holy church! You know that! All of you!"

Immediately Lord Skalka's henchman stepped up and hit the whip handle full force into Juro's abs, forcing the air from his lungs. "Silence, dog! Save your breath for screaming!" Soon the guards had Juro out of earshot from the crowd of his supporters, and into the gate of Vranov Castle.

They took him down to the lower levels of the basement where the dungeons were, and the torture chamber. When the guards forcing Juro on approached, another henchman opened a heavy wooden door, and Juro was pushed violently inside. The short chain between his ankles prevented him from catching himself, and he fell down with a thud on the stone floor, at the feet of Ladislav, the Master Torturer. Ladislav placed a heavy booted foot on Juro's neck and face, pressing it

down on the stone floor. "Welcome, rebel dog. I have been waiting for you. All is ready here to get your confession. I believe in pain to extract the truth, dog!"

He lifted his leg, and then with full force kicked into Juro's abs. Juro doubled over, a deep moan escaping his lips as the pain penetrated deep into his gut. Then the henchmen approached and dragged him up, and over to a large and heavy wooden contraption. It was mainly rectangular, with its corners lengthened, ending in shackles. Before the henchmen forced his chest up onto the contraption, Juro caught a glimpse of iron mechanical parts at the sides and under its top, and how the shackles were attached to chains that looped around at the end of the lengthened parts and disappeared under the top. At the sides he saw wheels. Violently he was slammed onto the top of what apparently was a rack. While guards held him down, the henchmen first took off the shackles from his ankles, then forced his legs sideways and snapped the shackles of the rack onto his ankles. At the same time the shackles from the beam, and the beam itself, were removed from his shoulders.

Quickly, before he could do anything, the henchmen grabbed his wrists and forced his arms up and sideways, so that they could snap the shackles on his wrists. Juro was chained to the rack! The lengthened parts were under his arms and legs, the rectangular top beneath his shoulders, back and buttocks. He felt the hard wood against the skin of his back, and also what seemed to be seams in the wooden top beneath him. He looked around him. The torture chamber was a large space. Chains and shackles were hanging from the ceiling in the middle. Rings were fitted in the floor beneath them. On one wall there was a huge fireplace, a coal fire burning red-hot inside. Another wall was fitted with stacks that contained various implements of torture. Juro could not see all, but he did see pliers, claws, and pins. Against another wall there were chairs and a table. The space was illuminated by several torches.

Before Juro could further look around the door opened, and Lord Skalka entered. Behind him came servants, who carried fine serving platters with exquisite foods and carafes of wine and water, placing them on the table. They bowed and left. Meanwhile, Lord Skalka stepped up to the rack where Juro was stretched out. Juro's breathing quickened. Lord Skalka took off a silk glove, and then placed his finger low on Juro's throat. Very slowly he let his finger lightly drag down Juro's chest, following the deep ridge between his thick pecs. He felt the light bristle of Juro's chest hair, and continued down, now following the ridge between Juro's abs. With his finger he felt the strong and hard muscles of his young victim tighten and relax with his breathing. He closed his eyes in pure pleasure. Then he said, "Ladislav, I trust all is ready? The rebel is safely secured to the rack? The mechanisms well oiled?"

The Master Torturer nodded, crossing his arms in front of his chest. "Good, excellent. We can begin. Now then, Juro. The church at Orava. Do you confess?"

Juro lifted his head to look at Lord Skalka. "You know very well that I never did such a thing. How can I confess when I am innocent?"

Lord Skalka observed how Juro's abs tightened when he spoke, giving sharp delineation of the six pack muscles. He sat down and gave the sign to Ladislav. The Master Torturer stepped aside the rack and took one of the wheels in his hands. He started turning. The mechanism started working. The chains at the shackles started to get pulled under the rack. A clanking sound was heard as each time the safety bolt fell into place to prevent the mechanism from sliding back. Then Juro started to feel it. His arms and legs started to get stretched, pulled at simultaneously. Soon the stretch turned into the beginning of pain. His wrists and ankles hurt in the shackles. The joints of his ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows and wrists started to hurt. His back started to hurt. He gritted his teeth. Clenched his fists. Stared at the vaulted ceiling above him. His lower back slowly rose from the rack. The pain increased. His abs fell deep as his body was stretched further, the waistband loosening from his lower belly. The pain increased. He closed his eyes tight. His entire body was in pain now. The mechanism began to creak and strain as the strong body on top was being stretched to its maximum. But the mechanism was stronger. The clanks came slower than before, but they kept coming as Ladislav turned the wheel. Pain. Juro bared his teeth, gritting. His face in a grimace. Pain. Abs sinking ever deeper. Leg and arms muscles quivering. PAIN. Joints seemed to be close to rupture. PAIN.

Then it happened. Juro could no longer hold his need to scream out, "AAAAHHHHHH!!!!!"

The scream came from deep inside. All over he was in agony. He was alone. He was chained to a rack, near naked, helpless, in the torture chamber of his sadistic enemy. He was in hell.

With that scream Lord Skalka motioned to Ladislav, and he released the mechanism. The chains sprung loose and allowed Juro's body back to normal. With heaving chest Juro gasped for air. A sweat had broken out over his body. "Well, rebel? How do you like the rack so far? Ready to confess?"

Ladislav stood grinning at the wheel, ready to turn it again. He looked at Juro, who turned his head away from the torturer, saying nothing. His breathing became more regular as he recovered from the first onslaught of pain. But they gave him little respite. Lord Skalka nodded and said, "Again!"

Ladislav turned the wheel. Juro braced himself. The mechanism did its work, and soon the hellish agony was there again for the young man. He fought against it, but it was not long before another scream of pain filled the torture chamber. "AAAAARRRRHHHHHH!!!!"

CHAPTER 5: TORTURE DUNGEON

The Torture Master stopped turning the wheel when Juro's body was stretched out painfully once again on the rack, but Juro could just avoid screaming out by gritting his teeth tightly. The shackles had chafed his wrists and ankles, and a little blood was visible at their ends. Sweat drops covered Juro's body. His skin glistened all over, his curly hair was sticking to his forehead. His chest rose and fell with his heavy breathing. He fixed his gaze up at some point in the vaulted ceiling, to avoid looking at the Torture Master with his hands on the wheel, or Lord Skalka standing right next to the rack. He could only wait for the moment that the mechanism would be put into work again, and another attempt was made to break his will by inflicting pain on his young strong body. He could only brace himself for more pain.

"Juro, again, I ask you. Confess. Confess!" Lord Skalka's left hand rested on Juro's outstretched bicep. And the fingers were probing, feeling up the hard and thick muscle. Juro closed his eyes and said through his teeth, "Never!" Lord Skalka nodded. "Very well, rebel. Torture Master! Increase the pain!"

The Torture Master's hands went over to another handle, and when he turned it, Juro felt something happening under his broad back. Seams in the wood were opening under him... and the Torture Master turned yet another wheel... and then Juro felt it... sharp points touching the skin of his back, lightly at first, but then they pressed into him... instinctively he wanted to raise up his back, but he could do so only a bit... and the pins pressed up... and bit into him. He groaned deep in pain. His breathing became sharper. The Torture Master walked over to the wall and grabbed a six-foot-long thick wooden stick, its surface covered with iron studs. He showed Juro the stick close up to his face, and then he pointed it at his defenseless chest and abs. Lord Skalka nodded.

WHACK!! WHACK!! WHACK!! The stick was slammed into Juro's abs. Then across his pecs. Then into his abs once more. And across his pecs... "AAAHHH!! AARRGGHH!!"

With each heavy impact on his chest and abs Juro's back was driven into the short pins pointing up under him. With the minimal moving space he had, involuntarily Juro's torso writhed under the hits from the stick, only to increase the pain caused by the pins. Angry red and thick welts formed on his pecs and abs, and the studs tore little wounds into his skin.

He did not notice that Lord Skalka had taken a vicious looking pair of teathed iron pliers from a table. Now he stood next to the rack, holding the pliers open, its teeth ready to bite down. He looked down at the heaving and sweating upper body of his young victim, suffering on the rack. To judge from Juro's screams and from the grimace on his face, he was in pain. But not yet enough to be broken and confess. Lord Skalka hesitated. Where should he apply the pliers? His eyes went over Juro's stretched out and beaten upper body. The softer flesh of his lower sides? The thick muscle of his pecs? The armpits?

