ARBiT
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National Checklist Day

National Checklist Day, observed annually on October 30, celebrates the power of organization, planning, and efficiency in everyday life. This day emphasizes the importance of creating checklists to manage tasks, priorities, and goals, whether at work, school, or home. Checklists help reduce stress, prevent errors, and ensure nothing important is overlooked, turning even complex projects into manageable steps. Beyond productivity, they encourage discipline, focus, and a sense of accomplishment as tasks are completed. National Checklist Day reminds us that success often lies in careful planning and attention to detail, and that even the smallest list can make a big difference.

राष्ट्रदूत
FRIDAY
30 October 2026
A-B

#A MASTERPIECE

The Golden Scythian Pectoral

Nomadic does not mean unsophisticated. It reveals a culture deeply connected to animals, nature, and symbolic narrative

In 1971, beneath a burial mound on the Ukrainian steppe known as Tovsta Mohyla, archaeologists uncovered one of the most breathtaking treasures of the ancient world, the Golden Scythian Pectoral.

Dating to the 4th century BCE, this extraordinary neck ornament belonged to the nomadic Scythians, a powerful culture that dominated the Eurasian steppe from roughly the 7th to the 3rd centuries BCE. Today, the pectoral is widely regarded as a pinnacle of Scythian gold craftsmanship.

At nearly 1.2 kilograms (over 2.5 pounds) of solid gold and about 30 centimeters in diameter, the pectoral is both opulent and intricate.

But its power lies not just in its weight.

It lies in its storytelling.

The Scythians were horse-riding nomads, feared by their neighbours for their mobility and skill in warfare. Greek writers like Herodotus described them as formidable and enigmatic. Yet, the pectoral reveals something deeper: a society with refined artistic sophistication and symbolic imagination.

The ornament is composed of three horizontal registers, each filled with detailed relief scenes.

The upper band depicts human figures, often interpreted as Scythian men tending animals, possibly preparing clothing from fleece. This scene suggests daily life, pastoral economy, and cultural identity.

The central band features intertwined plant motifs, lush, swirling vegetation that symbolizes fertility and the natural world.

The lower band erupts into dynamic animal combat scenes, lions, griffins, and other creatures locked in dramatic struggle. This reflects the so-called "Animal Style" characteristic of steppe art, where animals embody power, chaos, and the forces of nature.

Together, the three levels may represent a layered worldview:

1. Human society above.
2. The fertile earth in the middle.
3. The raw, untamed animal realm below.

Some scholars believe that the pectoral was created by Greek craftsmen working for a Scythian elite patron. By the 4th century BCE, Scythians maintained active trade relationships with Greek colonies along the Black Sea. This cultural exchange blended Greek technical precision with Scythian symbolism.

The result is extraordinary detail.

Muscles ripple beneath animal hides. Faces are expressive. Even tiny strands of hair and fleece are individually rendered. The gold was hammered, cast, and soldered with remarkable skill.

The pectoral was discovered in a royal burial, likely belonging to a Scythian noble or king. Such objects were not everyday adornments. They were emblems of authority, worn across the chest to proclaim status and divine favour.

Unlike sedentary civilizations that built cities in stone, the Scythians expressed power through portable wealth, gold that traveled with them across the steppe.

This pectoral survived because it was buried with its owner, sealed within the earth for over two millennia.

Today, it stands as proof that nomadic does not mean unsophisticated.

It reveals a culture deeply connected to animals, nature, and symbolic narrative.

So here's the question:

When you look at the Golden Scythian Pectoral, what captivates you more, the staggering technical mastery of its goldwork, or the layered symbolic world it reveals about a steppe civilization often misunderstood by history?

Sledge Patrol command headquarters at Eskimonæs.

Compared to the simple trapper's huts on the trails, the station at Eskimonæs was luxurious. The red-painted house had a large living area in the centre with a roaring stove, comfortable chairs and tables. This was ringed with six bedrooms and radio room, together with a generator room. Surrounding the exterior wall of each were storerooms, doubling as outer layers of insulation.

FIRST CONTACT

Lt. Hermann Ritter.

● Verna Mohon

March 8, 1943

Marius Jensen and two Greenlandic patrol members, Mikael Kunak and William Arke, set out to patrol the area north of Eskimonæs, their home base. There was a trapper's hut on Sabine Island, 60 miles (96 km) away, that they wanted to check.

