

# HAZVARI



## A STRANGE FILE



## Chapter 1: Shadows in Oman

The evening air hung thick with humidity as James Brown adjusted his designer sunglasses, casually leaning against the outdoor railing of the upscale café in Muscat. Despite the late hour, the heat of the day still clung stubbornly to the city.

Dressed in an impeccably tailored light linen suit that screamed "wealthy tech investor" rather than "former MI6 operative," he sipped his Turkish coffee and maintained his cover flawlessly.

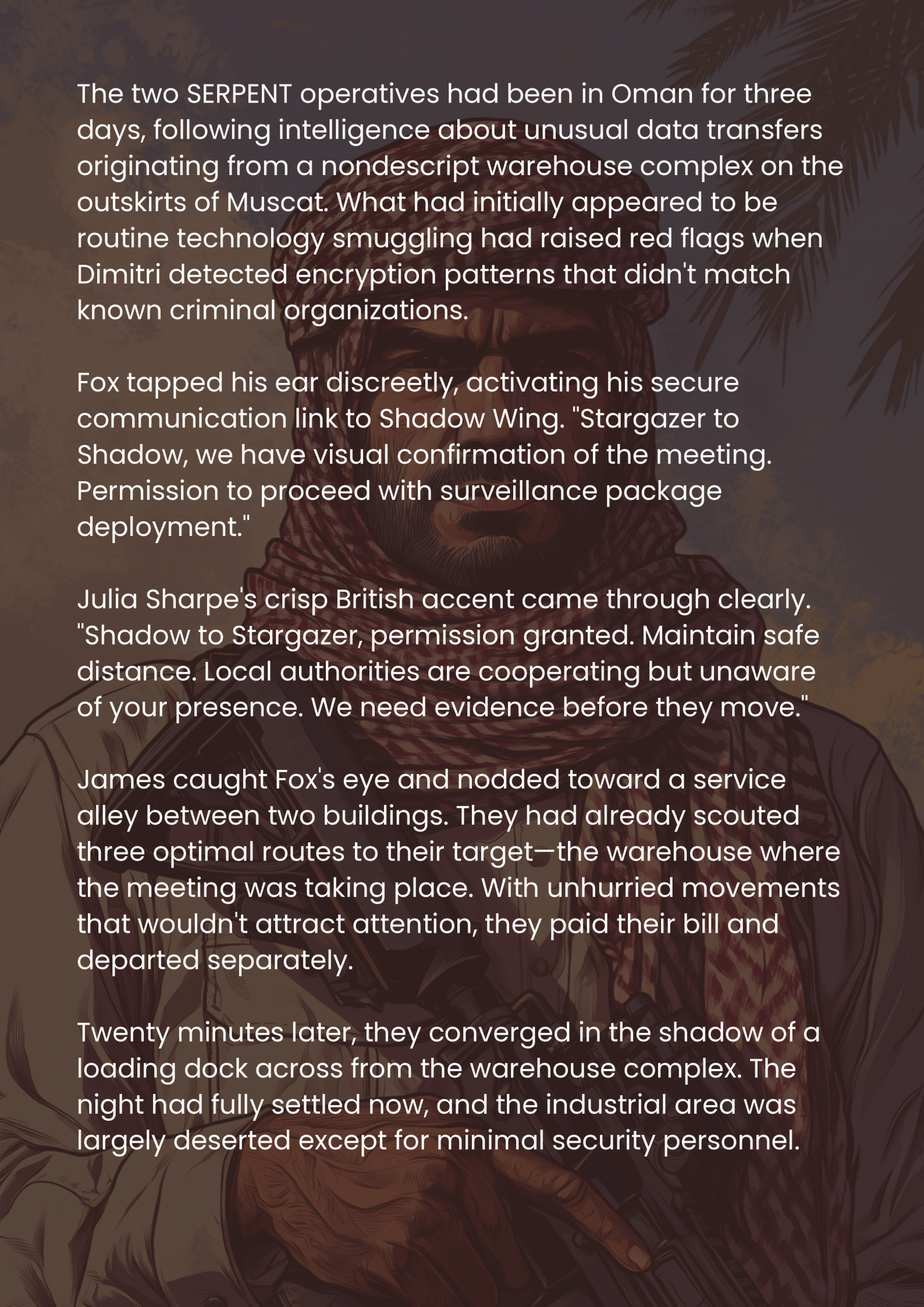
"Our friends are on the move," he murmured, the words barely audible over the ambient chatter of the café patrons.

Across the table, Fox Meyer nodded almost imperceptibly, his attention seemingly fixed on his tablet displaying fabricated investment portfolios. In reality, the modified device was tracking the movements of three individuals who had just exited a black SUV across the street.

"I count five now," Fox replied, flicking through screens as if reviewing market data. "Two more just arrived from the east entrance. The exchange might be happening tonight rather than tomorrow."

James set down his cup with practiced nonchalance. "Julia's intel was spot on, as usual. The Overseer rarely misses."





The two SERPENT operatives had been in Oman for three days, following intelligence about unusual data transfers originating from a nondescript warehouse complex on the outskirts of Muscat. What had initially appeared to be routine technology smuggling had raised red flags when Dimitri detected encryption patterns that didn't match known criminal organizations.

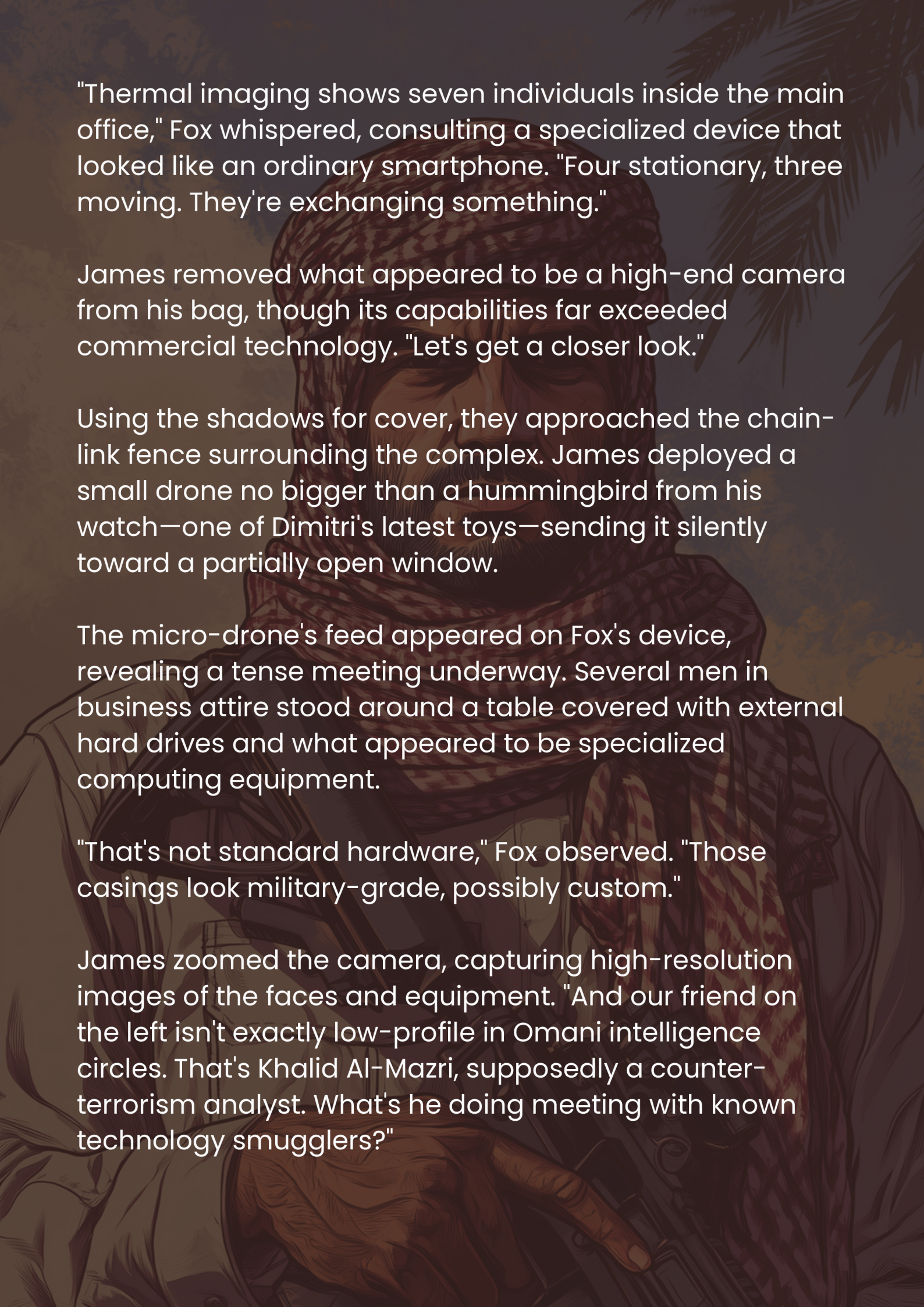
Fox tapped his ear discreetly, activating his secure communication link to Shadow Wing. "Stargazer to Shadow, we have visual confirmation of the meeting. Permission to proceed with surveillance package deployment."

Julia Sharpe's crisp British accent came through clearly. "Shadow to Stargazer, permission granted. Maintain safe distance. Local authorities are cooperating but unaware of your presence. We need evidence before they move."

James caught Fox's eye and nodded toward a service alley between two buildings. They had already scouted three optimal routes to their target—the warehouse where the meeting was taking place. With unhurried movements that wouldn't attract attention, they paid their bill and departed separately.

Twenty minutes later, they converged in the shadow of a loading dock across from the warehouse complex. The night had fully settled now, and the industrial area was largely deserted except for minimal security personnel.





"Thermal imaging shows seven individuals inside the main office," Fox whispered, consulting a specialized device that looked like an ordinary smartphone. "Four stationary, three moving. They're exchanging something."

James removed what appeared to be a high-end camera from his bag, though its capabilities far exceeded commercial technology. "Let's get a closer look."

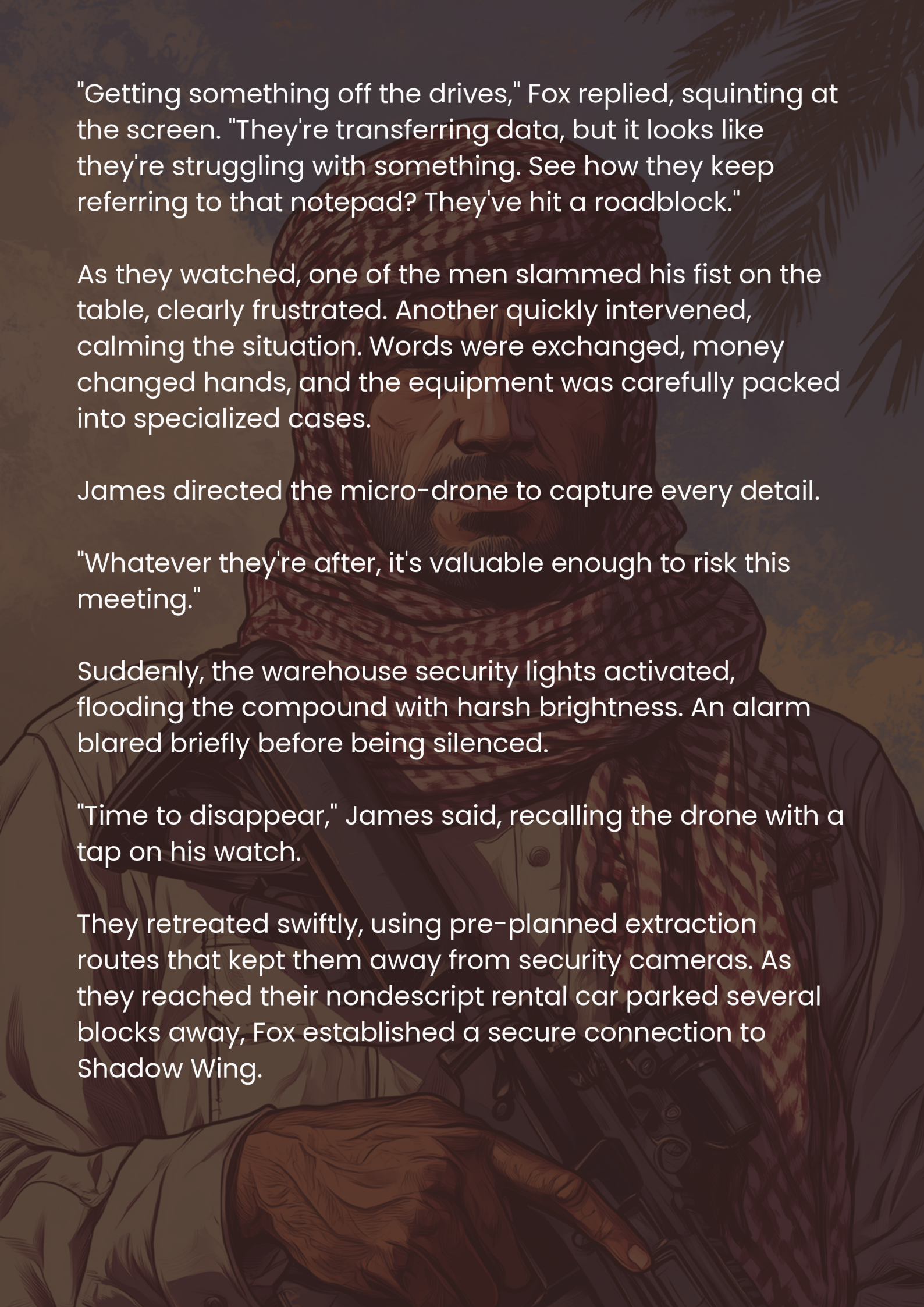
Using the shadows for cover, they approached the chain-link fence surrounding the complex. James deployed a small drone no bigger than a hummingbird from his watch—one of Dimitri's latest toys—sending it silently toward a partially open window.

The micro-drone's feed appeared on Fox's device, revealing a tense meeting underway. Several men in business attire stood around a table covered with external hard drives and what appeared to be specialized computing equipment.

"That's not standard hardware," Fox observed. "Those casings look military-grade, possibly custom."

James zoomed the camera, capturing high-resolution images of the faces and equipment. "And our friend on the left isn't exactly low-profile in Omani intelligence circles. That's Khalid Al-Mazri, supposedly a counter-terrorism analyst. What's he doing meeting with known technology smugglers?"



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown turban and a patterned shawl, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a rifle with both hands, and his right hand is resting on the trigger guard. The background is dark and indistinct.

"Getting something off the drives," Fox replied, squinting at the screen. "They're transferring data, but it looks like they're struggling with something. See how they keep referring to that notepad? They've hit a roadblock."

As they watched, one of the men slammed his fist on the table, clearly frustrated. Another quickly intervened, calming the situation. Words were exchanged, money changed hands, and the equipment was carefully packed into specialized cases.

James directed the micro-drone to capture every detail.

"Whatever they're after, it's valuable enough to risk this meeting."

Suddenly, the warehouse security lights activated, flooding the compound with harsh brightness. An alarm blared briefly before being silenced.

"Time to disappear," James said, recalling the drone with a tap on his watch.

They retreated swiftly, using pre-planned extraction routes that kept them away from security cameras. As they reached their nondescript rental car parked several blocks away, Fox established a secure connection to Shadow Wing.



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown and white checkered turban and a dark military uniform, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a black assault rifle with both hands. The background is dark and indistinct.

"Stargazer to Shadow, package secured but we may have tripped a silent alarm. Recommend immediate data transmission and extraction planning."

"Acknowledged," came Julia's response.

"Transmit your findings and proceed to extraction point Delta. We have allies in Omani intelligence preparing to move on the warehouse, but they need justification. Your evidence might be just what they need."

Fox looked at James as they pulled away from the curb. "Something tells me we just scratched the surface here." "Indeed," James replied, his expression thoughtful as the city lights illuminated his face.

"And I suspect our Special Agent K is about to get very busy with whatever was on those drives."



## Chapter 2: Shadow Wing Analysis

The Bombardier Global 8000 known as Shadow Wing cruised at 45,000 feet above the Arabian Sea, its sleek modified exterior giving no indication of the hive of activity within. The aircraft wasn't merely transportation for SERPENT—it was command central, analysis hub, and tactical headquarters rolled into one.

In the analyst's war room at the heart of the aircraft, Dimitri Zechev hunched over his workstation, his fingers dancing across multiple keyboards as data streams scrolled across his screens. The Bulgarian tech expert hadn't slept in twenty-six hours, but the three espresso shots Mei had brought him kept his mind razor-sharp. "There it is again," he muttered, pushing his glasses up his nose. "That's the third pulse in the same pattern."

Mei Huang glanced up from her own station, where she'd been analyzing linguistic patterns in communications intercepted from the Omani warehouse. "The encrypted transmission?"

"Yes, but it's not just encrypted—it's fragmented. They're splitting the data across multiple channels to avoid detection." Dimitri's eyes never left the screen as he spoke. "Clever, but not clever enough."

Isabella Moreno joined them, carrying a tablet displaying historical satellite imagery of the warehouse district.





"The facility has changed hands three times in the past eighteen months. Each time to a different shell corporation, but I've traced them all back to the same holding company in Singapore."

"Which is likely another shell," Mei observed.

"Naturally," Isabella agreed. "But what's interesting is the timing. Each ownership transfer coincided with a major technology seizure elsewhere in the region. It's as if they're creating distraction events."

The holographic command table in the center of the room suddenly illuminated as Julia Sharpe entered. The Overseer's presence immediately commanded attention, her tailored suit as impeccable as her reputation.

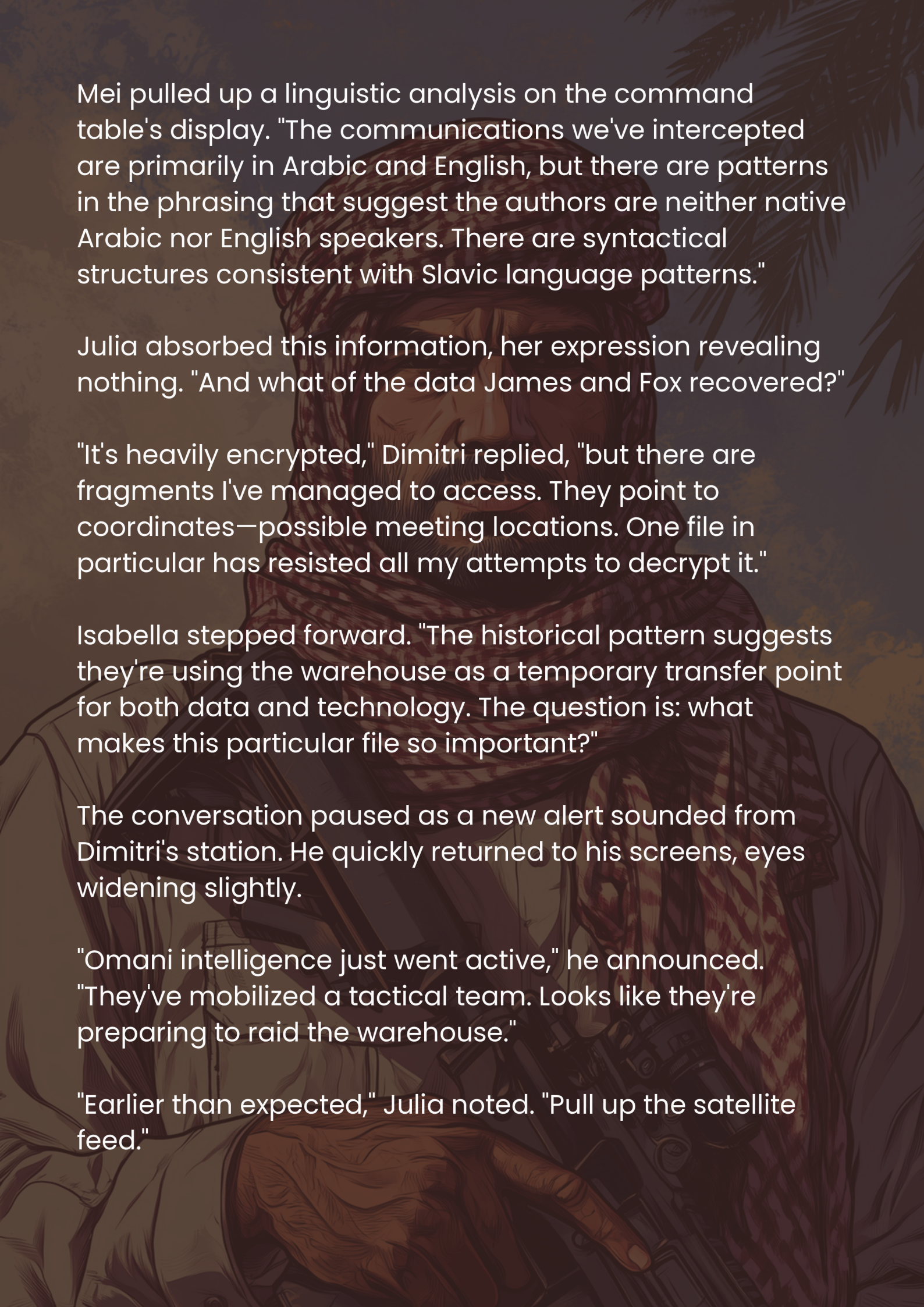
"Status update," she requested simply.

Dimitri swiveled in his chair. "I've isolated the transmission pattern. They're sending data packets that reassemble elsewhere—likely on a server outside our immediate monitoring range. But I've captured enough to know it's not standard criminal encryption. This has government-level sophistication."

"Omani government?" Julia asked.

"No," Dimitri shook his head. "If I had to guess, I'd say we're looking at technology that originated from either Chinese or Russian intelligence services, but modified by someone with considerable skill."





Mei pulled up a linguistic analysis on the command table's display. "The communications we've intercepted are primarily in Arabic and English, but there are patterns in the phrasing that suggest the authors are neither native Arabic nor English speakers. There are syntactical structures consistent with Slavic language patterns."

Julia absorbed this information, her expression revealing nothing. "And what of the data James and Fox recovered?"

"It's heavily encrypted," Dimitri replied, "but there are fragments I've managed to access. They point to coordinates—possible meeting locations. One file in particular has resisted all my attempts to decrypt it."

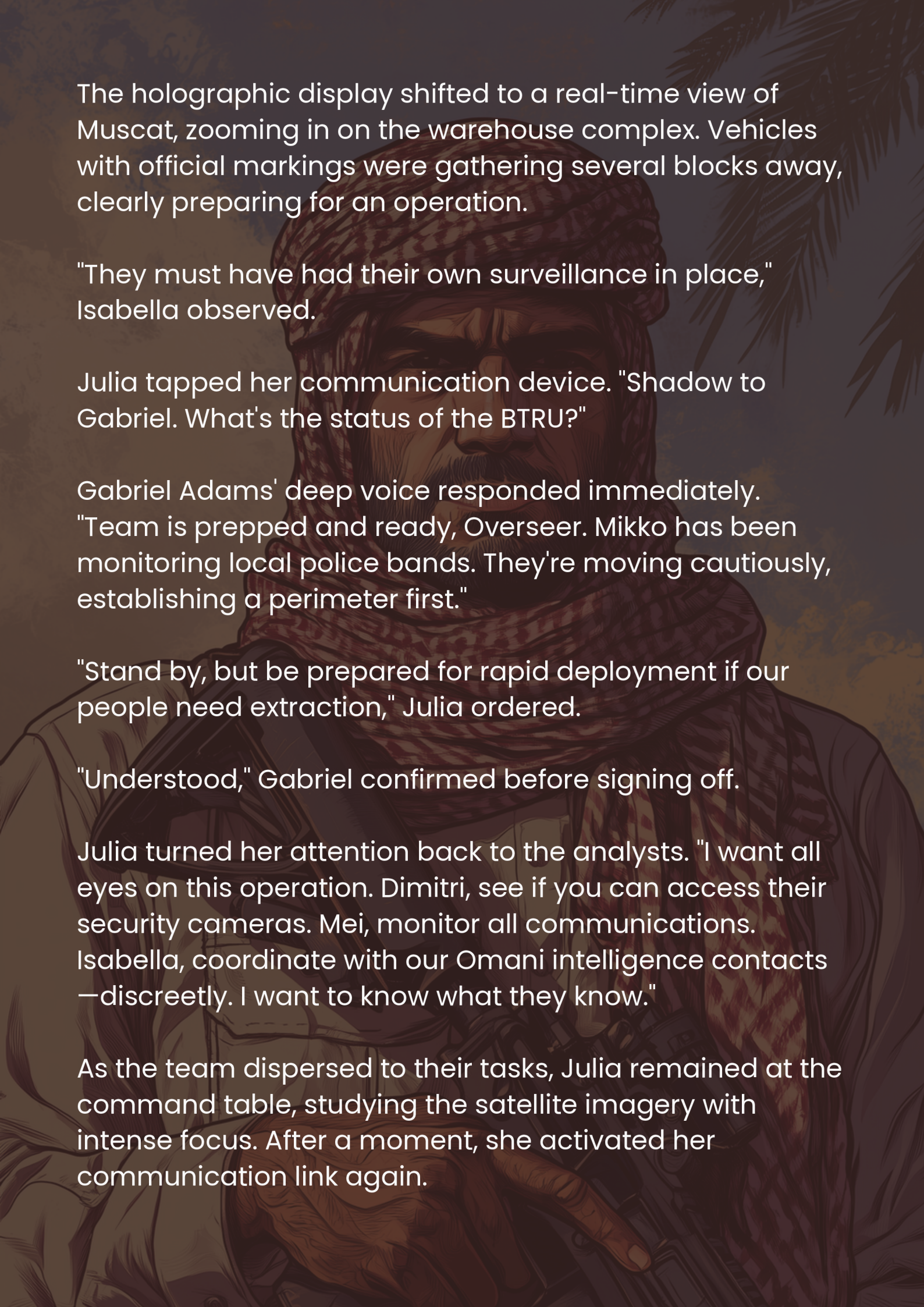
Isabella stepped forward. "The historical pattern suggests they're using the warehouse as a temporary transfer point for both data and technology. The question is: what makes this particular file so important?"

The conversation paused as a new alert sounded from Dimitri's station. He quickly returned to his screens, eyes widening slightly.

"Omani intelligence just went active," he announced. "They've mobilized a tactical team. Looks like they're preparing to raid the warehouse."

"Earlier than expected," Julia noted. "Pull up the satellite feed."





The holographic display shifted to a real-time view of Muscat, zooming in on the warehouse complex. Vehicles with official markings were gathering several blocks away, clearly preparing for an operation.

"They must have had their own surveillance in place," Isabella observed.

Julia tapped her communication device. "Shadow to Gabriel. What's the status of the BTRU?"

Gabriel Adams' deep voice responded immediately. "Team is prepped and ready, Overseer. Mikko has been monitoring local police bands. They're moving cautiously, establishing a perimeter first."

"Stand by, but be prepared for rapid deployment if our people need extraction," Julia ordered.

"Understood," Gabriel confirmed before signing off.

Julia turned her attention back to the analysts. "I want all eyes on this operation. Dimitri, see if you can access their security cameras. Mei, monitor all communications. Isabella, coordinate with our Omani intelligence contacts—discreetly. I want to know what they know."

As the team dispersed to their tasks, Julia remained at the command table, studying the satellite imagery with intense focus. After a moment, she activated her communication link again.



## Chapter 3: First Contact

The raid on the warehouse unfolded with military precision. From Shadow Wing's command center, the SERPENT team watched through multiple feeds as Omani special forces breached the facility, catching several occupants off-guard. Dimitri had successfully accessed the building's security cameras, providing the team with interior views that even the Omani tactical team lacked.

"They're securing the main server room," Special Agent K observed, eyes fixed on the central monitor. Having arrived in the command center moments earlier, K had immediately grasped the situation and begun applying analytical skills to the unfolding operation.

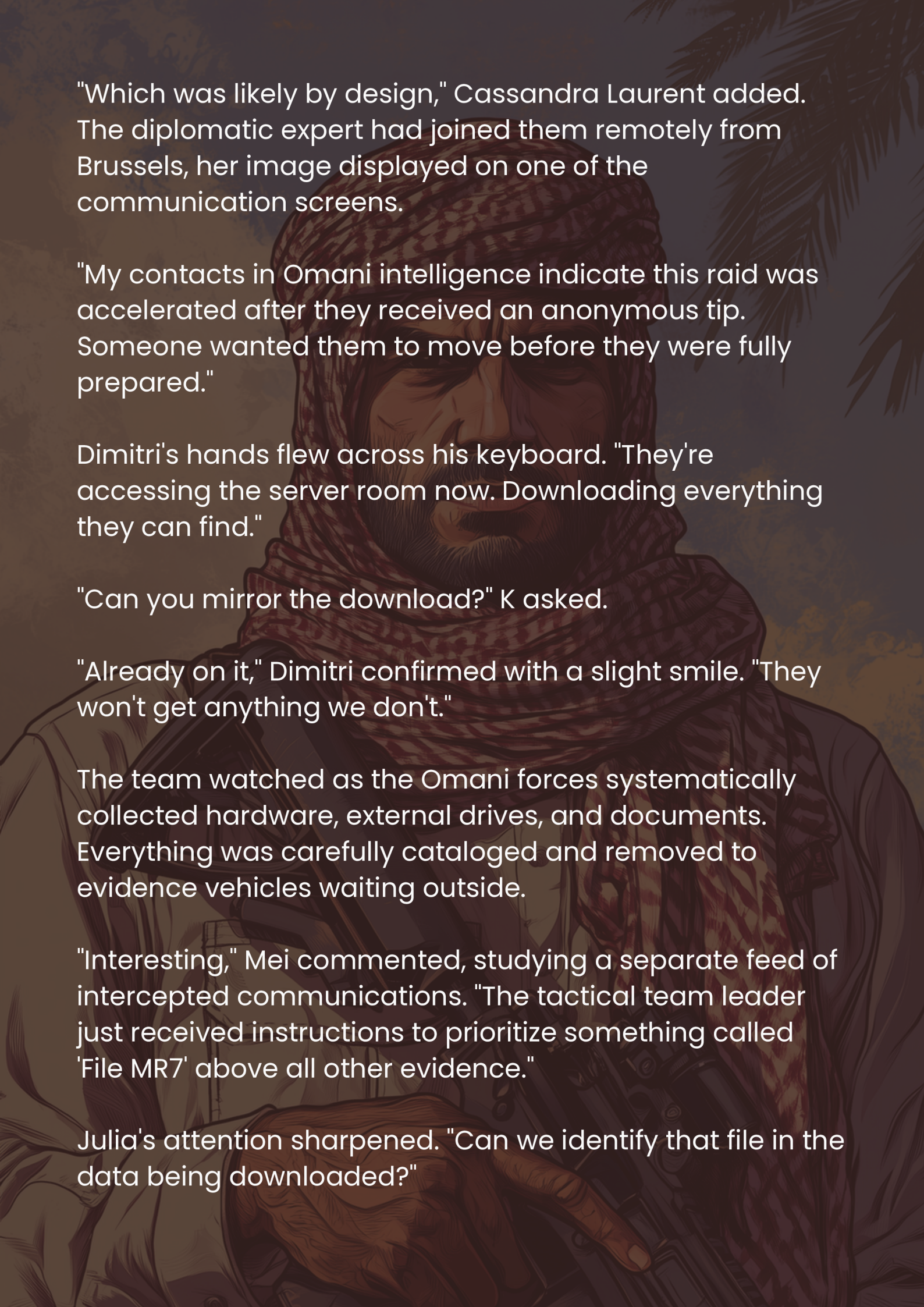
On screen, armed officers in tactical gear methodically cleared rooms, detaining three individuals who offered no resistance. They appeared to be low-level staff rather than the key players James and Fox had observed the previous night.

"The primary targets are already gone," Julia noted, her tone neutral but her expression betraying frustration.

"They must have been tipped off."

Gabriel Adams stood with arms crossed near the tactical display, watching the operation with a professional's eye. "The Omani team is good—clean entry, proper room clearing procedures. But they're about twelve hours too late."



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown turban and a patterned shawl, is shown from the chest up. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and indistinct.

"Which was likely by design," Cassandra Laurent added. The diplomatic expert had joined them remotely from Brussels, her image displayed on one of the communication screens.

"My contacts in Omani intelligence indicate this raid was accelerated after they received an anonymous tip. Someone wanted them to move before they were fully prepared."

Dimitri's hands flew across his keyboard. "They're accessing the server room now. Downloading everything they can find."

"Can you mirror the download?" K asked.

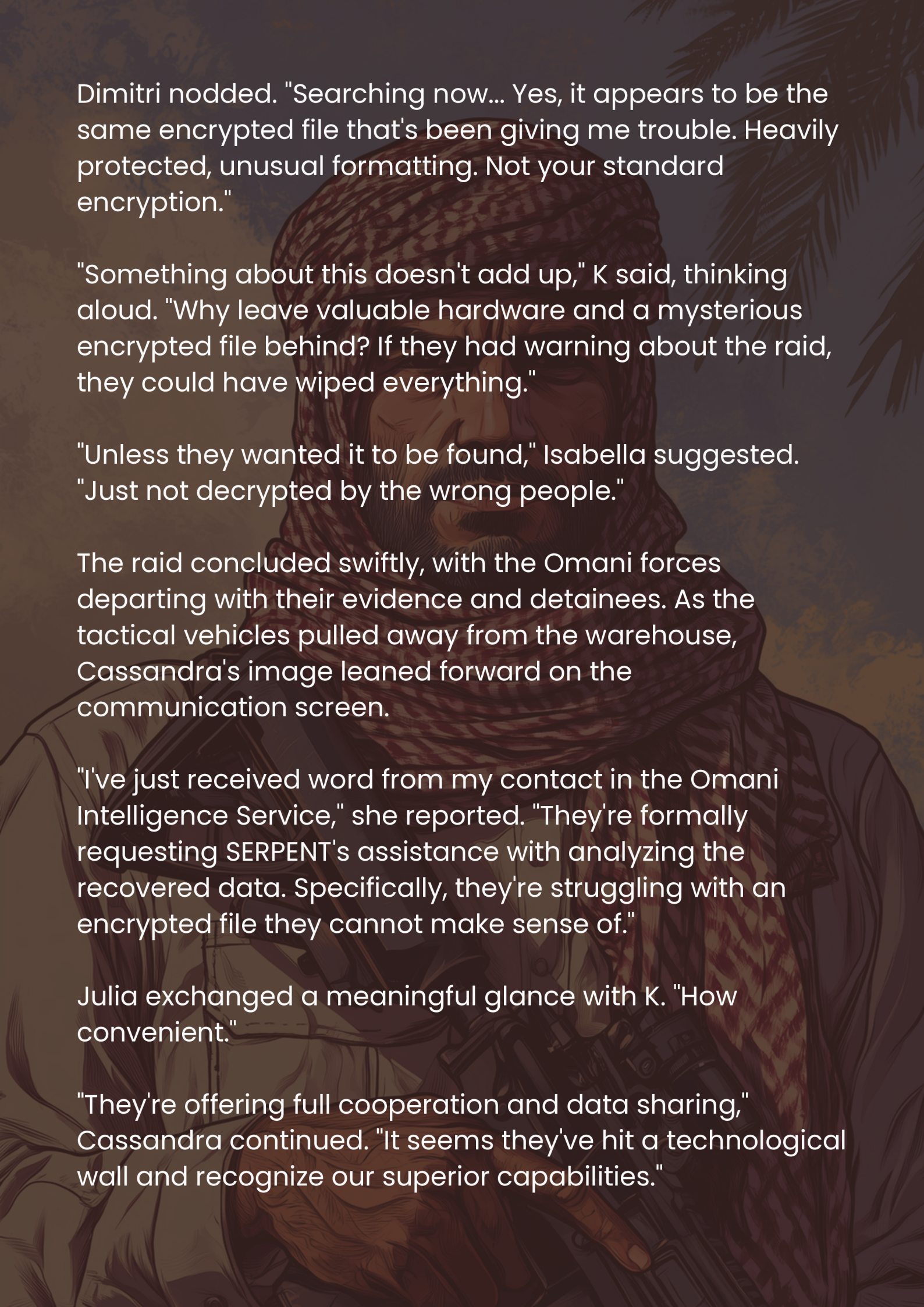
"Already on it," Dimitri confirmed with a slight smile. "They won't get anything we don't."

The team watched as the Omani forces systematically collected hardware, external drives, and documents. Everything was carefully cataloged and removed to evidence vehicles waiting outside.

"Interesting," Mei commented, studying a separate feed of intercepted communications. "The tactical team leader just received instructions to prioritize something called 'File MR7' above all other evidence."

Julia's attention sharpened. "Can we identify that file in the data being downloaded?"



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown and white patterned turban and a dark military uniform, is shown from the chest up. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

Dimitri nodded. "Searching now... Yes, it appears to be the same encrypted file that's been giving me trouble. Heavily protected, unusual formatting. Not your standard encryption."

"Something about this doesn't add up," K said, thinking aloud. "Why leave valuable hardware and a mysterious encrypted file behind? If they had warning about the raid, they could have wiped everything."

"Unless they wanted it to be found," Isabella suggested. "Just not decrypted by the wrong people."

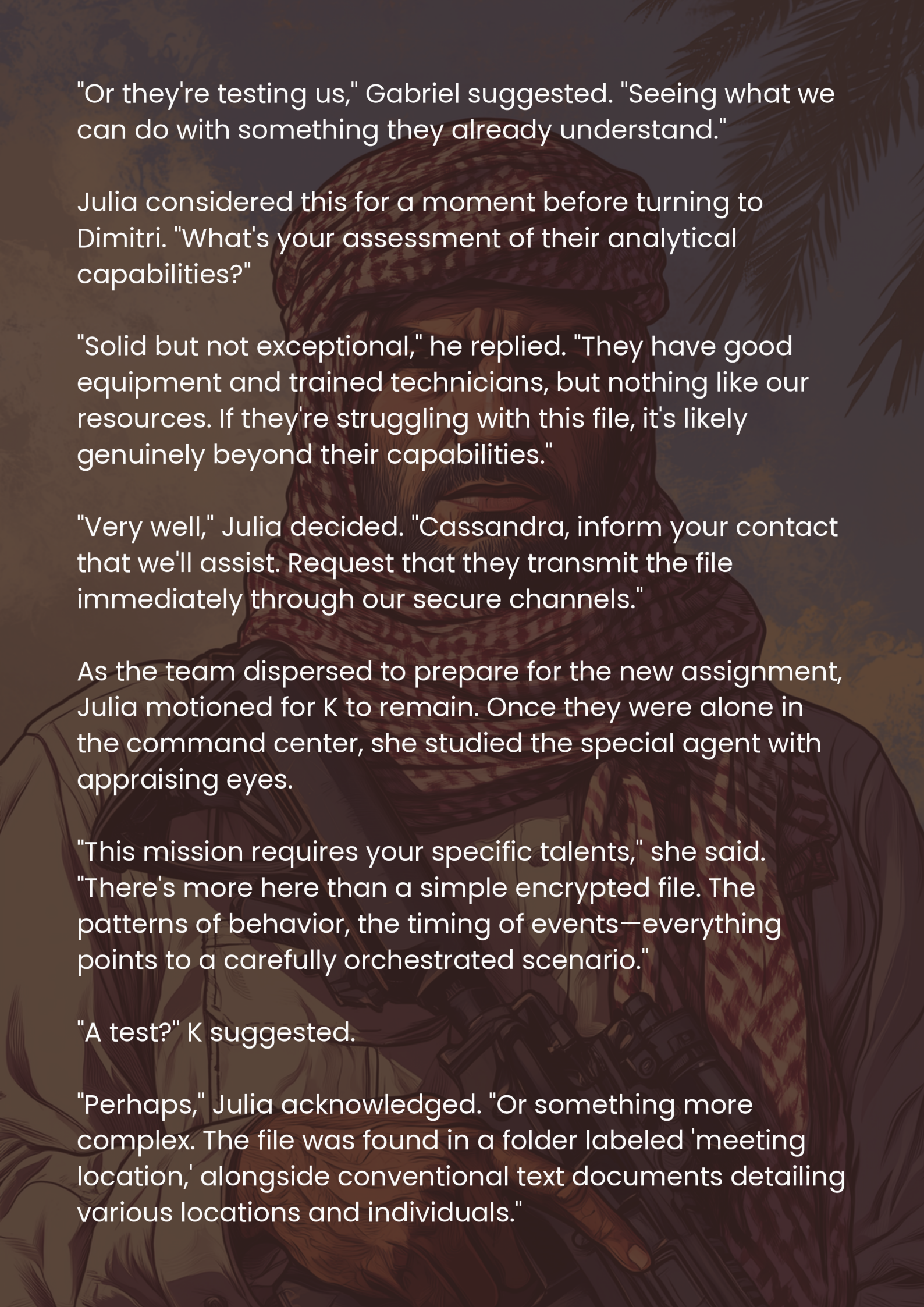
The raid concluded swiftly, with the Omani forces departing with their evidence and detainees. As the tactical vehicles pulled away from the warehouse, Cassandra's image leaned forward on the communication screen.

"I've just received word from my contact in the Omani Intelligence Service," she reported. "They're formally requesting SERPENT's assistance with analyzing the recovered data. Specifically, they're struggling with an encrypted file they cannot make sense of."

Julia exchanged a meaningful glance with K. "How convenient."

"They're offering full cooperation and data sharing," Cassandra continued. "It seems they've hit a technological wall and recognize our superior capabilities."





"Or they're testing us," Gabriel suggested. "Seeing what we can do with something they already understand."

Julia considered this for a moment before turning to Dimitri. "What's your assessment of their analytical capabilities?"

"Solid but not exceptional," he replied. "They have good equipment and trained technicians, but nothing like our resources. If they're struggling with this file, it's likely genuinely beyond their capabilities."

"Very well," Julia decided. "Cassandra, inform your contact that we'll assist. Request that they transmit the file immediately through our secure channels."

As the team dispersed to prepare for the new assignment, Julia motioned for K to remain. Once they were alone in the command center, she studied the special agent with appraising eyes.

"This mission requires your specific talents," she said. "There's more here than a simple encrypted file. The patterns of behavior, the timing of events—everything points to a carefully orchestrated scenario."

"A test?" K suggested.

"Perhaps," Julia acknowledged. "Or something more complex. The file was found in a folder labeled 'meeting location,' alongside conventional text documents detailing various locations and individuals."



A man with a beard, wearing a keffiyeh (a red and black checkered headscarf) and a dark jacket, is holding a rifle. He is looking down at the rifle. The background is dark and blurry, suggesting an outdoor setting at night or in low light. The overall tone is serious and tactical.

"A rendezvous point," K concluded. "Hidden in plain sight."

"Exactly," Julia agreed. "I need you to crack this puzzle, Agent. Whatever is encoded in that file could lead to something significant. Report to my office in thirty minutes for a complete briefing."

As K left the command center, the Shadow Wing banked gently, adjusting course to maintain optimal satellite coverage over the region. Behind the specialized glass of the windows, the vast expanse of the Arabian Sea stretched to the horizon, a reminder of both the vastness of their jurisdiction and the isolating nature of their work.

In thirty minutes, the Contract would be officially offered.

And as always, the choice to accept would be K's alone.



# Briefing



Greetings, Special Agent.

During a raid of our allies in the country of Oman, several computers and server equipment were confiscated. The authorities of Oman spent the past week analyzing the data that resides on this hardware. However, they were not able to make sense of all the data. This is where we come in. If we manage to figure out what the file they've sent us means, we take on several additional contracts in the future, at very favorable terms.

A little more information about this file. It was found in a folder named "meeting location". It had several text files in it, that all had written details about locations and people. There was one file however, that the Oman authorities were not able to convert to text. Please make sense of it and report your findings Special Agent.

As always, Special Agent, the contract is yours, if you choose to accept.



# Materials

strange-file.zip

## Answer Instruction

Use the answer to unlock the flagfile, this will reward you with your badge.

For this contract you will need to use the website <https://what3words.com>

Example Answer:

italy-veneto-verona-045-hot-pasta-sauce-paper-mill

## Flagfile

Be advised, the flagfile is an encrypted ZIP. Make sure your OS supports the ZIP format. Ensure the password contains no hidden characters or formatting.

PS: Don't forget to claim your Coins and XP, by posting your card in the [#card-brag](#) channel in Discord.

<https://discord.hacktoria.com>

## Write-Up

There is an attached file called a write-up, this will give you the answer in case you get stuck.

## Acknowledgements

This challenge was made by Frank Diepmaat.