As the Torture Master let his stick smash into Juro's abs once again, and Juro uttered another scream of pain, Lord Skalka decided. He put the pliers on Juro's left pec, and he squeezed, hard.

"AAAARRHHHHH!" Juro's pec muscle exploded with pain. He hardly sensed that another blow landed on his abs, or that his back was further torn by the spikes beneath him as his torso writhed. And then Lord Skalka squeezed, twisted and pulled the pliers. Blood began seeping from between its end, the iron sharp teeth biting into the hard muscle of Juro's chest.

"NNAAAAAHHHHH!" Even as Lord Skalka removed the blood-stained pliers, Juro screamed. Only after some seconds, while he gasped for air, his chest heaving hard, did he recover from the torturing pain. Also, the Torture Master stopped bringing down the studded stick, but he kept it menacingly close to Juro's unprotected body. Lord Skalka let his hand wander over Juro's reddened and welted abs, his bruised ribcage, and his welted and beaten pecs. Finally, his fingers played over the bleeding wound on his left pec muscle. Juro winced at the touch.

"Well, rebel? Are you going to confess your crimes now?" Juro swallowed with difficulty, his mouth and throat being dry. Through his pain he was aware of Lord Skalka standing close, the hated man's face close to his. He turned his head, to face his tormentor. "You... I hate... you..."

And then he spat. Little saliva he had to spit, though mixed with a little blood from biting his lips and the inside of his cheeks in pain, he did stain his torturer's face. Furiously Lord Skalka backhanded Juro in the face. "You dog! For that you will suffer even more! Take him to the estrapade! Prepare him, but do not continue the torture until I am back!"

The Torture Master nodded, put down the studded stick, and began to release the rack mechanism. Juro moaned as he felt the tension in his body diminish. The pins retreated from below his back. Blood began to flow again in his feet and hands. As he began to recover a bit from the excruciating pain, his breathing slowed down. He closed his eyes, and for a moment it seemed as if a merciful loss of consciousness would release him from his suffering.

SPLASH!!! Ice-cold water splashed over Juro's half-naked body. Rudely he was awakened to realize his situation again. He licked some of the cold water from his lips. The Torture Master's henchmen were busy releasing Juro's ankles and wrists from the shackles of the rack. His torturer stood next to him, still holding the wooden bucket. "Wake up, rebel! No time to sleep! You can't feel pain when you sleep, dog!"

He was too weak to fight and break free, when the henchmen released the shackles. They grabbed Juro at his wrists, arms and neck, and forced him out of the dungeon, into the corridor, and then back into another dungeon. It was a smaller one. Torches lit the room, and Juro saw shackles hanging on a long chain, that ran over a heavy pulley at the ceiling, and back down to a cranking device. Then he noticed that the floor below the shackles was covered with spiked stones, their sharp studs pointing upwards. Juro resisted, but the henchmen forced him on. They made him step onto the studded stones, and he grimaced as the soles of his bare feet were pressed onto the spiked stones. Quickly the henchmen forced his arms behind his broad back, and they secured his wrists into the heavy shackles. The Torture Master went over to the cranking device and turned the wheel. The chain began to move over the pulley, and Juro's arms began to be pulled up behind him. He bent over to ease the strain, but soon his arms were forced higher by the relentless mechanism. The Torture Master stopped and secured the chain only as Juro's shoulders were straining and hurting, and all he could do was support his weight somewhat by his feet. But that meant pressing his soles down on the spiked studs...

The Torture Master stepped up to Juro and backhanded him in the face, hard. "There, rebel dog. Now you get some time to think about the pain to come for you. Maybe then you will confess to your crimes!" With a cruel laugh he turned away, and they left Juro alone.

CHAPTER 6: THE ESTRAPADE

Juro had no sense of time, the only thing he was aware of was the aching and the pain wrecking his body. His bare feet were pressing on the sharp spiked stones. His arms were pulled upwards behind his back, and his weight caused a hard

strain in his shoulders. Only by stepping down on the spikes could he relieve the pain in his shoulders. His joints were already painful from the torture on the rack. His abs, ribcage and chest were bruised and welted. His back showed the wounds of the pins. His mouth was opened half while he took slow breaths and tried to deal in his mind with the pain in his body. With each breath, his thick muscled abs tightened and relaxed, the deep ridges between them showing.

He had no idea how long it was before the dungeon door opened. Lord Skalka and the Torture Master entered, followed by the two henchmen. Juro looked up, and his eyes met those of Lord Skalka. "Now then, Juro, how much longer do you think you can hold out? It is useless, my boy. Not even you will be able to take the pain much longer. Why not confess now? Think about it, no more pain... some rest for your exhausted body... a physician to dress your wounds and ease the pain... well, what do you say?"

While speaking Lord Skalka let his gloved hand play over Juro's thickly muscled pecs. He lightly pinched the wound from the pliers. Juro grit his teeth, then said, "No. The accusations are false! I will never confess to crimes I did not commit! Never!"

Lord Skalka turned away from Juro and signaled with his hand to the Torture Master. He ordered the two henchmen at the wheel, and immediately they began to turn it. The chain creaked as it began to move over the pulley, and Juro was slowly lifted up by his arms behind his back. He groaned deep as his body was lifted higher and higher, until his hands reached the pulley. He gritted his teeth tightly, so as not to scream in pain, but it was hard for him. Lord Skalka spoke again from below, "Confess, rebel!"

But Juro kept silent, and then the Torture Master released the securing mechanism. Juro fell. Unable to catch himself, he slammed into the floor, and into the upward-pointing studs. "AARRRHFFF!!!"

He fell chest down, and the sharp studs were driven into his chest and abs. Before he could move himself, the henchmen turned the wheel again, and Juro was lifted up again by his arms. His face grimaced in pain as he tried to find some support for his body, but only for a moment could he relieve his shoulders... soon his body was lifted from the floor and the maximum strain returned to his joints.

"URRRNNGGHH!!! They pulled him up all the way up again, and then immediately the Torture Master released the chain. Juro fell and was slammed into the studs once more. "AAAARRRHFFF!!!"

While the henchmen pulled him up again, Lord Skalka watched Juro's body and the fresh wounds from the studs. Blood started to trickle down his torso. His strong muscles strained under the glistening skin as pain sweat covered Juro's body. He gasped for air. Relentlessly he was pulled up high, and again the chain was released. With a loud thump, Juro again fell on the studs. "NAAARRGGHHH!!!"

This time the Torture Master let him lie. Juro had landed half on his chest and half on his left arm. The studs had bitten into his pec and shoulder muscle. Grimacing, he tried to tear his body away from them, only to feel the fresh pain from other studs beneath him. The Torture Master grabbed his hair and yanked his head back and up. Through a haze Juro saw Lord Skalka's face. He was backhanded over his jaw. "Come on, rebel! Confess! Or you get hoisted up again, and again, and again, until you give up! Confess!"

Something inside him pleaded for release, for the end of suffering. But Juro had courage, and pride. No matter how much his body screamed for an end to the pain, his willpower was stronger. He licked his parched lips and said, "... No... never..."

Lord Skalka's eyes hardened, and he gave the order to continue the torture. Juro tried to brace himself as the henchmen put their hands on the wheel. At that moment the door was opened, and a secretary of Lord Skalka entered. "My Lord, I am sorry to interrupt, but you told me to give you any news about Huncaga if it arrived."

Lord Skalka turned away from the half-naked tortured body of Juro, by now hanging again from his arms behind him. While Juro fought against the pain, Lord Skalka walked up to the secretary. "My Lord, Huncaga is letting you know that he is

willing to bring testimony against the rebel Juro Janosik if Your Grace will keep the bargain and offer him a pardon for his actions in the past. That is what he said, My Lord.”

Lord Skalka began to smile, his face showing great satisfaction. He walked back to Juro. “You hear that, rebel? Now your crimes will be confirmed before court, even without your confession. Well, not having confessed makes it only worse for you! Hahaha!”

Lord Skalka walked out of the torture dungeon and ordered the Torture Master to get Juro to his cell. He climbed the stairs on the way to his chambers. He had a new session of the Tribunal to prepare. And also, he would already give the order to build a scaffold, in preparation for the execution of the rebel Juro Janosik...