The dogs picked up the scent of 'strangers' from several miles away, aromas of different tobacco and food items. Their ears pricked up and their pace changed, signaling that something 'un-Arctic' was ahead. As they drew nearer, they saw smoke coming from the chimney and footprints on the ice: the footprints of men wearing military-style boots with heels, not the soft sealskin kamiks worn by local trappers.

However, before they reached the hut, they saw two men escape up the mountainside. Inside, they found two half-empty mugs of coffee on the table, sleeping bags, Nazi uniforms, daggers, supplies, coal and almost half a polar bear.

The three men set out straightaway on the return journey to Eskimonæs, to report the discovery as soon as possible, but Jensen knew that the dogs were in need of rest, so, they stopped for the night in a hut just 5 miles (8 km) south of Sabine Island.

Meanwhile the two German soldiers had made it quickly back to their headquarters at Hansa Bugt, a secluded inlet that was also on Sabine Island. Jensen and his men had found a hut with two scouts, not realizing that over the hill was Germany's secret headquarters, commanded by Lieutenant Hermann Ritter.

March 11, 1943

Sheltered in the tiny hut, they heard men approaching during the night. The dogs had raised the alarm. They had no idea how many men, or the extent of the threat, but made the decision to escape immediately on foot, grabbing only their rifles.

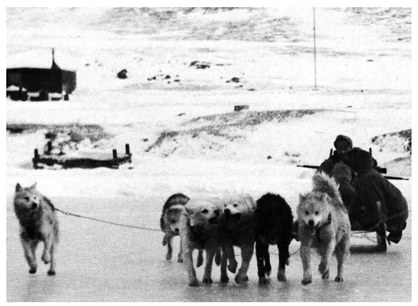
Musk Ox.

Ritter had sent a patrol to find them, hoping to stop them before they could report their sighting of the German presence to the Sledge Patrol headquarters at Eskimonæs. Their orders were to bring them back, alive or, if necessary, dead.

March 13, 1943

Fortunately, after their narrow escape, Marius Jensen and his men did make it back. They had slogged nearly 100 miles across ice and snow in two days. Summing up the setback, Kurt Olsen, a senior member of the Sledge Patrol based at Eskimonæs, managed to radio the following message to Governor Eske Brun in Nuuk:

"We have suffered a severe loss. Half of our dogs and three fully equipped sledges. Fritz also got his hands on Marius's journal, so, he could not be better informed of our whereabouts."



A contemporary photograph of a patrolman setting out from Sanodden Station.

RAID

March 23, 1943

Ten days later, in the early evening, the Sledge Patrol's command base at Eskimonæs was attacked. Lt. Ritter had sent a squad with submachine guns, as well as rifles and revolvers. It was a carefully planned assault.

Compared to the simple trapper's huts on the trails, the station at Eskimonæs was luxurious. The red-painted house had a large living area in the centre with a roaring stove, comfortable chairs and tables. This was ringed with six bedrooms and radio room, together with a generator room. Surrounding the exterior wall of each were storerooms, doubling as outer layers of insulation.

When the Germans arrived, there were only five men at the base. Days earlier, some had been sent to the radio station at Ella Island, whilst Marius Jensen and Eli Knudsen had been despatched north to look for another patrolman, Peter Nielsen, who they thought did not yet know of the German presence.

On hearing their approach (those brilliant dogs again!), the camp commander, Ib Poulsen, stepped out, his rifle loaded, to ask the Germans what they wanted. After some initial distantly shouted exchanges, the Germans inquired:

"Do you intend to offer armed resistance?"

Poulsen responded succinctly: "Jawohl." ("Yes.")

The Germans opened fire! Somehow, in the hail of bullets that ensued, Poulsen managed to escape. He ran into the cold night, without his arctic-weather gear, save for his trousers and sealskin boots. Miraculously, he survived. At a hidden supply mound, he found a tent, which he cut into a makeshift anorak and then walked 230 miles to Ella Island. The others also escaped, faring better because they had a moment to grab their polar clothing.

The base at Eskimonæs did not survive. The Germans torched it and in a spectacular, crackling blaze against the snow, it burned to the ground.

