

# CUETOPROJECT

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La Tercera Caida : The Story of Karl Kemov (1908-1946)

by Marko Velk

Opening reception Thursday October 4th, 6 to 8 PM

On the 30th of June 1908 a giant meteorite exploded in mid-air, 8,000 metres above the Tunguska region of Siberia, devastating a 2,000km<sub>2</sub> expanse of Taiga. The shock wave it caused was equivalent to a thousand Hiroshima nuclear bombs. On the same day, in a small village in this very same region, Karl Kemov came into the world. It is a name that means little on this side of the Atlantic. And yet...

Born to a German mother and a Russian father, the young Karl developed from a young age a profound interest in anything that more or less resembled an animal, from stags, elks, roe deer and wolverines to bears and tigers. He was fascinated by these animals that he often came across during long days out hunting with his Uncle Vasilij. An impressive array of trophies adorned the walls of the family living room; the young Karl would enjoy taking hold of them to use in the games he played with his friends, imitating perfectly the growls and other animal noises he had heard during the night. Each in turn would assume the role of a bear, a deer, a tiger or another wild-eyed beast arising from the lively imagination of children who had grown up alongside these animals.

A few years on, the now teenage Karl regularly joined Vasilij in chopping the wood that would see them through the bitter Siberian cold. He would recall the long afternoons he used to spend playing with his friends as, donning a variety of masks, they chased one another through the forests close to his home. Since then he had become accustomed to going hunting with his uncle, and had developed an acute sense of the chase, and, consequently, how to make a kill. During these long days out hunting, Uncle Vasilij would tell him stories of his own, deprived childhood where he was left to fend for himself. A successful day's hunting would often end with a hearty meal accompanied by . a locally-produced alcohol that loosened the tongues of even the most inhibited of guests. Thus, stories of drinking sessions, hunting and women fuelled the imagination of the adolescent, who in turn came up with stories that would sound more like surreal tales than true accounts. By the age of

18, the youngster, who had grown into a solid, sturdy young man, had developed something of an overly-inventive imagination. Every night he would dream of combats, of strange, organic masked forms that opposed one another, each taking the form of an animal – some realistic, some not, in chaotic scenes that centered around a single goal – his victory. His mind full of these images even during the day, in his sleep he would often encounter these hordes of part-man, part-beast-like creatures. Wearing a mask in the form of a white tiger, he would confront them in hand-to-hand combat, he too becoming a surreal being, a fighting machine ready to challenge any force.

His uncle, by then nearing 60, dreamed of one day travelling to Mexico in order to see for himself the famous pyramids; Gathering together all his savings, he decided to take the young Karl Kemov with him on a journey that would prove to be long and difficult. On the 3rd of November 1929 they arrived in Mexico. Upon the road leading to the Pyramid of the Sun, Karl experienced a revelation. Pasted along the walls were dozens upon dozens of posters singing the praises of the Mexican “luchadores”. Images of these half-man, half-godlike combatants, some looking even more surreal than others, wearing masks that only added to their unreal appearance, flooded his thoughts as he continued on his way.

All of a sudden his dreams had become a reality. He could already picture himself in a white tiger mask, facing the continent’s most ardent wrestlers. An incredible strength rose up inside him, like a remedy for the life he had lived until that point, like a higher force descending on him from the Aztec sky above.

And so the legend of the greatest wrestler of all time was born; Karl Kemov, otherwise known as «El tigre blanco». The little we know of his life is an impressive story, that of a man whose destiny embraced the childhood dreams of a boy with a vivid imagination, the secret of which may well lie in the events of 30th June 1908.

from October 4th until November 2nd 2007