CHAPTER 7: TRIAL AND SENTENCE

The soldiers took Juro from the Torture Chamber back to his cell. Supporting him under his shoulders, they dragged him on, and after opening the cell door they roughly threw him inside. Weakened from the tortures, Juro fell down hard on the little straw that barely covered the hard stone floor. He curled up in pain, moaning as he crossed his arms before his chest. His strong body ached all over, and from the many small wounds on his upper body a little blood trickled. Two soldiers took hold of their cudgels and stood threateningly right next to the defenseless Juro.

“Well now, rebel, how does it feel, eh? Starting to feel sorry you ever tried to rebel against our Lord Skalka? Did the life as a serf not become you, dog? Haha!”

They started to bring down their cudgels on Juro’s naked back and shoulders. Juro groaned in pain as the thick cudgels were slammed into him and the pain penetrated his body once more. As he was too weak to fight back, all he could do was try to protect his head with his strong arms. Finally, the soldiers let off, and with a final kick into Juro’s abs one soldier said, “Enough for now, dog. Lord Skalka wants you alive and well for the execution. Just let this be a small taste of what’s in store for you!”

With a coarse laugh, the soldiers left Juro alone, slamming the heavy cell door shut.

He had no idea how long he was on the cold floor. All he knew was that his body was in pain. And that he had not confessed, no matter how hard his torturers had tried to break him. His body had screamed for release, for an end to pain. But his willpower had prevailed, and he had been able to handle his horrible suffering. By and by, very slowly, he started to recover from the onslaught on his strong body. It seemed as if the aching and pain began to ease. At that same time, he became aware how thirsty he was. Slowly he stretched out his body and lay on his back. As he came to some rest, exhaustion made itself felt. Gracefully he fell asleep, and the horror and pain receded from his consciousness. Soon he was fast asleep. As he breathed slowly and deeply, his wide chest rose and fell, and the sweat and blood began to dry up on his tortured body.

He woke up as the cell door opened and an old dungeon guard entered. The man carried a tray with food and water. He also had a small jar with him. “Juro, are you awake? Do not worry, I will not hurt you. Chief Litisky asked me to look after you a bit. Lord Skalka allowed you get food and water. I also brought some soothing unguent for your wounds. Careful now!”

Janosik rose to a sitting position, leaning his broad shoulders against the stone wall. He took the food and drink from the guard, and thankfully ate and drank. Meanwhile, the old man took care of the welts and small wounds on Juro’s body. Sometimes as he touched or pressed a nasty bruise or welt, Juro winced slightly. But all in all, he started to feel somewhat better. “Thank you, old man, you are kind. I am grateful to you and Chief Litisky. Tell me, do you have any news on the Chief? When will he be back? I hope the Emperor will grant me a fair trial.”

The old man shook his head somberly. "Chief Litisky has not returned yet, young friend. I hope and pray, for your sake, he returns in time for the trial."

Juro's chin sank towards his hairy chest as he sighed deeply. He would be at the mercy of the cruel Lord Skalka until the return of Chief Litisky. The old guard looked down on the half-naked, muscled prisoner, and he felt compassion. He knew Lord Skalka would want to have this young and strong rebel made an example of. He sighed also and put his calloused hand on the thickly muscled shoulder of Juro. "Do not lose hope, my young friend. I pray for you that Chief Litisky will be here in time."

Juro put his hand on the old man's and thinly smiled. He realized once again that it was on behalf of good people such as this man that he had stood up against cruelty and tyranny. As the old guard left, once again Juro stretched out on the straw, to give his abused body more rest.

The next day Juro was taken outside the Castle once more to appear before the Tribunal. The guards had placed the heavy yoke on his strong shoulders again and chained his wrists and neck to it. Although he was still in pain, Juro walked tall and proud, not giving any sign of being affected by the tortures he had suffered. But his body was bruised, welted, and covered with small scars and scabs. The soldiers made him stand before the platform on which the Tribunal was seated. Lord Skalka was wearing the dark red robe, its color symbolic of the bloody punishment he was entitled to pronounce. He stood and said, "This Tribunal is now ready to pronounce judgment in the case of the rebel and murderer, Juro Janosik, and give sentence. First, thanks to the fact that a citizen of Liptov County, by the name of Huncaga, has stepped forward to give evidence, the Tribunal has been satisfied that all charges against the rebel Juro Janosik are confirmed by proof. Huncaga has deposited a statement as eyewitness that he saw the rebel Juro Janosik perform theft, robbery, and also the looting of Orava church and the murderous killing of Father Vitko! The rebel is therefore guilty! It is also established that the rebel Juro Janosik has had the opportunity to confess his crimes and ask for mercy, but he has stubbornly refused to do so. The Tribunal has decided that this aggravates the guilt of the rebel Juro Janosik. Does the lawyer of the defense have anything to say?"

Juro, who had become very tense while listening to Lord Skalka, turned sideways to his advocate. Dr Palugay stood up next to the half-naked and chained prisoner, and said, "If it pleases the Tribunal, the defense wants to ask for clemency for the rebel Janosik. It should be taken into account that he has served the Emperor for some years as a loyal and courageous soldier. It is of course good that justice will be done and that he must pay for his crimes against the good order of this County and against the Crown. I ask the Tribunal to show some mercy and grant the rebel that he is not punished in the most serious way."

Palugay sat down, and Lord Skalka looked down towards his helpless prisoner. "Juro Janosik, you are guilty of terrible crimes and have not confessed to them. The Tribunal will therefore require that your punishment reflects the crimes. We sentence you to a punishment that will consist of two separate moments for you to pay. First, as a thief, robber and looter, the Tribunal sentences you to severe corporal punishment, to be suffered in public, at the discretion of the Tribunal. Secondly, as the murderer of a holy priest, after you have recovered sufficiently from the first part of your punishment, you will be taken back to the place of execution, to suffer death by being hanged on a hook by your ribs. The Tribunal orders the place of execution to be prepared. The rebel Juro Janosik will be returned to his cell, and there receive good treatment, in order that he will be fully fit to receive the full measure of punishment. Take him away!"

As the soldiers started to drag Juro away and back to the Castle, he could no longer be silent. Straining against the chains and struggling he shouted, "Skalka! You cruel tyrant! Your tyranny will come to an end soon! You may kill me, but you cannot kill the people's just wish for freedom and dignity!"

Two soldiers came up to Juro and started to use their cudgels hard on Juro's abs. The heavy hits drove the air from his lungs, and he could only groan in pain. From behind, a gag was tied around his face, to prevent him from speaking. Then he was forcibly removed... a half-naked and chained young strong man struggling for his freedom between a number of soldiers in their green and blue uniforms. But he was helpless, and he knew that soon he would be subjected to slow and painful tortures.

CHAPTER 8: PUNISHMENT ON MARKET DAY

It was a beautiful summer's day. The warm rays of the sun caressed the busy Liptov County market and its attendants. As usual, farmers sold their produce and city dwellers were busy buying and haggling. All seemed perfectly normal, but everybody knew that this day would be different. This day was set for the public punishment of Juro Janosik.

For the occasion, a big wooden platform had been built in the open space between the marketplace and Vranov Castle. Right next to it stood another platform, covered with an awning to provide shade for the luxurious easy chairs that were placed beneath it. Servants had prepared everything for Lord Skalka and his aristocratic guests... on tables were wine, fine finger foods, and clear fresh water stood ready. As the servants were busy getting everything in perfect order, this was a sign that soon the moment of Juro's punishment would arrive.

The big platform was ready, but it provided a stark contrast with the one opposite. On it, more to the left, a thick wooden post stood erected. It was about 7 feet high and had an iron ring around it at man's eye level, from which at each side a short chain was hanging, ending in wrist-shackles. From that ring down to about waist-level the post was covered with nasty looking short, sharp studs pointing outwards. To the right side of the platform there stood a large wooden X-shaped cross, solid and thick. It reclined somewhat backwards, and at the ends of the cross shackles had been attached. Between the post and the X-cross two of the executioner's assistants, wearing red and black uniforms, were busy preparing for the punishment. One of them was tending a large brazier and making sure enough coals were kept red and searing hot. He had already placed a few instruments in the brazier... their wooden handles sticking out and their iron ends buried in the red-hot coals. Another brazier stood next to it, with a large pot on top over a burning coal fire... the pot apparently contained some boiling fluid. The other assistant was laying out various instruments of torture on a table, occasionally testing whether their pointed or toothed ends were sufficiently sharpened.

The midday hour drew near, and groups of people started to move towards the place of punishment. Many had brought food and drink, and they settled down around the big platform, waiting for the prisoner to arrive. It was a beautiful day, but spirits were not high. They all knew it was their champion Juro who would soon be on that platform, to be subjected to a gruesome punishment.

In his cell, Juro was drinking his last water and eating his last food, before they would come for him. He felt strong, in body and mind. Every day since his sentencing he had been preparing himself. The outrage and injustice of his condemnation had given him new courage and determination. If it was his fate to suffer punishment at the hands of that hated tyrant Skalka, then he would show him what kind of a man he really was. He would prove himself to be strong and courageous, and not show weakness. That way he might give a lasting inspiration to the people oppressed by tyranny and by cruelty. This attitude Juro continually tried to focus on. But he needed all his strength of character in those occasional moments, when he realized what he was facing. He would have to stand up against pain and torture. He was not afraid of pain, but he knew full well how much it took from one's will power and character to deal with purposely inflicted physical tortures and not to beg for the agony to stop. The natural instinct of the body was to avoid pain, so his mind had to be stronger than the urge to give in to his body's crying out for an end of the suffering.

Then there were footsteps in the corridor, and soon the locks rattled. His cell door was opened. Soldiers entered, followed by the executioner. "On your feet, rebel! It is time!"

With a knot in his stomach Juro got up slowly and stood tall. Immediately two soldiers stepped behind him. His arms were forced behind his back and his wrists were tied together with rough rope. His arms being roughly pulled back, the striations in his shoulder-muscles stood out, and his triceps showed. The soldiers pushed him forward, and all left the cell. They passed through the dungeon corridor and up the stone steps, out into the Castle courtyard.

The bright sun was shining hot, and Juro stood squinting before his eyes could adjust to the light of the sun. Then he could see what was happening around him. Two parties of 20 soldiers stood ready, their lances resting against their shoulders.

Also, there were three carriages: two luxurious ones, in which Lord Skalka was seated with his aristocrat guests and their wives. In a third carriage, the Chief Executioner Ladislav had taken his place. On seeing Juro, Lord Skalka rose to his feet and said, "Ah, look! There he is! All ready for his punishment! Didn't I tell you, my dear friends, what a fine young man he is? Look at those muscles! He has recovered well from his stay in the dungeon, and from his interrogation. I am quite sure that he will last a long time while being tortured!"

Juro's face had a grim look, his jaw muscles set tight, his eyes focusing away on some point in the distance. He could feel the lustful eyes of Lord Skalka running all over his strong body. He was the only man half-naked in that courtyard, and his powerful physique and handsome features drew everybody's attention, both women and men. He straightened his broad, thick-muscled shoulders and stood tall.

Lord Skalka sat down, and made a gesture indicating that the time for departure was there. A soldier stepped up to Juro and tied the end of a long rope around his thick neck. Then he attached the other end to the carriage that Ladislav the executioner was sitting in. The whole procession came into motion, and they left the Castle courtyard.

After about half an hour the procession reached the place of execution. First, a party of 20 soldiers. After them followed the carriages with Lord Skalka and his guests. Then the executioner's carriage, with Juro walking behind it, tied by his neck. The second party of 20 soldiers completed the procession. The crowd looked on in silence as they saw Juro approach for his punishment. Sadness and compassion could be read in their eyes. Their champion was about to be cruelly tortured, and his brave run against tyranny, cruelty and extortion had come to an end. But what they saw impressed them. Juro walked upright. His steps were supple and determined. His bare feet stood firmly on the ground; his thick calves flexed with every step he took. The dark red breeches he wore fitted tightly around his thick muscled thighs and round buttocks. They were resting low on his hips, his upper body naked. And what a sculpted body it was! Once more the crowd admired their hero. They had seen him before, of course, in wrestling bouts and on festive occasions, when Juro had taken off his shirt. Amongst friends, he had enjoyed taking off his shirt and showing off his strength and his magnificent torso. How different the occasion was now! Now he was half-naked on the orders of his tormentor, and his helpless body was soon to be subjected to the vicious torture instruments prepared especially for him...

Juro took slow breaths, and his deeply ridged abs muscles tightened and relaxed with each breath he took. A thin trail of black hair ran down the middle ridge between his abs, down from his chest. Above the abs and his wide ribcage stood his thickly muscled hard pecs, covered with some curly chest hair. His chest stood out as his strong arms were still tied behind his back, biceps and triceps sharply defined. His thick neck and broad shoulders bore his noble head. His square jaw showed a thick stubble, but that gave him an even more manly and courageous look. His curly half-long hair danced slightly as he walked on, towards the platform, towards the suffering and pain.

The carriages reached their destination. Lord Skalka and his guests stepped up to their platform and chose their easy chairs under the awning. They would have the best view on the platform opposite and would be able to watch Juro's punishment while enjoying all the amenities provided. On invitation of their host, they sat down and started to discuss Juro and the punishment to come. They commented on the whipping post and the X-cross, they pointed to the table covered with torture instruments and the braziers with red-hot coals. Once and again their eyes turned to the half-naked prisoner, and they speculated on the type and number of tortures that would be used on the young rebel... how much would he be able to take before passing out from the pain? Lord Skalka laughed and promised them that the tortures would be long and slow, and also, he assured them that he would have Juro revived, should he pass out.

In the meantime, Ladislav the torturer descended from his carriage and stepped up to Juro. Grinning he untied the rope from Juro's neck and then pushed him forward towards the steps leading up to the punishment platform. Juro stopped at the bottom of the steps and looked up. His eyes rested on the whipping post with its sharp studs, the X-cross with the shackles hanging open, the braziers, and the table with the instruments of torture ready. At that moment a cold shiver ran down his broad muscled back, and he closed his eyes, swallowing. He felt the warm rays of the sun on his skin, but that sensation made him realize his vulnerability to the full. His body was unprotected. For a moment he seemed to be overwhelmed by what was happening to him. But then Ladislav gave him a violent push in his back.

“Onto that platform, dog!” The hard push made Juro stumble, and he fell forward onto the wooden steps. His wrists were still tied behind his back, so he landed painfully on his chest. Ladislas grabbed his curly hair and yanked his head back, hissing through his teeth, “What is this, dog? Afraid, eh? Yes, you better be!”

Juro felt anger rise up inside him. He shook his head free from Ladislas’ grasp and then his eyes caught Lord Skalka looking at him, a cruel thin smile on his lips. He must show no weakness now. He got back to his feet and looked up at Lord Skalka with a determined gaze. And then he took the steps up onto the platform, alone and with defiance.

There he stood. Ladislas the Torturer stepped up behind him and the two henchmen took their place on Juro’s left and right. Three men clad in black and red, standing next to a young, half-naked man. Juro stood tall, his bare feet planted solidly on the wooden platform, his wrists tied behind his back, his chest thrust out, his deep ridged abs tightened, his broad shoulders straightened, his jaws set tight, his eyes staring hard, focusing on some point in the distance. His posture, his strong muscular build, his apparent strength and fitness, his manly youthfulness and determined gaze impressed all present. There was an uneasy silence, until Lord Skalka rose from his seat, ready to pronounce the sentence and to order the punishment to begin.

Lord Skalka cleared his throat. “Citizens of Liptov County! This is a glorious day for our beloved Emperor and for our county! You all remember the vicious crimes committed against the Crown and the Emperor’s representatives by the rebel Juro Janosik. You all know he is a thief and a highwayman with no respect for property or the noblemen placed over him. You all know how violent and brutal he has been in the perpetration of his crimes. And now you all know he even coldheartedly killed a priest! For that last crime he will pay with his life. But today, he will pay first for his other crimes. With his pain! Look at him! On that man our Torturer will inflict many agonies! His screams will be his way to repay us for all the suffering he made us undergo. The Tribunal has sentenced him to be tortured at the discretion of me, Lord Skalka, your Lord and Master. Well, I can tell you: I will make him pay to the utmost! I have ordered my Torturer to prepare the worst possible ways of making him suffer. And he will make sure that this rebel shall feel all of it! Now then, Torturer... begin!”