#DUEL ON ICE

Eli Knudsen.

Armband designating the Sledge Patrol as military personnel.

Marius Jensen.

AMBUSH

Meanwhile, Marius Jensen and Eli Knudsen had found Peter Nielsen and the three were now travelling back to Eskimonæs. Eli Knudsen had the better dog team and had pulled far ahead of the others. He headed for Sandodden hunting station to get some rest.

March 26, 1943

After the raid on Eskimonæs, Ritter's patrol had also headed to Sanodden. When Eli Knudsen arrived, they were lying in wait.

As the soldiers rose, like apparitions from the snow, Eli mushed his team to make a run for it. Ritter ordered his men to 'shoot the dogs.' Several fell in the first burst, dragging as the sledge continued. Then, in the second burst, Eli Knudsen was shot and killed.

Eli Knudsen

It was unintended; the gunner's aim was off because of a jam. Hermann Ritter later recalled that he deeply regretted Knudsen's death and that he had recurring nightmares about it.

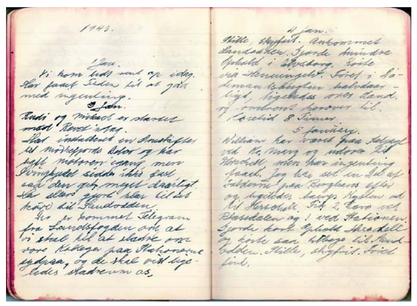
Ritter was an 'old school' soldier, doing his duty as best he could, but he had no sympathy for the Nazi cause. Before this command, he had at one time been investigated by the Gestapo for some of his remarks. More senior officers, who had regard for him, spoke up and saved him. He was here partly because of his polar expertise and partly to put him out of the way.

The dead dogs were swept under the snow, the rest of the team was staked out and the sledge drawn up outside the hut. The stove was lit.

When Marius Jensen and Peter Nielsen arrived a little later, they expected to see Eli Knudsen inside. Instead, they were ambushed by Ritter's men. Outnumbered and outgunned, they surrendered.

CARDS, CONTEMPLATION AND COMRADESHIP

As prisoners of war, Jensen and Nielsen were taken to Ritter's HQ at Hansa Bugt on Sabine Island.



Marius Jensen's journal captured by the German patrol.

Lt. Hermann Ritter

With the German location on Greenland having been detected, Ritter assumed it was only a matter of time before U.S. bombers would be called in. His job was to survive and save his men, until the sea-ice melted enough for a rescue ship to dock and evacuate them.

To that end, he launched a campaign of reconnaissance to seek out places to hide and to find and destroy any Allied communications centres.

He recognized that Marius Jensen not only had innate knowledge of the topography, he was also something of a dog whisperer with the oftentimes quarrelsome Greenland dogs. Their power and pull was unmatched but they were aggressive and independent, requiring expert handling, something many of his men struggled with.

Jensen and Nielsen were unshackled and unguarded, having given their word not to escape. In the evenings, Ritter and Jensen played cards, discussed philosophy and shared their mutual passion for the Arctic. They formed a friendship and deep regard for each other, despite also retaining their sense of patriotic duty. Marius Jensen was even able to persuade Ritter to let Peter Nielsen take a sledge back to Sandodden to buttress Eli Knudsen's grave, protecting his corpse from scavengers like arctic foxes. In exchange, he agreed to cooperate, to show Ritter the routes and to drive his sledge.

This takes us to that stage of the story where we started, at the Myggebugten hut on the morning of April 19th; with Ritter staring down the barrel of his own rifle and Jensen saying:

"Now, you are my prisoner."

This followed, if you remember, Lt. Ritter sending a squad of soldiers to destroy the radio station at Ella Island.

THE RACE FOR ELLA ISLAND

Jensen feared that the German soldiers Ritter had sent to Ella Island would kill the personnel there. Consequently, he left Ritter in the hut and set off alone, determined to beat them and to warn the Danish radio crew.

At 31-years-old, Jensen was in his physical prime and the arctic wilderness was his natural habitat. He was deeply bonded with his crack dog team and he had given the Germans a map that followed circuitous trails around the fjords. He knew a shorter route across the ice!

Marius Jensen

To make his sledge lighter, he unloaded a large amount of the supplies and left them in the hut with Ritter. There was no need to bind his prisoner; he was confident that he would not escape.

