



WACKTODIA

IDENTIFY THE ENEMY
TANK AND SECURE
INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

FRIENDLY FIRE

Chapter 1: Border Incident

The midday African sun beat down mercilessly as Mikko Häyhä adjusted the focus on his binoculars. From his elevated position on a rocky outcrop, he had a clear view of the training exercise unfolding on the arid plains below.

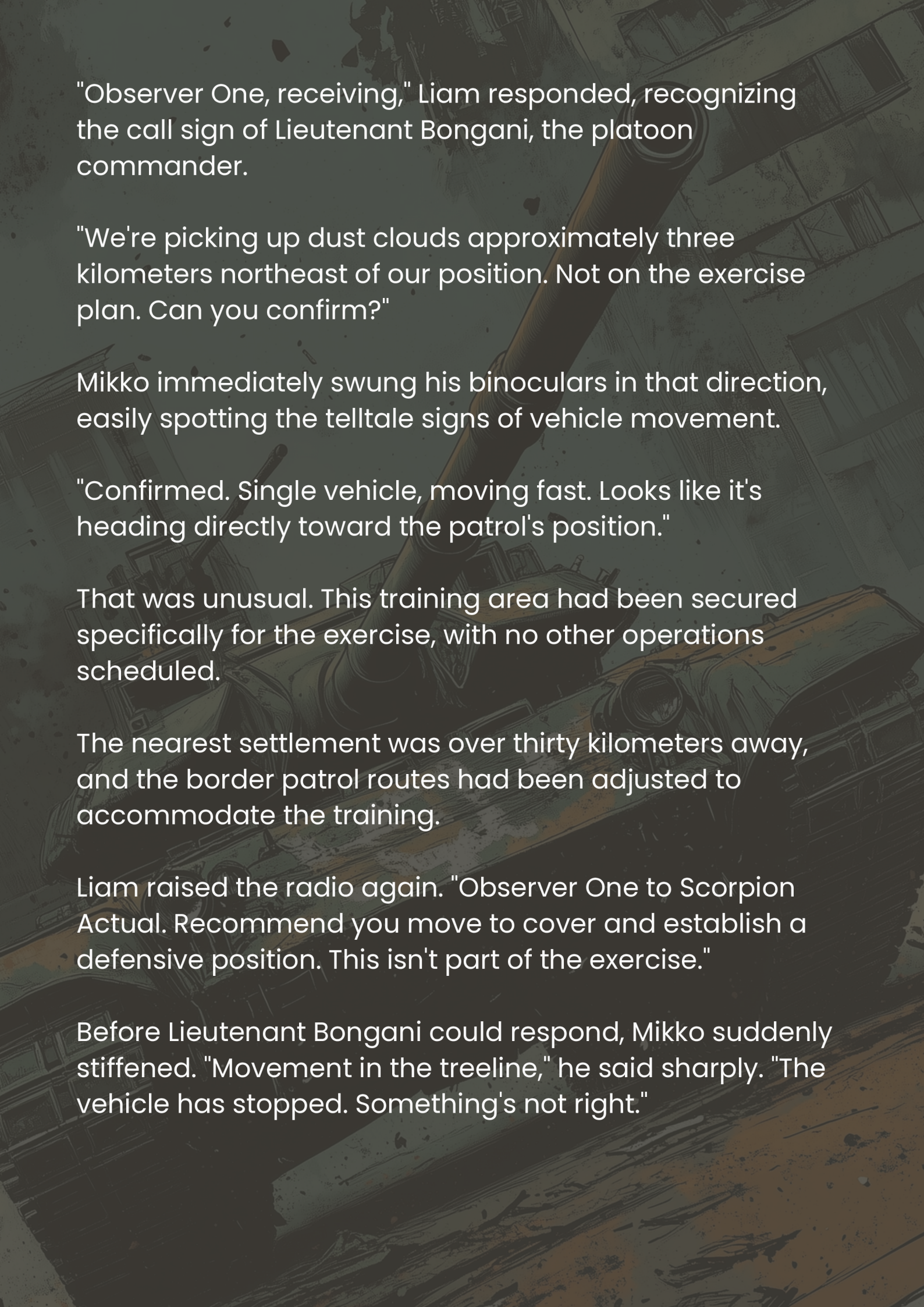
Twenty-four South African National Defense Force soldiers moved methodically through their patrol formation, exactly as he and Liam had instructed them earlier that morning.

"They're getting better," Mikko remarked, his Finnish accent barely detectable after years of international operations. "The point team is maintaining proper spacing this time."

Beside him, Liam Irwin nodded, his Australian outback experience making him particularly at home in this harsh landscape. "Good situational awareness too. Sergeant Khumalo has them checking their sectors consistently."

The two BTRU operatives had spent the past week conducting advanced training with this SANDF platoon, sharing expertise gained from their years in special operations. While officially this was a standard joint exercise, SERPENT had intelligence suggesting increased weapons trafficking across this northern border region, making their presence particularly valuable.

Liam's radio crackled to life. "Scorpion Actual to Observer One, do you copy?"



"Observer One, receiving," Liam responded, recognizing the call sign of Lieutenant Bongani, the platoon commander.

"We're picking up dust clouds approximately three kilometers northeast of our position. Not on the exercise plan. Can you confirm?"

Mikko immediately swung his binoculars in that direction, easily spotting the telltale signs of vehicle movement.

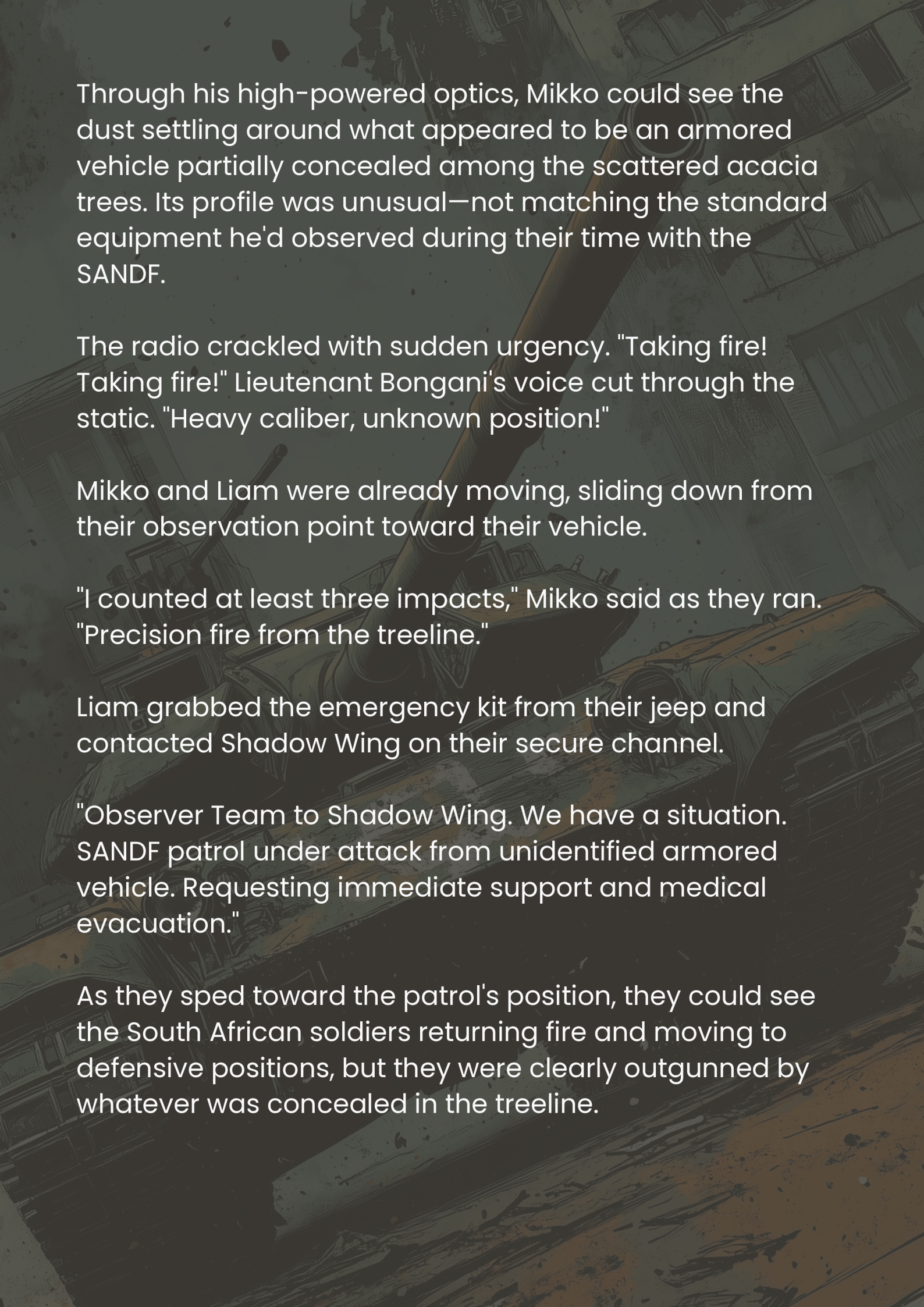
"Confirmed. Single vehicle, moving fast. Looks like it's heading directly toward the patrol's position."

That was unusual. This training area had been secured specifically for the exercise, with no other operations scheduled.

The nearest settlement was over thirty kilometers away, and the border patrol routes had been adjusted to accommodate the training.

Liam raised the radio again. "Observer One to Scorpion Actual. Recommend you move to cover and establish a defensive position. This isn't part of the exercise."

Before Lieutenant Bongani could respond, Mikko suddenly stiffened. "Movement in the treeline," he said sharply. "The vehicle has stopped. Something's not right."



Through his high-powered optics, Mikko could see the dust settling around what appeared to be an armored vehicle partially concealed among the scattered acacia trees. Its profile was unusual—not matching the standard equipment he'd observed during their time with the SANDF.

The radio crackled with sudden urgency. "Taking fire! Taking fire!" Lieutenant Bongani's voice cut through the static. "Heavy caliber, unknown position!"

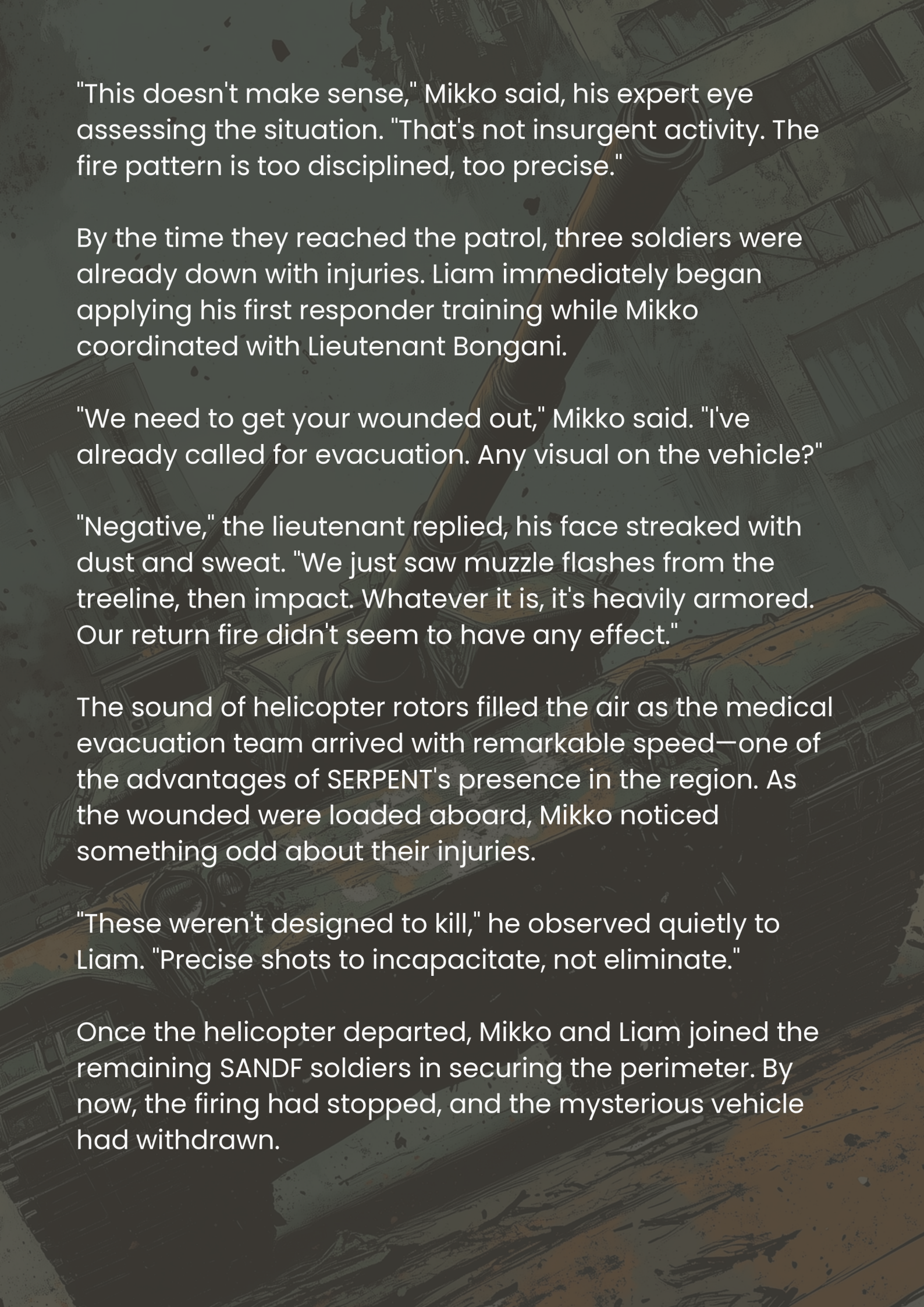
Mikko and Liam were already moving, sliding down from their observation point toward their vehicle.

"I counted at least three impacts," Mikko said as they ran. "Precision fire from the treeline."

Liam grabbed the emergency kit from their jeep and contacted Shadow Wing on their secure channel.

"Observer Team to Shadow Wing. We have a situation. SANDF patrol under attack from unidentified armored vehicle. Requesting immediate support and medical evacuation."

As they sped toward the patrol's position, they could see the South African soldiers returning fire and moving to defensive positions, but they were clearly outgunned by whatever was concealed in the treeline.



"This doesn't make sense," Mikko said, his expert eye assessing the situation. "That's not insurgent activity. The fire pattern is too disciplined, too precise."

By the time they reached the patrol, three soldiers were already down with injuries. Liam immediately began applying his first responder training while Mikko coordinated with Lieutenant Bongani.

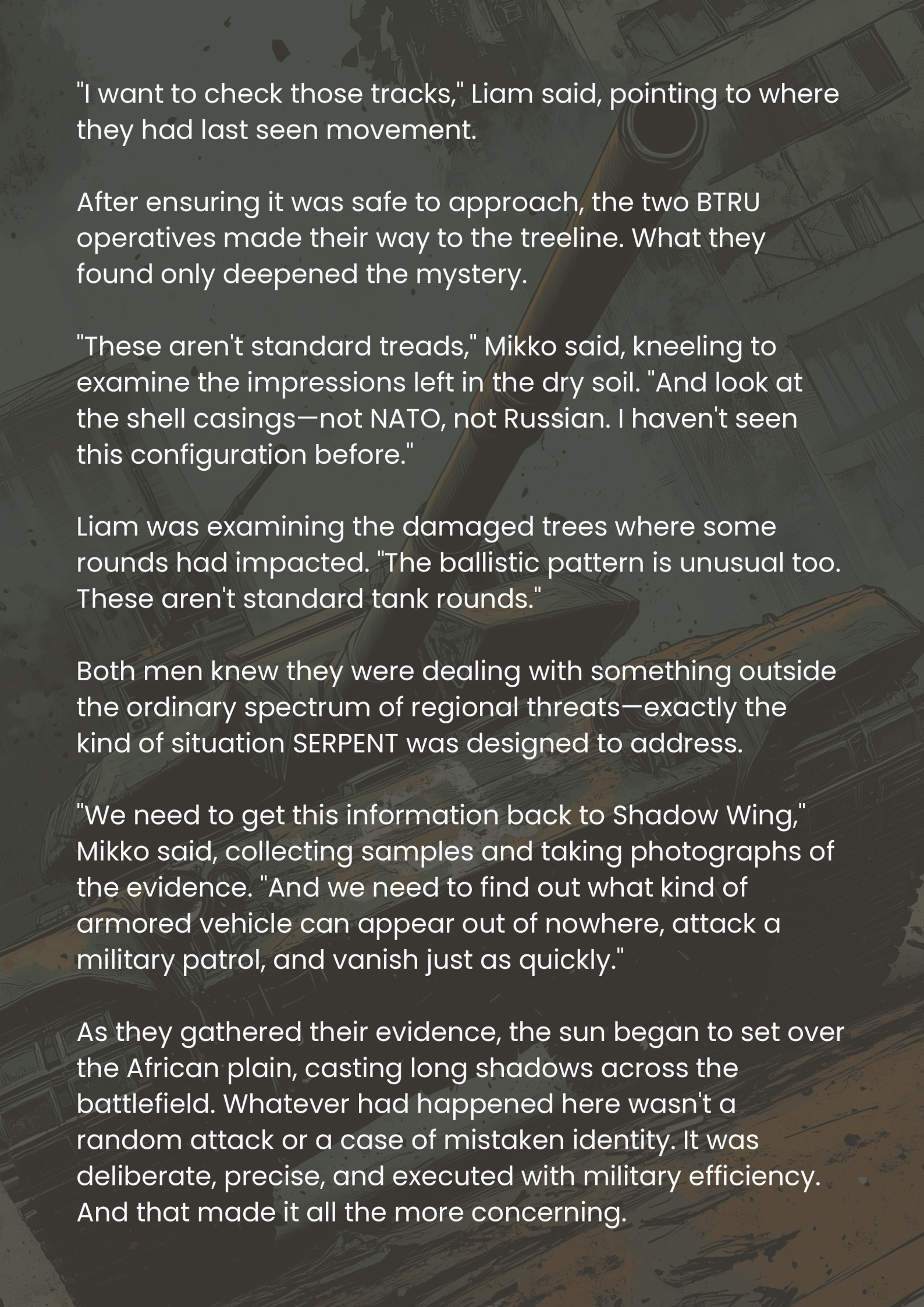
"We need to get your wounded out," Mikko said. "I've already called for evacuation. Any visual on the vehicle?"

"Negative," the lieutenant replied, his face streaked with dust and sweat. "We just saw muzzle flashes from the treeline, then impact. Whatever it is, it's heavily armored. Our return fire didn't seem to have any effect."

The sound of helicopter rotors filled the air as the medical evacuation team arrived with remarkable speed—one of the advantages of SERPENT's presence in the region. As the wounded were loaded aboard, Mikko noticed something odd about their injuries.

"These weren't designed to kill," he observed quietly to Liam. "Precise shots to incapacitate, not eliminate."

Once the helicopter departed, Mikko and Liam joined the remaining SANDF soldiers in securing the perimeter. By now, the firing had stopped, and the mysterious vehicle had withdrawn.



"I want to check those tracks," Liam said, pointing to where they had last seen movement.

After ensuring it was safe to approach, the two BTRU operatives made their way to the treeline. What they found only deepened the mystery.

"These aren't standard treads," Mikko said, kneeling to examine the impressions left in the dry soil. "And look at the shell casings—not NATO, not Russian. I haven't seen this configuration before."

Liam was examining the damaged trees where some rounds had impacted. "The ballistic pattern is unusual too. These aren't standard tank rounds."

Both men knew they were dealing with something outside the ordinary spectrum of regional threats—exactly the kind of situation SERPENT was designed to address.

"We need to get this information back to Shadow Wing," Mikko said, collecting samples and taking photographs of the evidence. "And we need to find out what kind of armored vehicle can appear out of nowhere, attack a military patrol, and vanish just as quickly."

As they gathered their evidence, the sun began to set over the African plain, casting long shadows across the battlefield. Whatever had happened here wasn't a random attack or a case of mistaken identity. It was deliberate, precise, and executed with military efficiency. And that made it all the more concerning.

Chapter 2: Unexpected Threat

Gabriel Adams stood at the holographic command table aboard Shadow Wing, reviewing the data stream coming in from Mikko and Liam on the ground.

The aircraft maintained its holding pattern in international airspace, close enough to provide support while remaining discreet.

"The attack was precise and deliberate," Gabriel observed, his years as a Delta Force operator before joining SERPENT giving weight to his assessment.

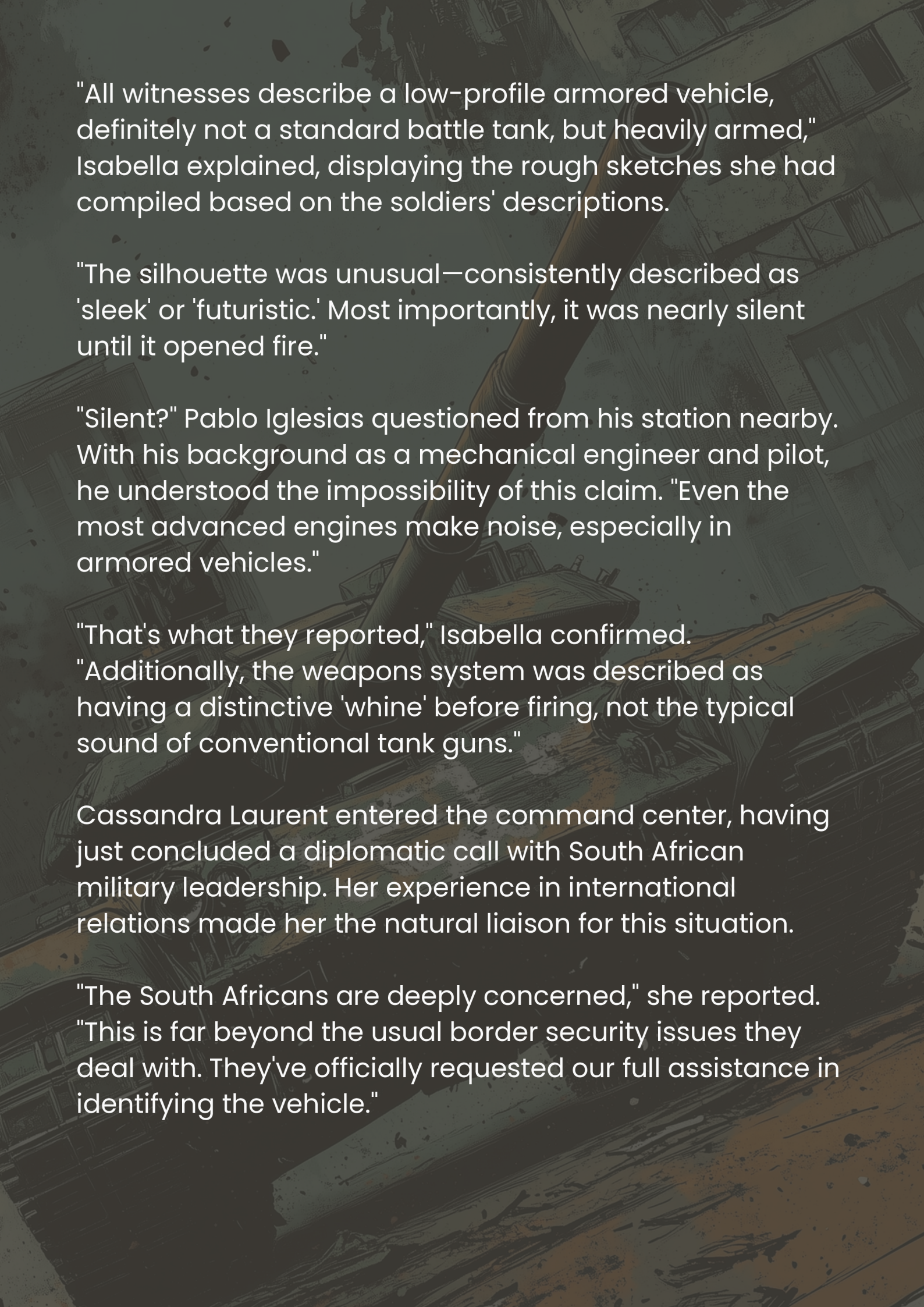
"No random fire patterns. They knew exactly what they were doing."

Isabella Moreno joined him at the table, having just finished a video debrief with the SANDF soldiers who witnessed the attack.

Her background as a historian and cultural expert allowed her to piece together a comprehensive picture from fragmented accounts.

"I've completed the initial interviews," she reported. "There are inconsistencies in their descriptions, but several details remain constant across all accounts."

Gabriel nodded for her to continue.



"All witnesses describe a low-profile armored vehicle, definitely not a standard battle tank, but heavily armed," Isabella explained, displaying the rough sketches she had compiled based on the soldiers' descriptions.

"The silhouette was unusual—consistently described as 'sleek' or 'futuristic.' Most importantly, it was nearly silent until it opened fire."

"Silent?" Pablo Iglesias questioned from his station nearby. With his background as a mechanical engineer and pilot, he understood the impossibility of this claim. "Even the most advanced engines make noise, especially in armored vehicles."

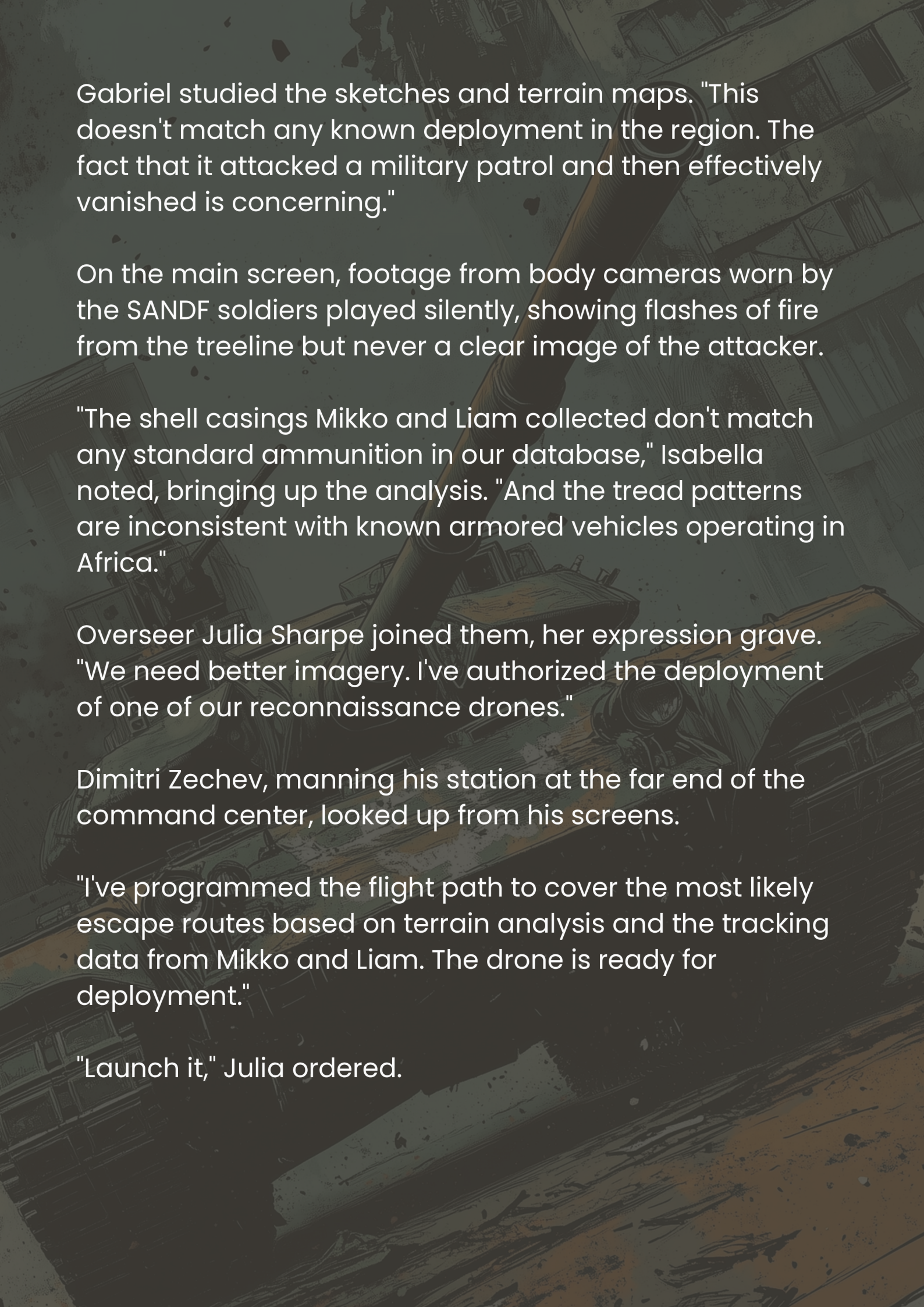
"That's what they reported," Isabella confirmed.

"Additionally, the weapons system was described as having a distinctive 'whine' before firing, not the typical sound of conventional tank guns."

Cassandra Laurent entered the command center, having just concluded a diplomatic call with South African military leadership. Her experience in international relations made her the natural liaison for this situation.

"The South Africans are deeply concerned," she reported.

"This is far beyond the usual border security issues they deal with. They've officially requested our full assistance in identifying the vehicle."



Gabriel studied the sketches and terrain maps. "This doesn't match any known deployment in the region. The fact that it attacked a military patrol and then effectively vanished is concerning."

On the main screen, footage from body cameras worn by the SANDF soldiers played silently, showing flashes of fire from the treeline but never a clear image of the attacker.

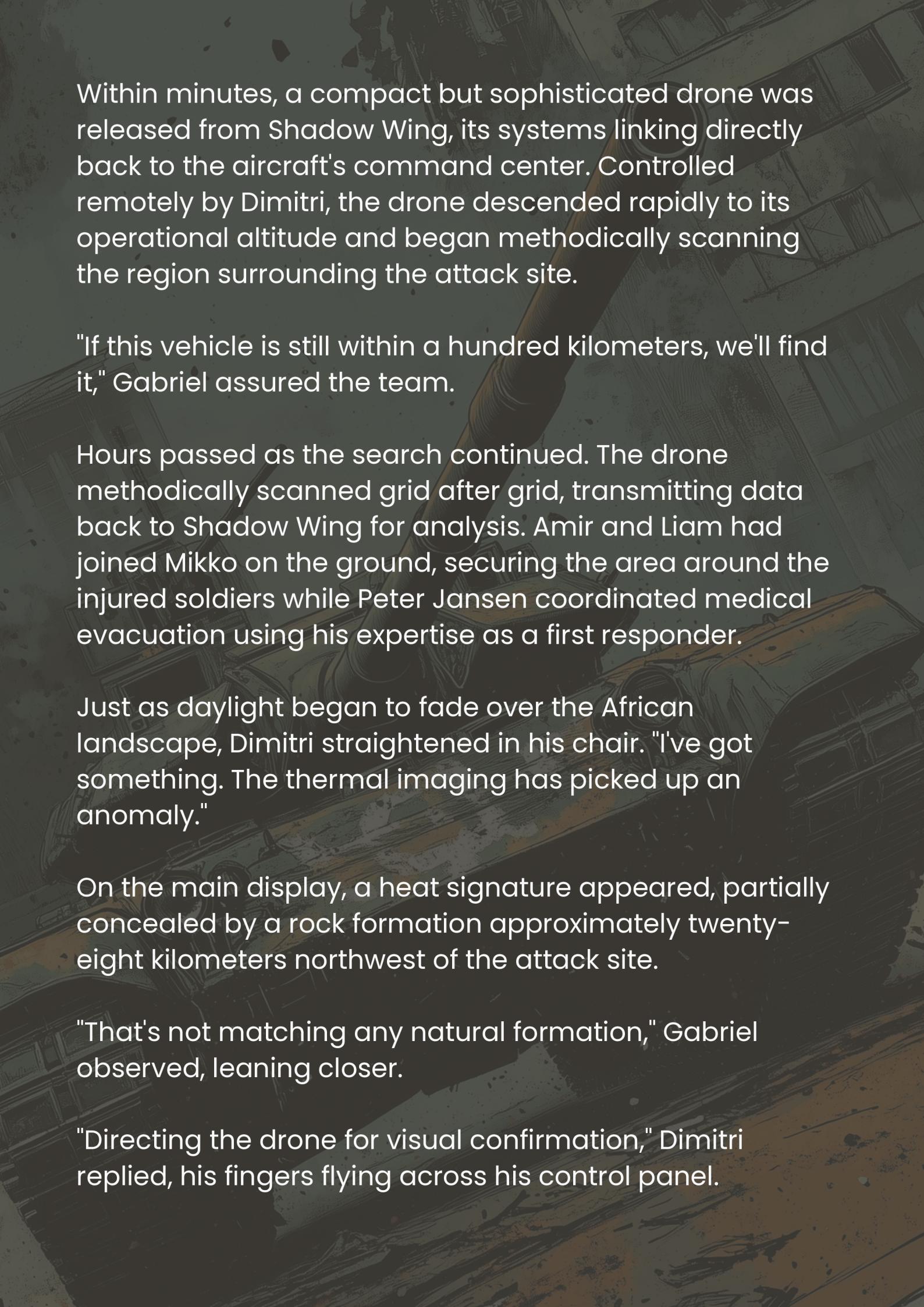
"The shell casings Mikko and Liam collected don't match any standard ammunition in our database," Isabella noted, bringing up the analysis. "And the tread patterns are inconsistent with known armored vehicles operating in Africa."

Overseer Julia Sharpe joined them, her expression grave. "We need better imagery. I've authorized the deployment of one of our reconnaissance drones."

Dimitri Zechev, manning his station at the far end of the command center, looked up from his screens.

"I've programmed the flight path to cover the most likely escape routes based on terrain analysis and the tracking data from Mikko and Liam. The drone is ready for deployment."

"Launch it," Julia ordered.



Within minutes, a compact but sophisticated drone was released from Shadow Wing, its systems linking directly back to the aircraft's command center. Controlled remotely by Dimitri, the drone descended rapidly to its operational altitude and began methodically scanning the region surrounding the attack site.

"If this vehicle is still within a hundred kilometers, we'll find it," Gabriel assured the team.

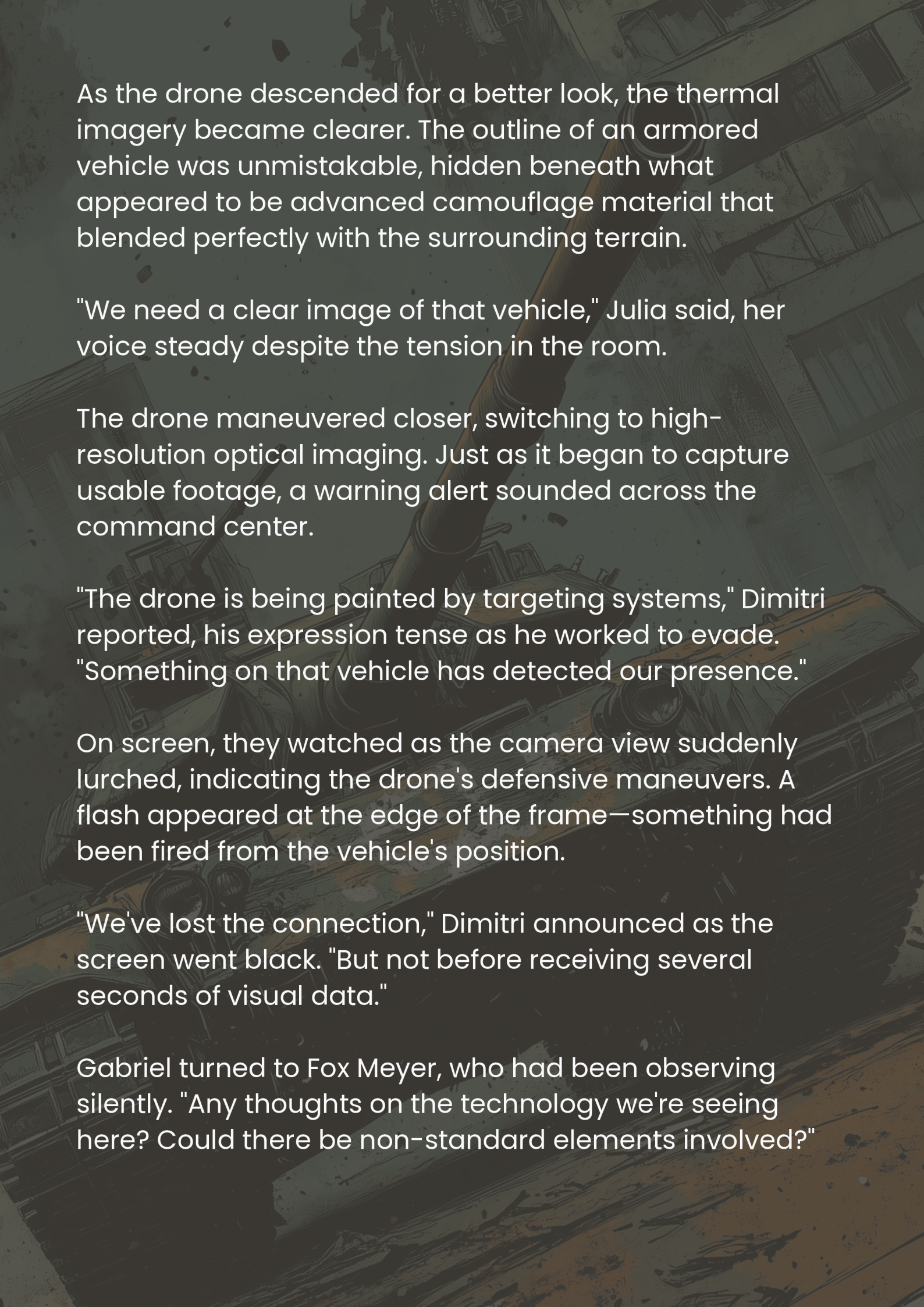
Hours passed as the search continued. The drone methodically scanned grid after grid, transmitting data back to Shadow Wing for analysis. Amir and Liam had joined Mikko on the ground, securing the area around the injured soldiers while Peter Jansen coordinated medical evacuation using his expertise as a first responder.

Just as daylight began to fade over the African landscape, Dimitri straightened in his chair. "I've got something. The thermal imaging has picked up an anomaly."

On the main display, a heat signature appeared, partially concealed by a rock formation approximately twenty-eight kilometers northwest of the attack site.

"That's not matching any natural formation," Gabriel observed, leaning closer.

"Directing the drone for visual confirmation," Dimitri replied, his fingers flying across his control panel.



As the drone descended for a better look, the thermal imagery became clearer. The outline of an armored vehicle was unmistakable, hidden beneath what appeared to be advanced camouflage material that blended perfectly with the surrounding terrain.

"We need a clear image of that vehicle," Julia said, her voice steady despite the tension in the room.

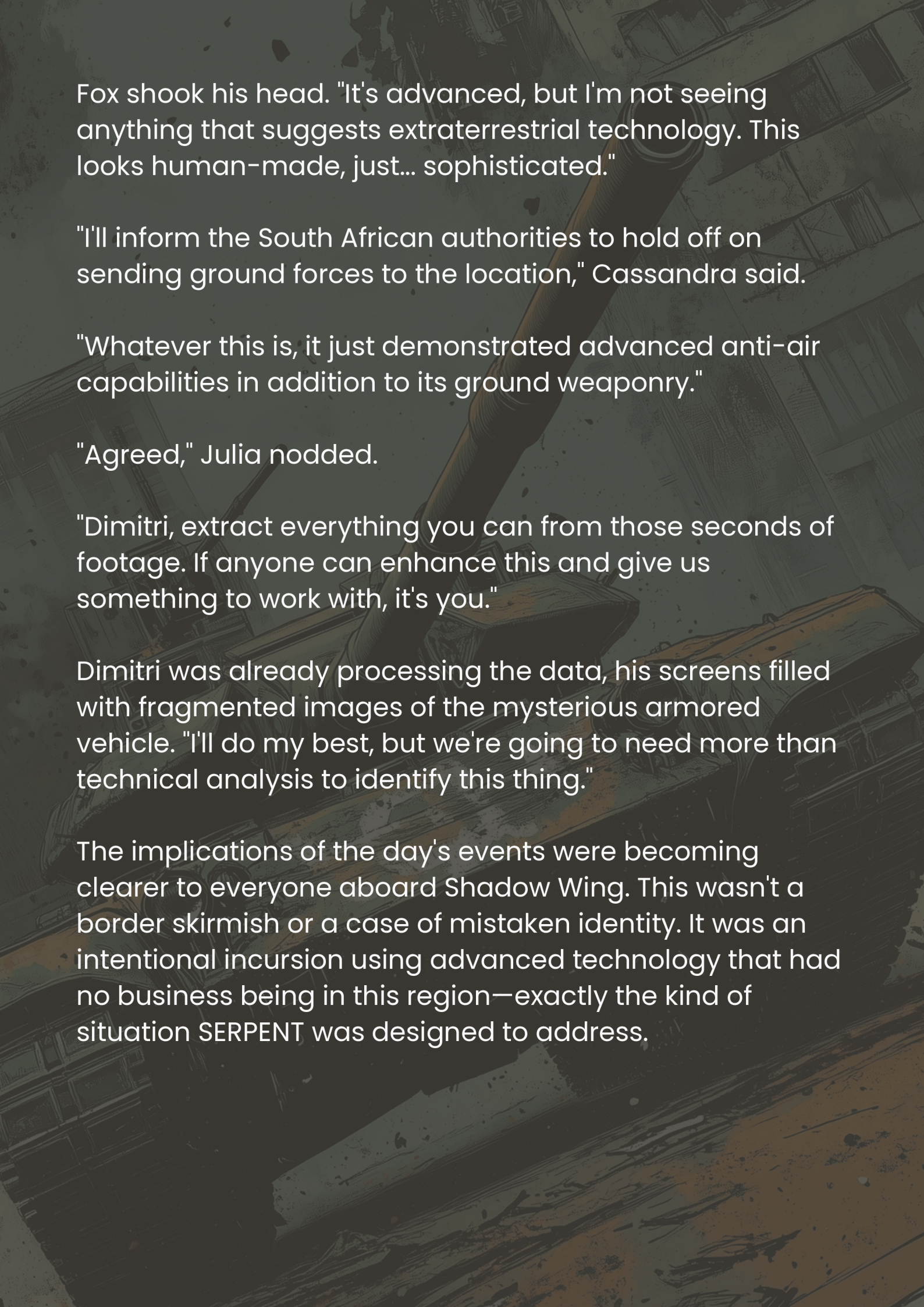
The drone maneuvered closer, switching to high-resolution optical imaging. Just as it began to capture usable footage, a warning alert sounded across the command center.

"The drone is being painted by targeting systems," Dimitri reported, his expression tense as he worked to evade. "Something on that vehicle has detected our presence."

On screen, they watched as the camera view suddenly lurched, indicating the drone's defensive maneuvers. A flash appeared at the edge of the frame—something had been fired from the vehicle's position.

"We've lost the connection," Dimitri announced as the screen went black. "But not before receiving several seconds of visual data."

Gabriel turned to Fox Meyer, who had been observing silently. "Any thoughts on the technology we're seeing here? Could there be non-standard elements involved?"



Fox shook his head. "It's advanced, but I'm not seeing anything that suggests extraterrestrial technology. This looks human-made, just... sophisticated."

"I'll inform the South African authorities to hold off on sending ground forces to the location," Cassandra said.

"Whatever this is, it just demonstrated advanced anti-air capabilities in addition to its ground weaponry."

"Agreed," Julia nodded.

"Dimitri, extract everything you can from those seconds of footage. If anyone can enhance this and give us something to work with, it's you."

Dimitri was already processing the data, his screens filled with fragmented images of the mysterious armored vehicle. "I'll do my best, but we're going to need more than technical analysis to identify this thing."

The implications of the day's events were becoming clearer to everyone aboard Shadow Wing. This wasn't a border skirmish or a case of mistaken identity. It was an intentional incursion using advanced technology that had no business being in this region—exactly the kind of situation SERPENT was designed to address.

Chapter 3: Evidence Gathering

Aboard Shadow Wing, cruising at 45,000 feet in international airspace near the South African border, Dimitri Zechev worked his digital magic. Multiple displays surrounded his workstation, each showing different aspects of the drone footage captured before the UAV was shot down.

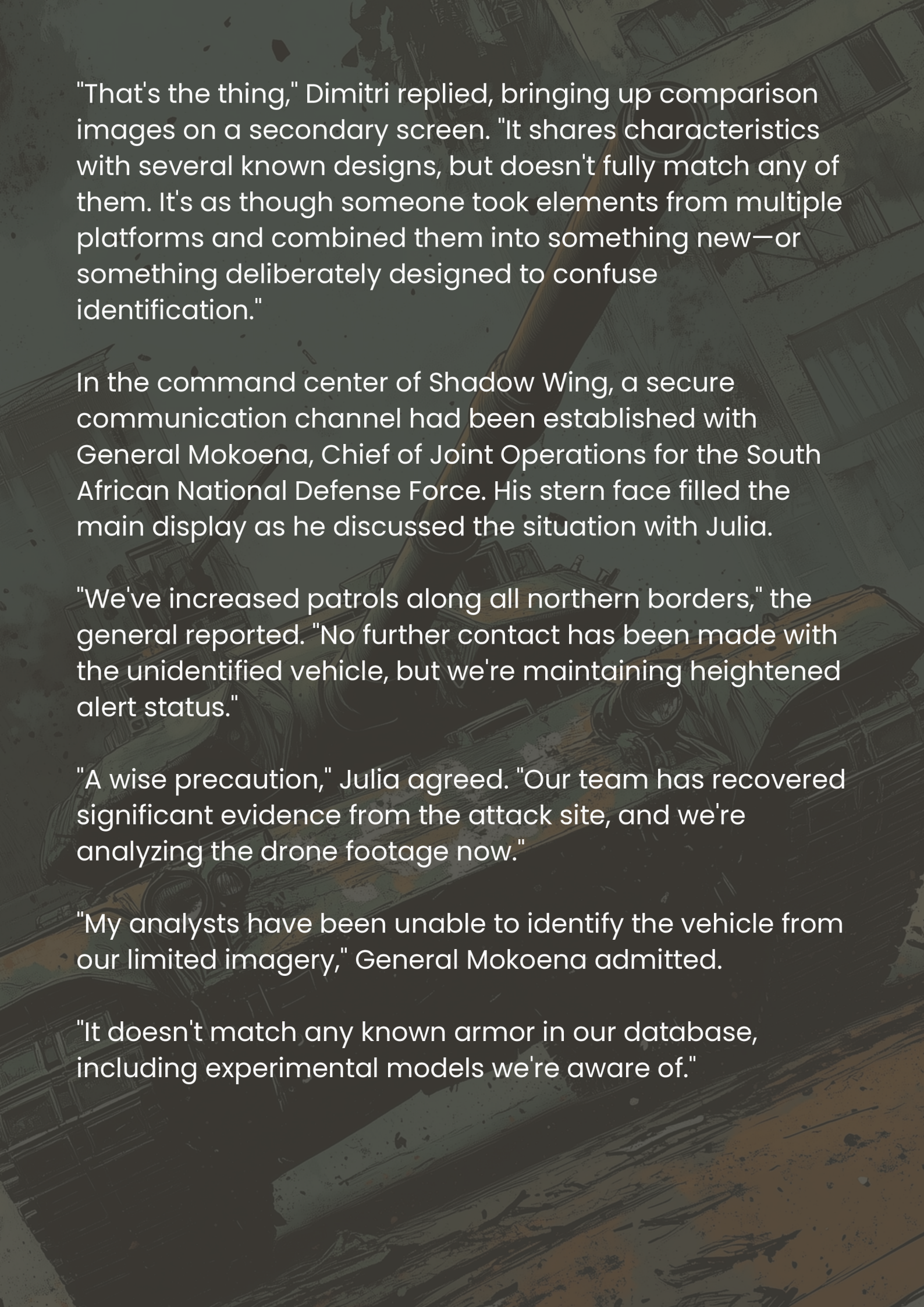
"The imaging quality is better than I expected," he muttered, fingers flying across his keyboard. "The drone managed to transmit sixteen seconds of high-resolution video before connection was lost."

From the doorway of the analysis center, Overseer Julia Sharpe watched him work. Her years at MI6 had taught her that technical specialists like Dimitri often performed best when given space, but time was of the essence.

"What can you tell me?" she asked, keeping her tone measured despite the urgency of the situation.

Dimitri enlarged a frame, enhancing a partially visible section of the armored vehicle. "It's definitely not a conventional tank. The profile is too low, the turret configuration unusual. See this section here?" He highlighted a portion of the image. "That's not standard armor plating. The angles and material appearance suggest something more advanced."

"Any matches in our database?" Julia inquired.



"That's the thing," Dimitri replied, bringing up comparison images on a secondary screen. "It shares characteristics with several known designs, but doesn't fully match any of them. It's as though someone took elements from multiple platforms and combined them into something new—or something deliberately designed to confuse identification."

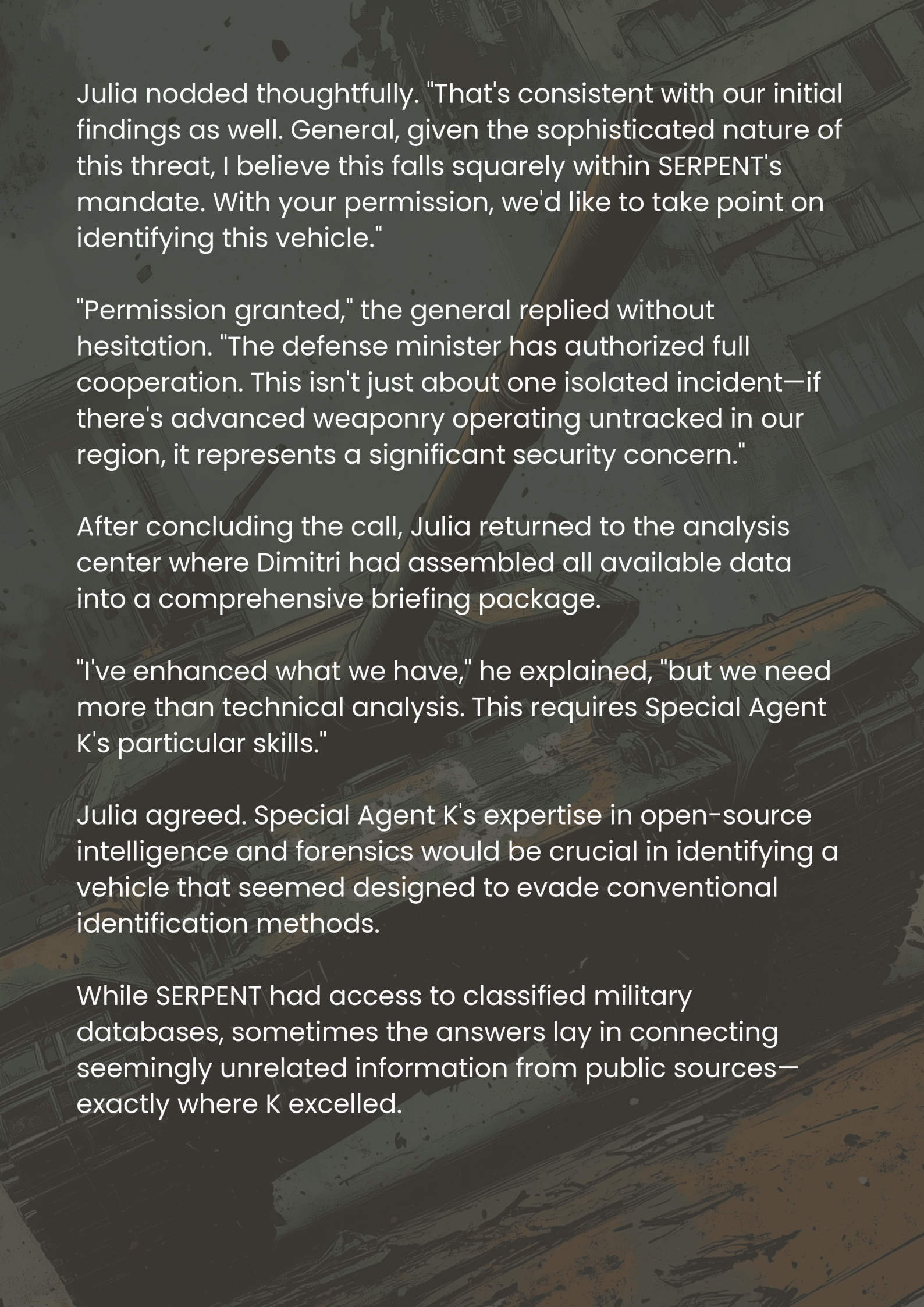
In the command center of Shadow Wing, a secure communication channel had been established with General Mokoena, Chief of Joint Operations for the South African National Defense Force. His stern face filled the main display as he discussed the situation with Julia.

"We've increased patrols along all northern borders," the general reported. "No further contact has been made with the unidentified vehicle, but we're maintaining heightened alert status."

"A wise precaution," Julia agreed. "Our team has recovered significant evidence from the attack site, and we're analyzing the drone footage now."

"My analysts have been unable to identify the vehicle from our limited imagery," General Mokoena admitted.

"It doesn't match any known armor in our database, including experimental models we're aware of."



Julia nodded thoughtfully. "That's consistent with our initial findings as well. General, given the sophisticated nature of this threat, I believe this falls squarely within SERPENT's mandate. With your permission, we'd like to take point on identifying this vehicle."

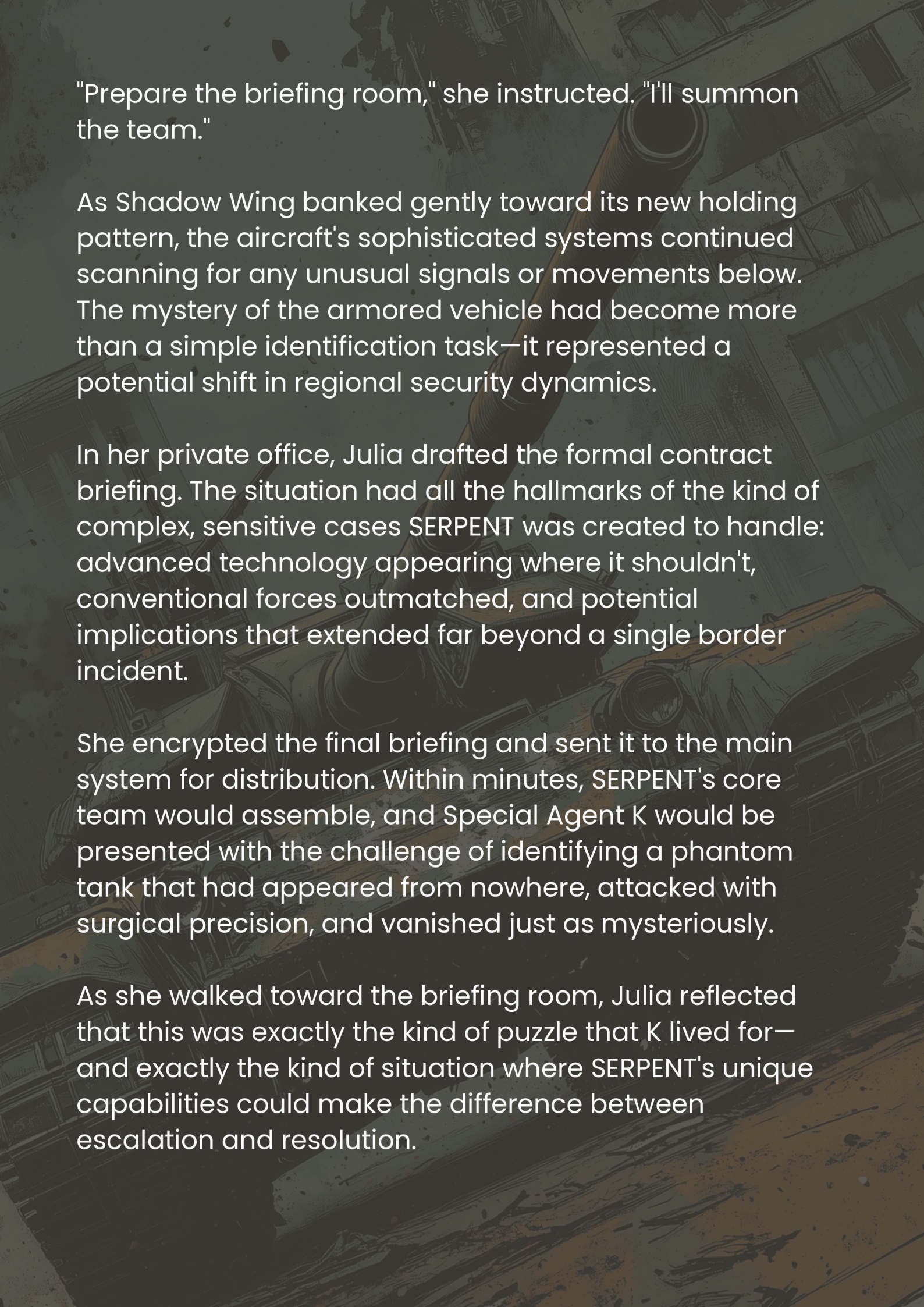
"Permission granted," the general replied without hesitation. "The defense minister has authorized full cooperation. This isn't just about one isolated incident—if there's advanced weaponry operating untracked in our region, it represents a significant security concern."

After concluding the call, Julia returned to the analysis center where Dimitri had assembled all available data into a comprehensive briefing package.

"I've enhanced what we have," he explained, "but we need more than technical analysis. This requires Special Agent K's particular skills."

Julia agreed. Special Agent K's expertise in open-source intelligence and forensics would be crucial in identifying a vehicle that seemed designed to evade conventional identification methods.

While SERPENT had access to classified military databases, sometimes the answers lay in connecting seemingly unrelated information from public sources—exactly where K excelled.



"Prepare the briefing room," she instructed. "I'll summon the team."

As Shadow Wing banked gently toward its new holding pattern, the aircraft's sophisticated systems continued scanning for any unusual signals or movements below. The mystery of the armored vehicle had become more than a simple identification task—it represented a potential shift in regional security dynamics.

In her private office, Julia drafted the formal contract briefing. The situation had all the hallmarks of the kind of complex, sensitive cases SERPENT was created to handle: advanced technology appearing where it shouldn't, conventional forces outmatched, and potential implications that extended far beyond a single border incident.

She encrypted the final briefing and sent it to the main system for distribution. Within minutes, SERPENT's core team would assemble, and Special Agent K would be presented with the challenge of identifying a phantom tank that had appeared from nowhere, attacked with surgical precision, and vanished just as mysteriously.

As she walked toward the briefing room, Julia reflected that this was exactly the kind of puzzle that K lived for—and exactly the kind of situation where SERPENT's unique capabilities could make the difference between escalation and resolution.

Briefing



Greetings, Special Agent.

Our friends over at the South Africa National Defense Force have reached out for help. Recently, one of their patrols in the north of their country, came under fire from an armored vehicle.

At first they thought this to be friendly fire, however no other units were in the area.

They sent a drone to inspect the vehicle and managed to take a photo, before being forced to retreat. Six out of the twenty-four strong platoon were injured, all survived after being evacuated by helicopter.

As they are unfamiliar with the model of the tank, which has since vanished. Therefor they call for our help in identifying the vehicle.

That is where you come in, identify the tank so we can track the origins and maybe get further in this investigation.

As always, Special Agent. The Contract is yours, if you choose to accept.

Materials

friendly-fire-starting-image.png

Answer Instruction

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

Find the model and country of origin of the tank.

Answer sample: indonesia-cougar-mk-8c

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.