Immediately the two henchmen grabbed Juro by his muscled upper arms and forced him, chest forward, hard against the whipping post. Juro gritted his teeth and grimaced as the sharp studs bit into his chest, but he made no sound. The henchmen untied his wrists and each of them grabbed one of his underarms. They forced his arms up and quickly snapped the shackles on his wrists. Juro resisted, the muscles of his back, deltoids and biceps flexed. But there was no escape... within seconds he stood chained to the whipping post, his broad muscled back exposed, his chest and abs dangerously close to the sharp pins pointing at his skin.

Ladislas checked the shackles, bumping into Juro’s body from behind. Juro’s chest was pressed against the post again, and again the pins tore at his skin. With an angry look in his eyes Juro turned his face towards the Torturer as he felt the stinging pain. But Ladislas just gave him a thin, evil smile and walked away towards the table with instruments. He picked up a whip and held it up high, for all the crowd to see. The whip had a wooden handle, from which extended three braided and connected thongs of about a foot long. These were then separated into individual thongs of about three feet. Each thong was knotted twice near its end, and at each knot rested a small lead ball. With each lash, the whip would tear at the skin of Juro’s back, and the six lead balls would increase the force of the impact and the pain! A murmuring went through the crowd, and some women even looked away from the sight of that cruel instrument. But Lord Skalka and his guests applauded and waved at the Torturer to begin the punishment. Ladislas turned toward the whipping post and positioned himself. Then all became silent.

For a short moment it seemed to Juro that all the world had become quiet. In what cannot have been more than a second or so, he became intensely aware of the warm sunshine on the skin of his naked upper body. He sensed the sun high up in the deep blue sky, the slight rustling of the leaves on the trees around the marketplace, the song of a distant lark. This moment of peacefulness seemed to last a long time, and it brought back memories of happier times. Juro closed his eyes as he took in that experience of warmth and peace... but then he heard a swishing sound and he tensed up.

WHACK!!

Juro's back exploded in pain. The Torturer had wielded the whip with full force and had lashed into Juro's broad muscled back. Juro arched his back in pain and his upper body was forced against the post. His strong fingers snapped around the chains holding his shackles, his thick biceps bulged as every muscle in his strong body flexed in reaction to the cruel lash of the whip. The air was driven out of his lungs, his mouth open in a silent scream, his head thrown back. The sharp stinging pain was followed by a deeper and searing pain. The he relaxed his back muscles just slightly and took a deep breath. As he straightened his back, the first red welts were forming on his middle back and right shoulder blade. The blood drops started to show where the lead balls had torn his skin. Juro took another breath, and turned his head to look, but he could hardly prepare for the next lash.

WHACK!! "NNNNNNRRRRGGH!!"

A second explosion of pain. Again, Juro's back arched. His ribcage slammed into the spikes. He closed his eyes tight, his face in a grimace. Every muscle in his body taut. His biceps bulging. His teeth gritted tightly as he fought to keep down the urge to scream out his pain. His torso inclining slightly left in involuntary reaction to the whip lashing into his left shoulder blade. He took a deep breath as he moved his chest away from the spikes, the agony in his back increasing after the second whiplash.

WHACK!! "NNNNAAGGHH!!"

The thongs and lead balls tore into his middle back. His upper body was thrust forward again, and the spikes bit into his pecs. The explosion of pain made his fingers release the chain, and they spread out. Such was the impact of the whiplash that for a moment Juro lost his footing, and he fell into the post. Groaning deep, he quickly regained support under his bare feet, and he tore his pecs free from the spikes.

WHACK!! "AAAAAHHHH!!"

Before Juro had had time to prepare himself for the next lash, the Torturer let his fierce instrument of pain tear once more into Juro's defenseless muscled back. He threw his head back as he screamed out his pain. His shoulder blades were driven into each other as his back muscles flexed violently under the impact of the whip. His fingers found their grip again on the chains. Juro gripped the chains tightly in his suffering. His body jerked, and more welts and small wounds began to emerge on his sweating skin.

WHACK!! "AAAAAHHHH!!"

This time Ladislas had targeted Juro's mid and lower back. The whiplash drove his midsection forward against the post. His abs, tightening as he screamed, were driven into the spikes. A sweat had now broken out all over Juro's body... his skin, taut over his thick muscles, was glistening. On his whipped back the sweat drops here and there mixed with the thinly trickling blood, causing thin rivulets to flow from his wounds, torn open by the lead balls.

The crowd that had gathered around the punishment platform watched in silence. Nobody said a word. Everybody had their eyes fixed on Juro. They watched how the whip was lashing into his strong defenseless body. The swooshing and cracking sounds of the whip, and Juro's raw screams of agony, were the only sounds heard.

Lord Skalka had his eyes fixed on Juro as well. He was completely fixed on taking in each and every aspect of the painful punishment. How the whip tore into Juro's skin, leaving more welts and wounds with every lash. How Juro's muscled body was half-naked and chained to the post. How his manly young upper body was open and without any defense against the lashes of the whip. How Juro's back muscles flexed and rippled under the lashes, how his biceps bulged and flexed each time the whip landed on his naked back. How Juro threw his head back in pain again and again. How he fought to hold back his screams, and how he nevertheless had to scream out his pain. Lord Skalka called out, "Torturer! His sides!"

Ladislav let the whip rest for a moment and nodded in acknowledgment of his master's order. He took a few steps sideways, chose his position anew and took aim at Juro's left ribcage. In the short moment of reprieve, Juro took a few deep breaths, his ribcage extending as he filled his lungs with air.

WHACK!! "SHHAAARRHH!!!"

The thongs and lead balls tore into Juro's left ribcage. The whip now partially wrapped around his body, and the impact was even harder. His upper body jerked and twisted, his left side curving in. With the violent movement of his torso, his pecs scraped against the spikes on the post. With a growl of frustration and pain Juro tried to keep his body away from the spikes.

WHACK!! "AAAAHH!!!"

Again, the whip lashed into his left ribcage, the lead balls tearing at his skin. As he screamed, Juro bared his teeth and pulled violently at the chains holding him captive to the whipping post. If only he could break those chains! If only he could fight them in a man-to-man fight! Anger rose up inside him, and his muscles flexed as he pulled the chains.

WHACK!! "AAAAARRGH!!!"

His right ribcage exploded in pain as the whip lashed into him and wrapped around his side. His body curved into the biting lash. His grasp on the chains was so tight that his knuckles whitened. His eyes were wide open, but he did not really see. He was engulfed with pain.

WHACK!! "AAAAHH!!!"

A second time the whip tore at his right ribcage. Juro almost lost his footing, his biceps bulged as he held himself up. He leant his sweaty forehead against the post and tried to catch his breath. He did not notice that Ladislav paused and looked towards Lord Skalka. He could just hear his words, "My Lord! I advise to give the prisoner a short rest and then continue to the next stage of torture. If I keep whipping him now, he might become numb and feel the pain less."

Lord Skalka watched the sweating, welted and bleeding Juro, resting his head against the post and breathing heavily. Without knowing it, his right hand rested in his crotch, as he had been massaging himself during the whipping. With a feeling of regret he nodded his consent, making a hand gesture as well. He lifted his glass of wine, sighed, and drank.

Ladislav walked over to the table and put his whip down. His hand reached to the left, and he picked up a torch. He walked towards the cauldron and held the torch into the coal fire. The torch caught fire, its flames dancing red and yellow. Juro looked over his shoulder to see what Ladislav was doing, and he swallowed. Ladislav held the torch up for all to see and slowly walked towards Juro. He stood close to him and muttered, "We need to do something about your open whip marks, dog!"

He grinned as he let the torch slowly approach Juro's naked upper body. Immediately he felt the heat getting closer to his skin and instinctively he tried to move his body away from the flame. Ladislav brought the torch ever closer to Juro's left side. Juro curved his torso away, but his movement was restricted. Soon he could move no further, but the flame approached ever more. Then the flame started to lick his side at the level of his waist.

"NNNNRRHHHH!!!" Juro's body twisted and turned, and in a fury, he kicked out at Ladislav, his left foot hitting him hard in the groin. Ladislav yelled, then groaned deep in pain, doubled over and dropped the torch. Quickly the two henchmen came running, one of them held Juro's legs and the other tied his ankles with rope. To make sure he also connected the tied ankles with rope to the bottom of the post. Ladislav struggled back to his feet. He grabbed Juro's hair and jerked his head back.

“For that you will suffer even more, you filthy dog!” He turned towards his henchmen. “Light that torch again! Come on!” One of the henchmen obeyed and handed the Torturer the torch again. Juro stood panting, his left side in pain from the first burn, looking over his shoulder as Ladislas approached. He jerked at the chains.

“Do what you want to me, bastard! You will not break me! Never!” Ladislas did not reply. He just moved the burning torch to Juro’s right side and let the flames lick at his skin.

“NNNNAAARRHHH!!” Juro screamed as the flames moved slowly higher, up from his waist towards his armpit. He twisted, curved his upper body, but Ladislas was careful not to let him escape the flames. Only after his armpits were burnt did he remove the torch. Juro’s skin was scorched. He rested his forehead against the post, sweat running down his face. He panted heavily, trying to catch his breath. Behind him Ladislas took some steps to the left and held the torch at Juro’s left side.

“AAAAAHHHH!!” Juro threw his head back as he screamed out. The flames burnt his left side and ribcage, and Ladislas moved the torch up very slowly. Again, Juro’s body twisted and turned, but there was no escape. Only after he had the torch finally burn Juro’s armpit Ladislas removed the cruel flames. Juro groaned deep in agony and let his body rest against the post, the pins again scratching his chest and abs, but that he hardly noticed.

Ladislas looked at Juro’s sides and decided he had done a good job. The burns were not too bad, but the torch had evidently caused a great deal of pain. He held up the flaming torch, a satisfied smirk on his face. And he received some applause from the platform opposite, where Lord Skalka and his guests had intently watched Juro suffer under the flaming torture. The crowd, however, was silent. They looked on in horror as they saw their young hero in so much pain. And they knew this was just the beginning.

Ladislas extinguished the torch in a bucket filled with water. He turned towards his henchmen. “Each of you! Take a fork and come here!” The two men did as ordered and approached Juro on each side, carrying a three-pronged fork with a wooden handle. Ladislas jerked Juro’s head back once more. “Now, this is for kicking me, you bastard!”

Ladislas stepped back, and he motioned his henchmen to begin. Juro looked to his left and right and saw the sharp fork-prongs close in on his open, scorched sides. He gritted his teeth and grabbed the chains tightly with his strong fingers. Then simultaneously the fork-prongs were pressed hard into his armpits, puncturing his skin. He squinted and hissed sharply as the pain hit him. He flexed his arms, his biceps bulging. Then the henchmen started to pull the forks downwards, keeping the pressure and moving very slowly.

“NNNNAAARRRRHHH!!” The fork-prongs scratched Juro’s burnt skin, causing thin lacerations as they were pulled slowly down. Juro shook his head in agony, baring his teeth as he screamed out. “AAAARRGH!!” After they had pulled their vicious instruments of pain all the way down to Juro’s waist, they looked at Ladislas. He only smiled and nodded. They lifted up the three-pronged forks and placed them once more in Juro’s armpits. Before Juro could catch his breath, they pressed and started pulling down.

“AAAAAHHHH!!” Again, Juro’s burnt sides were cruelly scratched and lacerated. As he screamed once again, he threw back his head. Every muscle in his magnificent body was flexed and taut. Lord Skalka sat upright in his chair and could not keep his eyes off this spectacle. Seeing that sculpted body writhing under the torture and hearing the almost animal-like screams gave him an intense satisfaction and excitement.

After the henchmen had finished their second assault on Juro’s sides, Ladislas motioned them to stop. Juro slumped against the post, panting heavily. Sweat and some blood mixed on his upper body. His eyes closed, he rested his forehead against the post, and tried to recover from the pain. He had to try to remove his thoughts from what was happening to him, but it was very hard to do. The pain was excruciating.

Lord Skalka rose from his seat and lifted his hand up. “Executioner! You will remove the prisoner from the post and chain him to the X-cross! Clean his wounds and let him rest a bit. I want him refreshed for the next series of punishments. I want

him to feel as much pain as possible! You hear? Make sure he stays conscious and revive him when he passes out! He must suffer! He must scream!”

In his excitement Lord Skalka had almost yelled these last words. All the crowd could see how much he enjoyed Juro’s agonies, and they despised him. But no one dared say anything.

The Torturer gave a sign, and the henchmen came to the post. They untied the rope that connected Juro’s ankles to the post, but they left the rope on his ankles intact. They took no risk. Juro was in pain, but the short minutes since his sides were brutally tortured had given him opportunity to recover a bit. Lord Skalka’s words had strengthened his resolve to show no weakness, and he fought hard in his mind to remain strong. His body was in pain, and it would get worse, but he would not submit and show fear or ask for mercy. He tried to breathe deep and slow.

The henchmen unlocked the shackles from his wrists. Each one clasped an already-chafed wrist in his hands. Juro sensed he was freed from the chains holding him to the post. Instinctively he reacted and he fought to escape from the grasp of the henchmen. He was very strong, and the two men had not expected this forceful attempt. Juro could free his left arm, and he began to struggle. The Torturer yelled out and quickly four lancers came climbing onto the punishment platform. Lord Skalka jumped up from his seat, his eyes wide with fear that Juro might escape. Two lancers threw themselves on Juro, and also the henchmen recovered and joined the fight. It was a brave but short-lived attempt to escape from the agony to come. Juro’s ankles were tied, and he was hopelessly outnumbered. He fought like a lion, growled like an animal, but there were too many. Soon they had subdued him. He was forced down to the floor, and the sharp lances were dangerously close to his skin as they pointed at his naked chest and abs.

Lord Skalka yelled out, “Good! Yes, good! He still has fight in him! That is excellent! We can make him suffer longer! On the cross with him! Make him scream!”

Now things went fast. Juro was grabbed by his arms and legs and lifted from the floor. He still struggled back, as he was forced chest up onto the inclined heavy X-cross. He winced as his tortured back was brought down on the rough wood. His arms were forced up and wide, and even though he resisted, and his arm muscles flexed, his wrists were put in the shackles. Only after they had secured his arms did they untie his ankles. His legs were spread, and his ankles were shackled to the cross. Juro flexed his muscles as he tested his chains, and then with a deep moan he threw back his head, realizing that he could not break free.

The soldiers climbed down from the platform. The Torturer approached with a big bucket, grinning. “Comfortable, dog? I am going to get you ready for more tortures! But before we continue, let’s freshen you a bit.”

He grabbed a big sponge from the bucket and began to wash down Juro’s sides. Juro hissed as the cold water bit into his wounds. The Torturer washed his whole upper body, cleaning it from sweat and the blood on his sides. Then he washed his face, and finally lifted up the bucket and splashed its content over Juro’s naked upper body.

Lord Skalka and his guests were provided with fresh drinks and food. They raised their glasses and drank, discussing the great spectacle of the young rebel’s punishment. They asked Lord Skalka about what was to come, and he pointed at the table carrying numerous instruments of torture. With a smile of evil superiority, he said “Look, friends! What do you see? Look! There are sharp pins, pliers, pincers, knives, claws! All can be used on his living flesh. And we have braziers with red hot irons! And there is boiling oil! All that he will feel on his naked skin! Hahaha! What delight! His screams of pain will be music to my ears...! And, of course, there is smelling salt and cold water, in case the rebel loses consciousness from the pain! Torturer! Is the rebel ready to be made to suffer?”

Lord Skalka’s guests laughed and were merry. They took back to their seats, glasses in hand, and prepared themselves for the next stage in the torment that was going to be inflicted on Juro.

Juro lay on the X-cross. He was not fully stretched out. He was spreadeagled on the cross, which stood inclined on the punishment platform. In this way Lord Skalka and his guests had a good view of Juro’s half-naked body. Juro’s arms were

not fully stretched, so his thick biceps were flexed. His chest slowly rose and fell with his breathing. He threw a glance at the table next to him and saw the instruments of torture arranged on the tabletop. Sharpened pincers and pliers, pins glistening in the sun, the cat's paws, a few slender knives. Suddenly he felt very vulnerable, and he closed his eyes tight. He gritted his teeth as he had to fight down a rush of anxiety and fear. Soon these tools were going to be used on his body, with sadistic skill to extract as much pain as possible. He was defenseless. Alone. No escape... but then he heard the Torturer answer Lord Skalka. "Yes, My Lord, the rebel is fully awake and secured to the cross. We continue the punishment!"

At these words, all the muscles in Juro's body tightened up. He threw a quick glance sideways and saw Ladislav pick up a pair of flat long-nose pliers with wide jaws. He held them up high for all to see, and then showed them to Juro, holding them close to his face. Juro noticed that the inside of the jaws was crenulated. Ladislav grinned with an evil smile as he moved the pliers down over Juro's chest and then to his left side. He opened the pliers wide and pressed them into the flesh of Juro's waist. And then he squeezed them shut, slowly but with great pressure. The pliers pinched Juro hard.

"GGGGRRGGH!!" Ladislav now twisted the pliers. Juro arched his body in pain, but still did not scream. Ladislav frowned and motioned his head, and one of the henchmen took another pair of pliers and came to Juro's right side. He applied the instrument to Juro's waist and squeezed hard.

"NNNNNNNNRRRH!!" Juro's face was in a grimace as he fought down the urge to scream out his pain. Ladislav and the henchman worked their tool on Juro, extracting more pain. Juro shook his head, but he did not scream.

The pliers were removed. They left angry red marks on both sides of Juro's waist. Juro caught his breath. Ladislav and the henchman went to the table, and each picked up another tool... a pair of pincers. They held the cruel tools up in the air, and then positioned themselves left and right of Juro. On Ladislav's mark, the pincers were moved to Juro's chest. Simultaneously they bit into his left and right pec. Ladislav and the henchman squeezed hard.

"NNNNRRRAAAHHH!!" The jaws of the pincers literally bit into Juro's flesh, cutting the skin as the instruments were squeezed, twisted and pulled. Juro threw his head back screaming, as his flesh was slowly torn.

"AAAARRHHH!!" The torture was not stopped until the pincers ripped off a bit of skin and muscle from the side of Juro's pecs. A sweat had broken out all over his body. His chest was heaving. The pincers were moved downwards and again Juro felt their bite, now in his waist again. And after the bite, the pressure. And the twisting. And the pulling. Hard and relentless.

"AAAAAHHHH!!" Juro shook his head violently, but there came no end to the agony until once more some skin and flesh was torn from his body. He was bleeding from four small fresh wounds, he moaned, sweating, his chest heaving. Then he heard Lord Skalka's voice. "Again! Do it again!"

As the pincers approached him again, Juro lifted his head and yelled at Lord Skalka. "Skalka! Your days of tyranny are numbered! Freedom will win!"

Lord Skalka laughed out. "Hahaha! You dog! Save your breath for screaming!" Then the pincers were applied again, just above the first wounds in his waist. Squeeze. Twist. Pull... "AAAAARRRH!!"

Juro's body jerked on the cross. He arched his body. But the pincers did their work and did not stop until again two fresh wounds were torn open in Juro's living flesh. As the pincers were removed, Juro sank back down on the cross, panting. Sweat beads ran down his face, stung his eyes. Sweat also covered his body, making it glisten in the sun. Ladislav looked down on his strong victim and assessed him. He looked him in the eyes, and Juro immediately returned his gaze. Ladislav noticed the fury and willpower in Juro's eyes but also, he could see that the young man was suffering. He grinned. "Get me an iron!"

One of the henchmen took a branding iron out of the brazier, using a cloth to grab the wooden handle, making sure he would not feel any heat at all. Carefully he handed the red-hot poker to Ladislav, who spat on the hot end, producing a

sizzle. Then he held the poker up high and took position next to Juro. He motioned the red-hot poker towards Juro's left waist side. Juro first felt the heat approaching. Then the pressure of the poker on one of his wounds. SSSSSHHHHH!

Juro threw his head back. "AAAAAHHHH!!" His fists opened wide, and he clawed the air. The stench of his own burnt flesh filled his nostrils. Ladislas removed the poker and pressed it into Juro's second wound. SSSSSSHHHHH!

"AAAAAHHHH!!" Juro's body twisted sideways as far as it could. In frustration, Juro turned his head and bit hard into his left biceps. But the pain was too strong. Even as Ladislas removed the poker Juro screamed loud. "AAAAARRGH!!"

Juro gasped for breath and moaned. Ladislas returned the poker to his henchman. "Get me another one! This one has lost its proper heat." The henchman obeyed and soon another red-hot poker was in Ladislas' hand and approaching Juro's naked upper body, now pointed at the wound in his left pec. Juro's eyes were on the red-hot end of the poker, and he grit his teeth hard, preparing himself for the pain.

SSSSSSHHHHH! "NNNNAAAAAAGGHH!!"

Ladislas took away the hot poker and slowly walked around to Juro's other side. The three wounds on his left side were cauterized. Juro took deep breaths as he tried to deal with the agony. He moaned deeply. As he opened his eyes, he was just in time to see the red-hot poker close to his right pec. He clenched his fists and took a sharp breath.

SSSSSSHHHHH!! "AAAAAHHHHH!!"

Ladislas burnt the wound shut and held his eyes on Juro's face. He saw the fierce grimaces, saw Juro's body jerk and twist in pain, and heard the animal-like deep scream. As he took away the poker and handed it to his henchman, Juro's body slumped back on the cross. The henchman handed over another poker from the brazier. Ladislas pressed it into one of Juro's wounds on his right-side waist.

SSSSSSHHHHH!! "AAAAARRRGHH!!"

Juro threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and with bared teeth screamed out his pain. He pulled with all his strength at the chains securing him to the X-cross, but they held him down. As Ladislas removed the poker, Juro inhaled deeply and let his head fall backwards. His thick muscled neck showed his Adam's Apple. And then Ladislas pressed the poker for the sixth time against Juro's flesh.

SSSSSSHHHHH!! "IIIEEAAAAAHHHHH!!"

As he screamed and violently pulled against the chains, the veins on Juro's arms seemed to burst. He was in hell. A red haze of pain before his eyes. All he knew was agony. Only after the hot poker was removed from his body he slammed back onto the cross with a loud yell, and another scream of agony, just to give vent to his pain and frustration.

"AAAAAAAHHHHH!!!"

Then he let his head fall backwards again. His chest heaving. He did not notice that Ladislas walked away from the cross and put the poker back into the brazier. His attention was on his suffering only. He was engulfed in pain.

The Torturer looked over at his master. Lord Skalka was sweating himself, but not from pain. With one hand on his swollen crotch, he said, "Give the dog some rest. Refresh him. Make sure he keeps feeling the pain to the worst possible degree!"

Ladislas nodded. He gave an order to his henchmen, and they climbed down from the platform, to return with a large bucket with cold water each. Ladislas took a cup, filled it with water, and walked up to Juro. He grabbed him by the hair, lifted up his head, and said, "Here, boy, drink this. It will do you good."

Juro kept his eyes closed and just put his lips to the cup. He craved moisture. He did not think, he just drank. He swallowed down the cold water, and he felt it inside him. Ladislas allowed him half the cup and then withdrew it. The henchmen came to each side of the cross, lifted the buckets and threw the content over Juro's naked upper body. SPLASH!

Juro moaned as the cold water hit him, and a shiver went through him. But it refreshed him somewhat. He opened his eyes and saw Ladislas standing next to him. He looked, but he now saw no instrument of pain in Ladislas' hand. He lifted his head and looked down left and right his body. The wounds were closed, burnt shut. Hurting bad. He closed his eyes again and rested his body on the wood of the cross. His breathing slowed down a bit, his abs tightening and relaxing with every deep breath he took. Very slowly his pain became a bit less intense.

But Juro's reprieve from suffering was only momentary. Ladislas had gone over to the table and come back to the cross to start the next stage of torture. As usual he held up the new instruments of pain... two small nail-like pins of about 3 centimeters length. He showed them to Juro as well and lowered them, to let them lightly scrape both his nipples. Juro's eyes filled with anger, at the same time a light shiver went through him. Ladislas held one pin in his left hand, and with his right he brought the pin down vertically above Juro's right nipple. Juro held his breath and looked down his chest. Then he felt the pinprick pain, as the sharp pin touched his nipple. And then Ladislas pressed the pin down, forcing it to break skin and dig itself into the nipple itself.

"NNNNRRGGHH!! NNNNAAAHHH!!"

The Torturer pressed the pin all the way deep into Juro's nipple. He could see that he was hurting Juro badly, and he grinned as he took the other pin in his right hand and walked over to the other side of the cross. Then he bent over and placed the pin on Juro's left nipple. And he pressed, slowly.

"SSSHHNNNNRRGH!! AAAAAHH!!"

The pin was driven deep into the nipple, until it was completely buried. Juro moaned deeply, his chest heaving. It felt as if his whole chest had been pierced. His eyes followed Ladislas as he walked over to the table and picked up a pair of pliers. Then with the pliers he picked up a piece of red-hot coal from the brazier and came back to the cross. He held up the smoking coal, then held it close to Juro's face to let him feel the heat. Juro turned his face away, and Ladislas pressed the coal on Juro's right nipple.

SSSSHHH!! "AAAAARRHH!!"

The coal burnt his nipple and heated up the pin inside the nipple. Again, there was the stench of burning flesh, and a blue vapor rose up from the tortured nipple. Juro's chest jerked and twisted, but there was hardly room for movement. Ladislas let the coal burn until its heat diminished, then he lifted it off Juro's pec. Juro gasped for air. Ladislas walked over to the brazier and picked up another red-hot coal. He went to Juro's other side and brought the pliers holding the coal down to his left nipple. With a sharp hiss Juro breathed in, then the coal was pressed on his nipple.

SSSSHHH!! "AAAAAAGGHHH!!"

Again, the vapor rose. Again, the stench. And again, the tortured and frustrated scream of agony from the helpless young man chained half-naked on the X-cross. Mercilessly, Ladislas held the coal in place, burning the nipple's surface and making the pin inside the nipple searing hot. And Juro screamed.

"AAAARRGH!!"

Finally, the coal was removed. Juro's nipples were burnt. His head fell back, and his chest heaved heavily. His chest hair stuck to his sweaty pecs. His abs got sucked in deep with his breathing, the undulating muscles and ridges showing. His arms quivered from his pulling hard at the chains. His eyes closed, he tried to focus away from the agony he was experiencing. The pain was overwhelming. But inside him he still found a voice telling him to hold out and not give in to the

fierce urge to ask for mercy. To say he'd do anything that would make the torture stop. To be released from this cross and be spared more pain. No. Never. His courage was not broken yet.

Lord Skalka seemed to have lost any attention for his surroundings. All he was focusing on was savoring the suffering of that young man fully in his power. The tortures were being inflicted by his command. Only he could put an end to this horrible ordeal. And Juro had already suffered much. But to Lord Skalka's taste, not enough.

"Torturer! What are you waiting for? I hear no more screaming! Is he conscious?" Ladislav grabbed Juro by the hair and lifted up his head. He looked in his eyes, saw his heaving chest. "My Lord, the rebel is awake. We can continue!"

Lord Skalka sat down again, drank from his wine, and motioned with his hand. The Torturer nodded, let go of Juro's hair and went over to the table. He picked up a slender knife and held it up high while he walked over to the cross. Its sharp blade was shining in the sunlight. Juro's eyes followed the blade as it approached his naked chest. He gritted his teeth as Ladislav let the blade rest at his throat and drew the knife slowly down without pressure. The blade followed the ridge between Juro's pecs and travelled further down through the deep ridge between his abs. Above the navel Ladislav stopped. He lifted the knife and brought it down at Juro's left waist side. There he pressed the blade, puncturing skin, and ever so slowly he began to draw the blade across Juro's lower abs. As he drew the blade and caused a thin wound, he wriggled the knife to extract the most pain he could.

"AAAAARRHHH!!" Juro felt as if his belly was cut in half. A burning pain pervaded his body. He squinted while the knife was cutting him, his face grimacing as he screamed. After Ladislav had made a long slash in the lower abs, he repositioned the knife higher, at Juro's higher abs, and repeated the cutting of living flesh. Slowly...

"AAAAHHH!!" With all his strength Juro pulled at his chains. Blood was already trickling from under the shackles on his wrists and ankles. Frustration and suffering gave Juro enormous strength, but it was not enough to break free. No matter how he struggled, he could not escape. After completing the second long cut in Juro's abs, Ladislav lifted the knife and moved it up to his chest. He brought it down on the left pec, punctured the skin and began to draw it across Juro's chest. Again, he worked agonizingly slowly.

"NNNAAAAHHH!!" Juro's fingers clawed the air as the blade cut his thick pecs. Ladislav did not forget to wriggle the knife as he drew it across, making sure he was hurting the young man as much as he could. As he stopped after having made a cut all across his pecs, Juro gasped and lifted his head, looking down his body. Three cuts were showing, two across his abs, and blood was seeping from them. The cuts were not very deep, but they did open up somewhat.

Ladislav put the knife back on the table. He picked up a pouring ladle with a wooden handle and a thin cup tube. He held the ladle up and walked to the second brazier which had the big kettle with boiling oil on it. He plunged the ladle into the kettle and scooped up the boiling oil, a hot vapor rising from the cup. He moved the ladle carefully above Juro's lower abs. And then he tilted the ladle, letting the boiling oil run through the cup tube, carefully directing the stream into the open wound across Juro's abs. Juro's eyes opened wide as he saw what was happening. Then the boiling oil poured into his wound. The steaming liquid sizzled.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!" Juro's body twisted and jerked violently. A red haze of pain engulfed him, and he shook his head left and right. He did not even notice that Ladislav moved the ladle and now poured oil into his second cut. He just experienced that the pain became even more intense.

"IIIIIIIIIIAAAAHHHH!!" He arched his body to the max, as far as the chains allowed. He roared. The boiling oil burnt his wounds and ran down his sides, burning his skin. The pain was unbearable. Once more he screamed out his agony, then his body fell back down on the cross, and his head leaned against his left bicep. All of a sudden all was silent. A deep silence, after the loud screams that had emerged from Juro's throat.

Lord Skalka rose from his seat. The crowd held their breath. All eyes were on the motionless half naked, tortured young man on the cross. Was he....?

Ladislav let go of Juro's balls as he placed his left hand under the vise. Juro felt the sharp spikes prickling his ball-sack, and he moaned deeply. Ladislav slowly began to turn the vise's mechanism, and the spiked jaws began to close in on Juro's balls.

The unrest in the crowd grew stronger. More shouting was heard. More people asked for the tortures to stop. Lord Skalka ordered his lancers to protect the punishment platform and directed his attention again to what was going to happen to Juro. His left hand was on his crotch. He could barely wait.

The Torturer turned the mechanism. Soon Juro felt the prickling of spikes on both sides of his balls. He was horrified at what was going to happen. Not only the unimaginable pain he would be suffering soon, but also his loss of manhood. One more time he collected all his strength and pulled at his chains. But he could not break free.

Then the pressure came on. The pins started to bite into his balls. The pain started to grow. Juro groaned. Ladislav turned again. Juro threw his head back, his mouth wide open in a silent scream of desperation. Ladislav turned the mechanism.

"NNNAAAAARRRGHH!!!"

And then a shot was fired from a distance. Galloping hoofs were heard. Heads turned. Lord Skalka also looked in the direction of the noise. His mouth fell open. At the head of a party of Imperial Guards there approached Johan Litisky, waving a document in his hand. From afar he shouted, "STOP! Stop the punishment! Orders from the Emperor!!"

The crowd started to yell as well. They shouted for the release of their hero. But then the air was pierced by another animal-like roar coming from the punishment platform.

"AAAAAARRRRRHHHHH!!!!!"

The Torturer had increased the pressure on Juro's balls. Juro jerked and trashed. Blood was starting to show between the spiked jaws of the vise. The Torturer prepared to give the vise another turn. Then another shot was heard, and with a raw scream Ladislav dropped the vise. A bullet had hit his shoulder.

In the general confusion Litisky arrived, and he ran up the punishment platform. He stood waving a document and addressed the crowd. "Citizens! The Emperor has pardoned Juro Janosik! The death sentence is revoked! And the punishment for robbery is to be limited to 50 lashes!"

At that he looked back, to see Juro's tortured body laying exhausted and shivering on the X-cross. He saw the table with instruments, the whipping post, the braziers. Tears of anger and compassion filled his eyes.

"Lord Skalka! This will end here and now! I take charge of these proceedings now. Soldiers! Release that man from the cross! See to it that he receives proper treatment for his wounds! And you, Lord Skalka..."

As Litisky turned towards the other platform, Lord Skalka had already disappeared. He could be seen to climb into his carriage and leave. He did not look back.

The End.