Ritter, assuming that Jensen had headed off to his own safety, had no choice but to stay where he was, and await the return of his patrol. It, at least, afforded him an opportunity to rest and restore his strength a little; something that he would all too soon be required to draw upon.

To be continued...

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Polar Bear.

#JLF

Jaipur Literature Festival unveils Second Speaker List for 20th Edition

The second list of speakers straddles fiction and poetry, histories of empire and civilisation, questions of identity and belonging...

Makarand Sathe.

Ben Moser (c) Nan Goldin 2.

As the Vedanta Presents Jaipur Literature Festival prepares to celebrate two decades of literary discovery and cultural dialogue, it announces its second list of speakers for the landmark 20th edition, set to take place from 14 - 18 January 2027 at Hotel Clarks Amer, Jaipur. The new announcement brings together an expansive and diverse group of writers, historians, academics, scientists, journalists, artists and public figures. The second list of speakers straddles fiction and poetry, histories of empire and civilisation, questions of identity and belonging, scientific discovery, international affairs, wellbeing, food and the arts.

The list features Adania Shibli, the Palestinian writer whose novel *Minor Detail* was nominated for the National Book Award and the International Booker Prize; Alice Roberts, the biological anthropologist, author and broadcaster known for her work on human evolution and archaeology; and Ananya Vajpeyi, whose scholarship explores Indian intellectual history and political thought. The Festival also welcomes Benjamin Moser, the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer and writer, among its distinguished line-up of speakers; Caroline Elkins, Harvard professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian whose work subverts the idea of British 'liberal imperialism,' and Claire Messud, acclaimed novelist whose writing explores identity, relationships and contemporary life.

The list features Eric Cline, archaeologist and historian whose research focuses on the ancient Mediterranean and Near East; Gabrielle Rifkind, whose work centres on conflict resolution and international relations; and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, whose fiction explores the Adivasi identity. Makarand Sathe, Marathi playwright, novelist and theatre director, joins Mira Seo, whose academic work engages with classical literature, and Mona Arshi, poet and novelist whose writing explores identity, family and belonging. Neil MacGregor, distinguished art historian and former director of the British Museum, brings his expertise in art and cultural history, while Paul Zacharia, acclaimed Malayalam writer and essayist, comes with his expertise that blends social commentary, satire and philosophical enquiry with fiction.

Also featuring in the announcement are Ritu Dalmia, the chef and restaurateur and co-owner of the popular Italian restaurant Diva; Roxie Nafousi, author and self-development coach known for her work on personal growth; and Shriram Nene, cardiovascular surgeon and health advocate whose public work focuses on healthcare and medical awareness. Sir Paul Nurse, Nobel Prize-winning geneticist and cell biologist, brings pioneering scientific ideas while Suraj Yengde, author of *Caste Matters*, examines caste, race and social justice. Sven Beckert, Harvard historian known for his work on capitalism and global economic history, and Tabish Khair, novelist, poet and critic whose writing explores migration, identity and cultural encounters, along with author and linguist Thangjam Hindustani Devi joins the list.

The announcement further includes Akshata Murty known for her work in business, philanthropy and social impact; Mishal Husain, acclaimed journalist, broadcaster and author; and Vishaka N. Desai, an art historian whose work focuses on Asian art, museums and international cultural exchange.

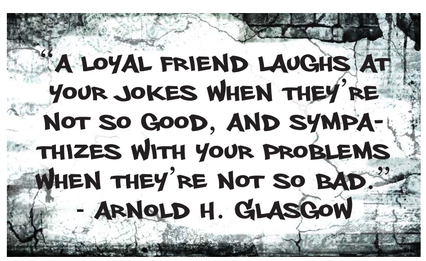
Sanjoy K Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts, said, "At a time when the world needs platforms for meaningful dialogue more than ever, we remain committed to bringing people and ideas together across disciplines, cultures and intercontinental boundaries, encouraging conversations that challenge assumptions, broaden horizons and remind us of our shared humanity."

As the Jaipur Literature Festival approaches its 20th edition, the programme promises another literary marathon marked by the diversity and freedom of ideas.

Adania Shibli (c) Liudas Masys 2026.

Neil MacGregor.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman