



# HACKTORIA

LOST  
DOWN UNDER



## Chapter 1: Echoes in the Dark

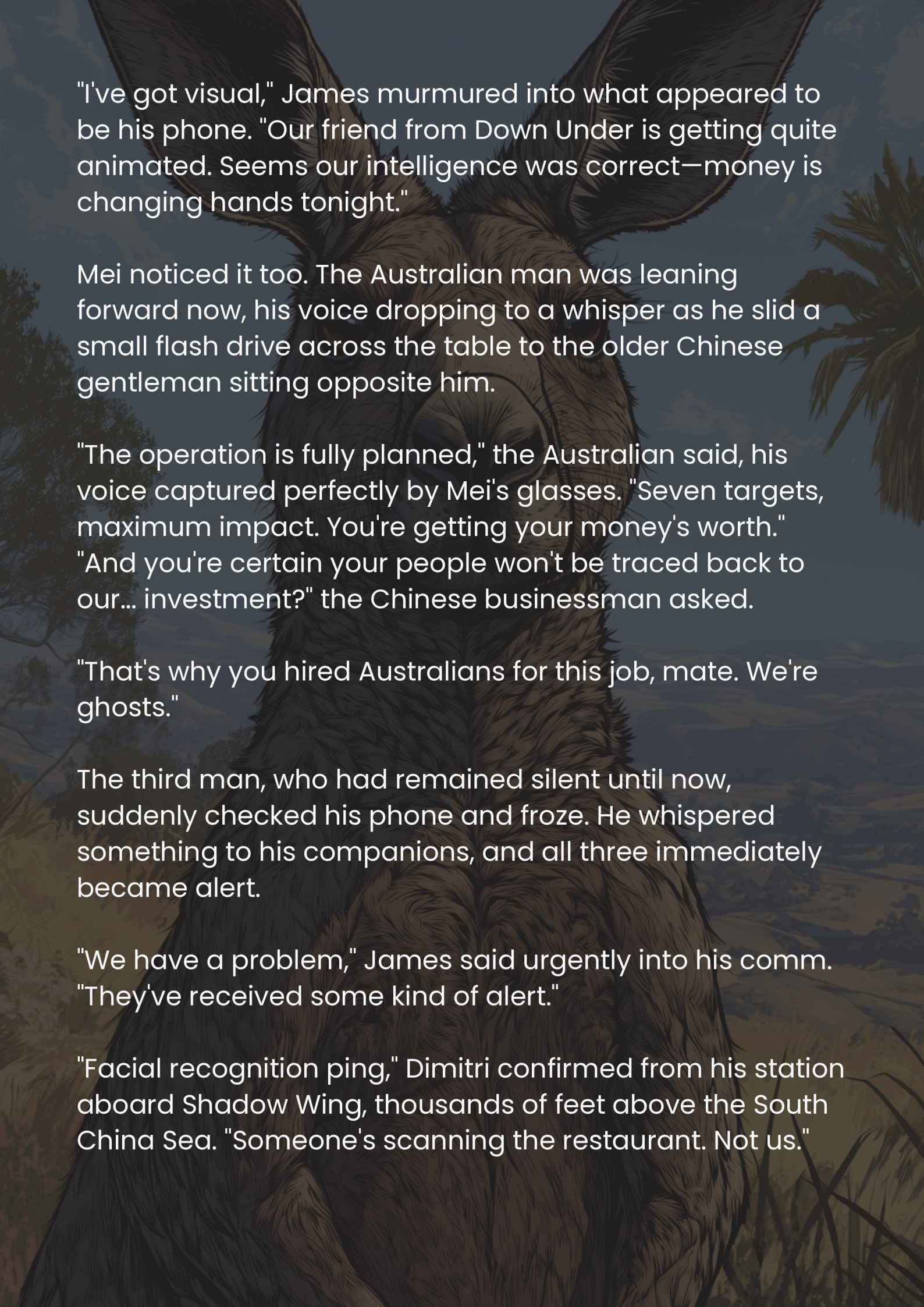
The Waterfront Restaurant in Hong Kong's Central district buzzed with the usual Thursday evening crowd of financial elites and foreign dignitaries. Crystal chandeliers cast a soft glow over white tablecloths and polished silverware. Near the window overlooking Victoria Harbor, Mei Huang adjusted her designer glasses and pretended to study the menu. In reality, the thin metal frames housed SERPENT's latest surveillance technology.

"Audio calibration complete," Dimitri's voice crackled through the nearly invisible earpiece. "We're picking up everything within a three-meter radius of your position. Maybe next time you'll let me add the facial recognition software I've been working on."

"We're not here to test your toys, Dimitri," Mei replied softly, her lips barely moving. She kept her gaze fixed on the menu while monitoring the table in the corner, where three men sat in hushed conversation. One was clearly Australian—tall with weathered skin and a distinctive outback drawl that occasionally punctuated the ambient noise.

Across the restaurant, James Brown sipped his martini, the picture of a bored British businessman awaiting his dinner companion. His perfectly tailored suit and casual demeanor betrayed nothing of the tension coursing through him. His watch—a modified Omega with built-in recording capabilities—was angled precisely toward the corner table.





"I've got visual," James murmured into what appeared to be his phone. "Our friend from Down Under is getting quite animated. Seems our intelligence was correct—money is changing hands tonight."

Mei noticed it too. The Australian man was leaning forward now, his voice dropping to a whisper as he slid a small flash drive across the table to the older Chinese gentleman sitting opposite him.

"The operation is fully planned," the Australian said, his voice captured perfectly by Mei's glasses. "Seven targets, maximum impact. You're getting your money's worth."  
"And you're certain your people won't be traced back to our... investment?" the Chinese businessman asked.


"That's why you hired Australians for this job, mate. We're ghosts."

The third man, who had remained silent until now, suddenly checked his phone and froze. He whispered something to his companions, and all three immediately became alert.

"We have a problem," James said urgently into his comm. "They've received some kind of alert."

"Facial recognition ping," Dimitri confirmed from his station aboard Shadow Wing, thousands of feet above the South China Sea. "Someone's scanning the restaurant. Not us."





Mei delicately placed her menu down and signaled for the check. "Completing surveillance and exiting," she said softly. "James, thirty seconds."


As she gathered her purse, Mei's mind flashed back to the briefing Isabella Moreno had given them before the operation. The historian's insights had proven invaluable. "The Jade Lotus Society has been funneling money to extremist groups for decades," Isabella had explained, pointing to historical patterns on the holographic display. "They always meet in places with historical significance to the Chinese revolution. This restaurant was once a safe house for revolutionaries in the 1920s. That's why they choose it—tradition matters to them."

Now, as Mei made her way casually to the exit, she saw the Australian man rise from his table, his eyes scanning the restaurant with newfound suspicion.

James finished his drink in one smooth motion and stood, timing his exit to intersect with a large group of tourists entering the restaurant. In the momentary confusion, he brushed past the Australian, his watch giving a subtle vibration to confirm the successful digital clone of the man's phone.

Outside, the humid Hong Kong night enveloped them as they walked in separate directions, as planned. Neither looked back as the restaurant's doors closed behind them.





"Extraction complete," Mei confirmed as she slipped into the back of a nondescript black sedan waiting two blocks away.

"Tell Overseer Sharpe we have confirmation of Chinese financing for domestic Australian terrorism. And James managed to clone the target's phone."

"Already patching through to Shadow Wing," Dimitri replied.

"And Mei? Good work not punching anyone this time."

"I only punch people who deserve it," she said with a small smile, thinking of her last operation that had gone slightly off-script.

"Now let's see what these extremists are planning for Australia."



## Chapter 2: Digital Breadcrumbs

Shadow Wing cut through the night sky above the Andaman Sea, its sleek form invisible to conventional radar thanks to Dimitri's modifications. Inside the aircraft's war room, the Bulgarian tech expert hunched over his workstation, fingers flying across multiple keyboards as streams of data scrolled across his screens.

"Anything useful from the clone?" Julia Sharpe asked, her British accent crisp as she entered the analysts' section of the aircraft. The Overseer's tailored suit and composed demeanor belied the urgency of the situation.

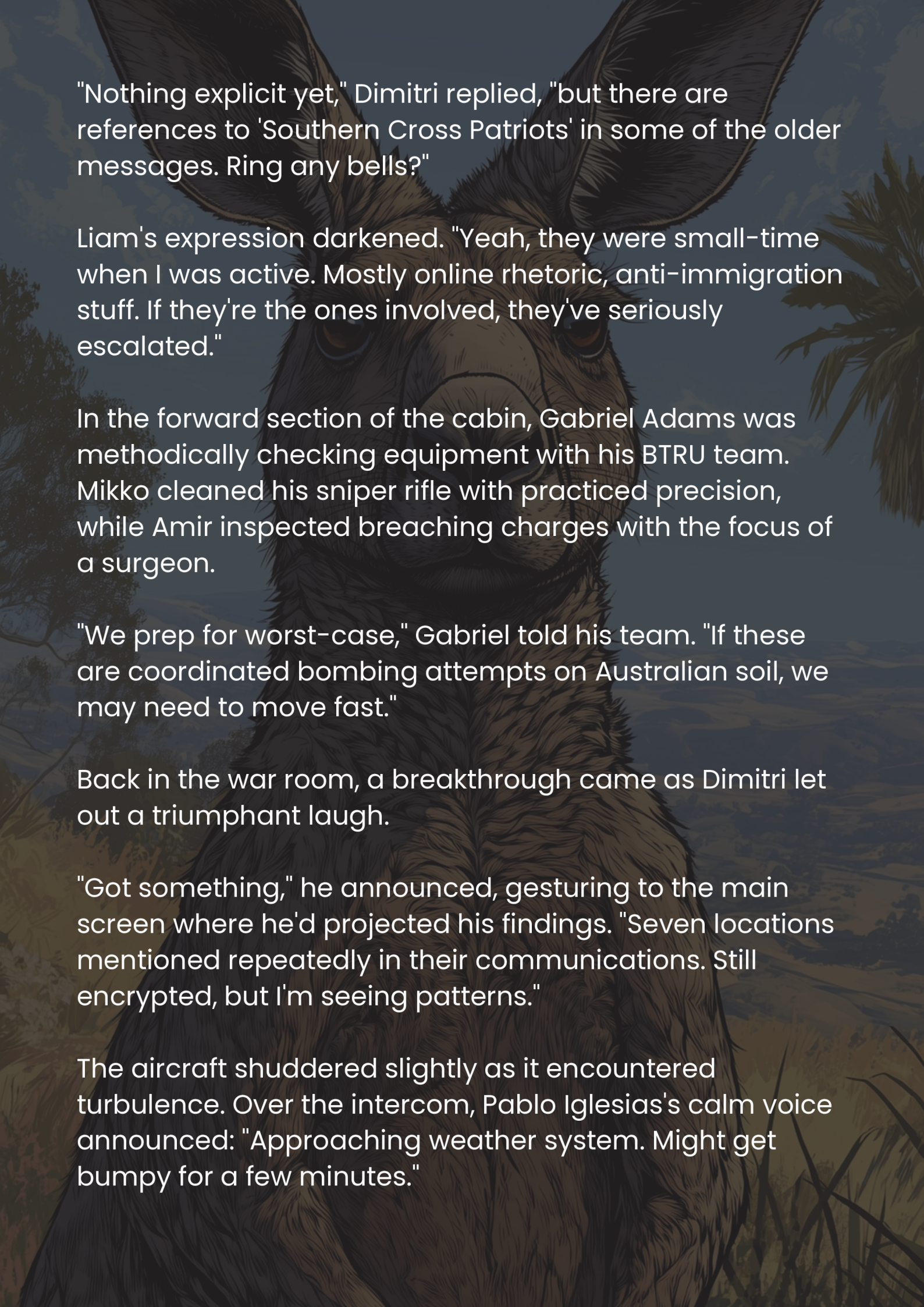
"Working on it," Dimitri muttered, not looking up. "The encryption is... interesting. Not military-grade, but someone knows what they're doing." He took a swig from an energy drink can before continuing.

"I've isolated several communications about fund transfers. They're using cryptocurrency, but they left traces."

Liam Irwin leaned against the doorframe, his muscular frame seeming too large for the aircraft's interior. The Australian BTRU member had been called in specifically for this operation.

"Any group names mentioned?" Liam asked. "I spent three years tracking domestic extremists with the SAS before joining SERPENT. Might recognize some players."





"Nothing explicit yet," Dimitri replied, "but there are references to 'Southern Cross Patriots' in some of the older messages. Ring any bells?"

Liam's expression darkened. "Yeah, they were small-time when I was active. Mostly online rhetoric, anti-immigration stuff. If they're the ones involved, they've seriously escalated."

In the forward section of the cabin, Gabriel Adams was methodically checking equipment with his BTRU team. Mikko cleaned his sniper rifle with practiced precision, while Amir inspected breaching charges with the focus of a surgeon.

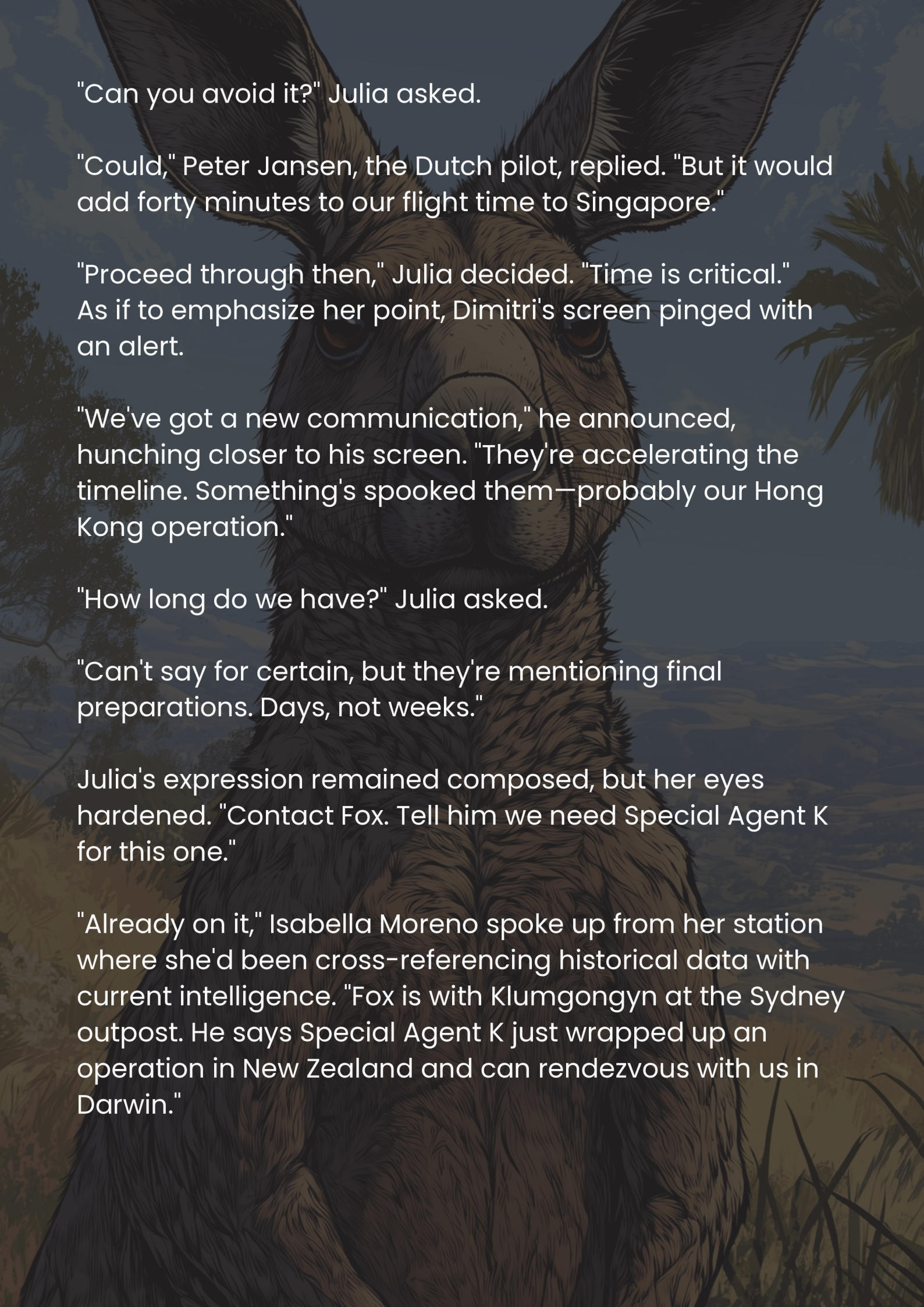
"We prep for worst-case," Gabriel told his team. "If these are coordinated bombing attempts on Australian soil, we may need to move fast."

Back in the war room, a breakthrough came as Dimitri let out a triumphant laugh.

"Got something," he announced, gesturing to the main screen where he'd projected his findings. "Seven locations mentioned repeatedly in their communications. Still encrypted, but I'm seeing patterns."

The aircraft shuddered slightly as it encountered turbulence. Over the intercom, Pablo Iglesias's calm voice announced: "Approaching weather system. Might get bumpy for a few minutes."





"Can you avoid it?" Julia asked.

"Could," Peter Jansen, the Dutch pilot, replied. "But it would add forty minutes to our flight time to Singapore."

"Proceed through then," Julia decided. "Time is critical." As if to emphasize her point, Dimitri's screen pinged with an alert.

"We've got a new communication," he announced, hunching closer to his screen. "They're accelerating the timeline. Something's spooked them—probably our Hong Kong operation."

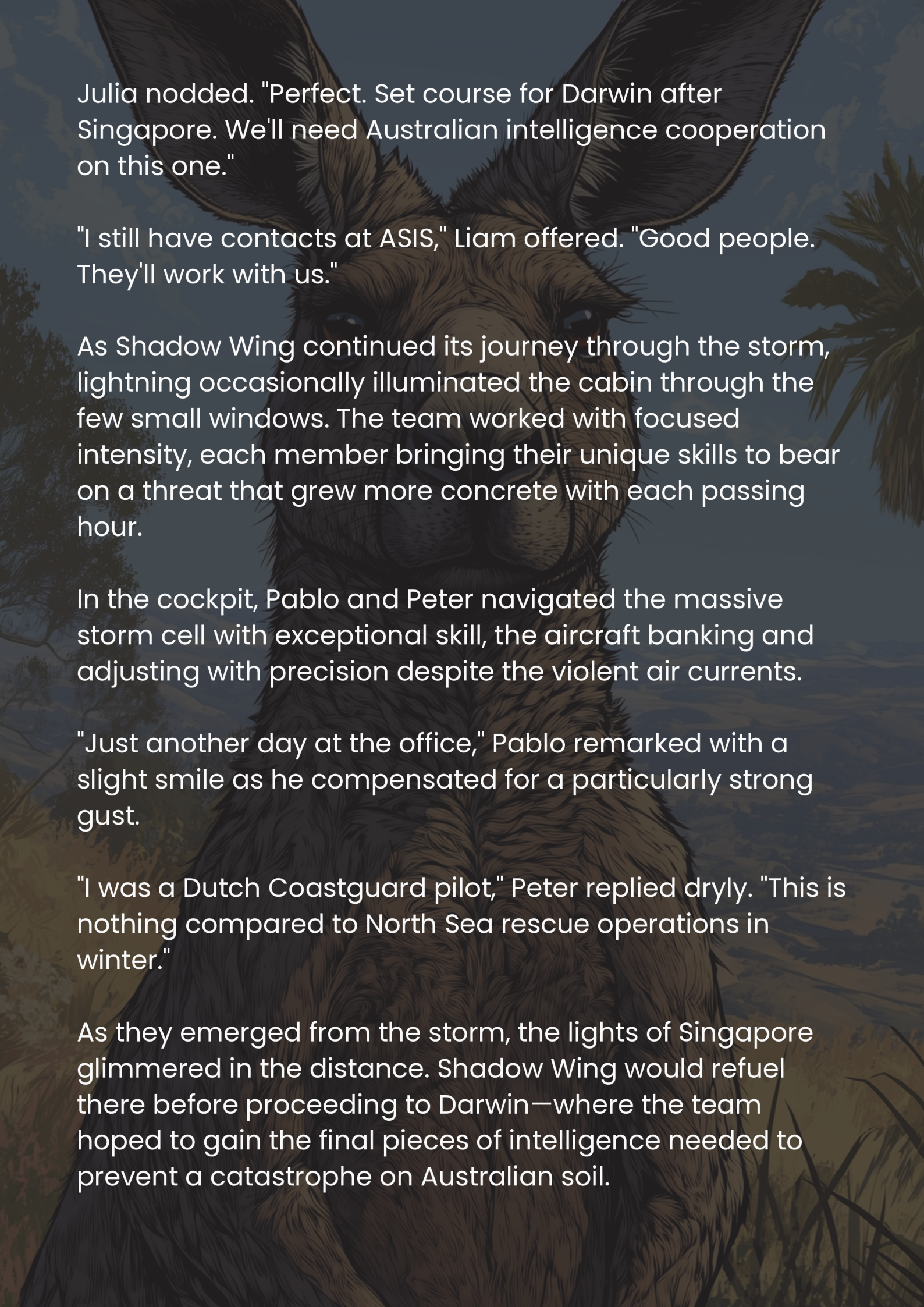
"How long do we have?" Julia asked.

"Can't say for certain, but they're mentioning final preparations. Days, not weeks."

Julia's expression remained composed, but her eyes hardened. "Contact Fox. Tell him we need Special Agent K for this one."

"Already on it," Isabella Moreno spoke up from her station where she'd been cross-referencing historical data with current intelligence. "Fox is with Klumgongyn at the Sydney outpost. He says Special Agent K just wrapped up an operation in New Zealand and can rendezvous with us in Darwin."





Julia nodded. "Perfect. Set course for Darwin after Singapore. We'll need Australian intelligence cooperation on this one."

"I still have contacts at ASIS," Liam offered. "Good people. They'll work with us."

As Shadow Wing continued its journey through the storm, lightning occasionally illuminated the cabin through the few small windows. The team worked with focused intensity, each member bringing their unique skills to bear on a threat that grew more concrete with each passing hour.

In the cockpit, Pablo and Peter navigated the massive storm cell with exceptional skill, the aircraft banking and adjusting with precision despite the violent air currents.

"Just another day at the office," Pablo remarked with a slight smile as he compensated for a particularly strong gust.

"I was a Dutch Coastguard pilot," Peter replied dryly. "This is nothing compared to North Sea rescue operations in winter."

As they emerged from the storm, the lights of Singapore glimmered in the distance. Shadow Wing would refuel there before proceeding to Darwin—where the team hoped to gain the final pieces of intelligence needed to prevent a catastrophe on Australian soil.



## Chapter 3: Convergence

Darwin's heat struck like a physical wall as the loading ramp of Shadow Wing descended onto the tarmac of the private airfield. The afternoon sun beat down mercilessly, creating shimmering waves above the concrete. Inside the aircraft, the environmental systems maintained a perfect temperature as the team worked with increasing urgency.

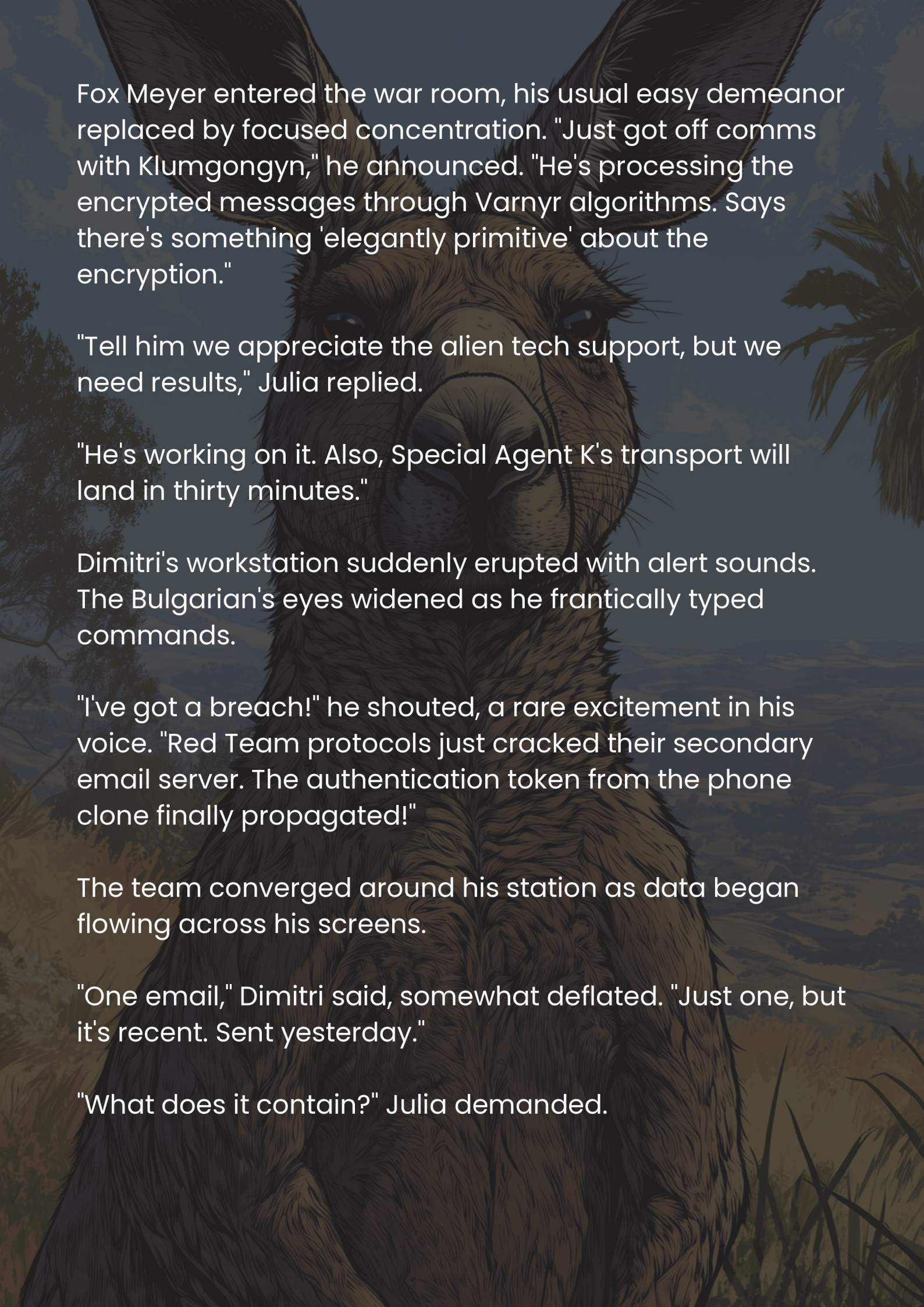
"ASIS has granted us full cooperation," Julia informed the team as she ended a secure call. "Their director will meet us here at 1800 hours. Until then, we push forward with what we have."

In the center of the war room, a holographic map of Australia hovered, with seven locations marked by pulsing red dots. Each location had fragmented data associated with it—population density, strategic value, potential casualty estimates.

"Still can't pinpoint exactly what these locations mean," Isabella said, frustration evident in her voice as she studied the map. "Historical analysis shows no pattern—they're not significant sites in Australian history, not former military installations..."

"They might be symbolic only to the group itself," Mei suggested. "Extremist organizations often construct their own mythology."





Fox Meyer entered the war room, his usual easy demeanor replaced by focused concentration. "Just got off comms with Klumgongyn," he announced. "He's processing the encrypted messages through Varnyr algorithms. Says there's something 'elegantly primitive' about the encryption."

"Tell him we appreciate the alien tech support, but we need results," Julia replied.

"He's working on it. Also, Special Agent K's transport will land in thirty minutes."

Dimitri's workstation suddenly erupted with alert sounds. The Bulgarian's eyes widened as he frantically typed commands.

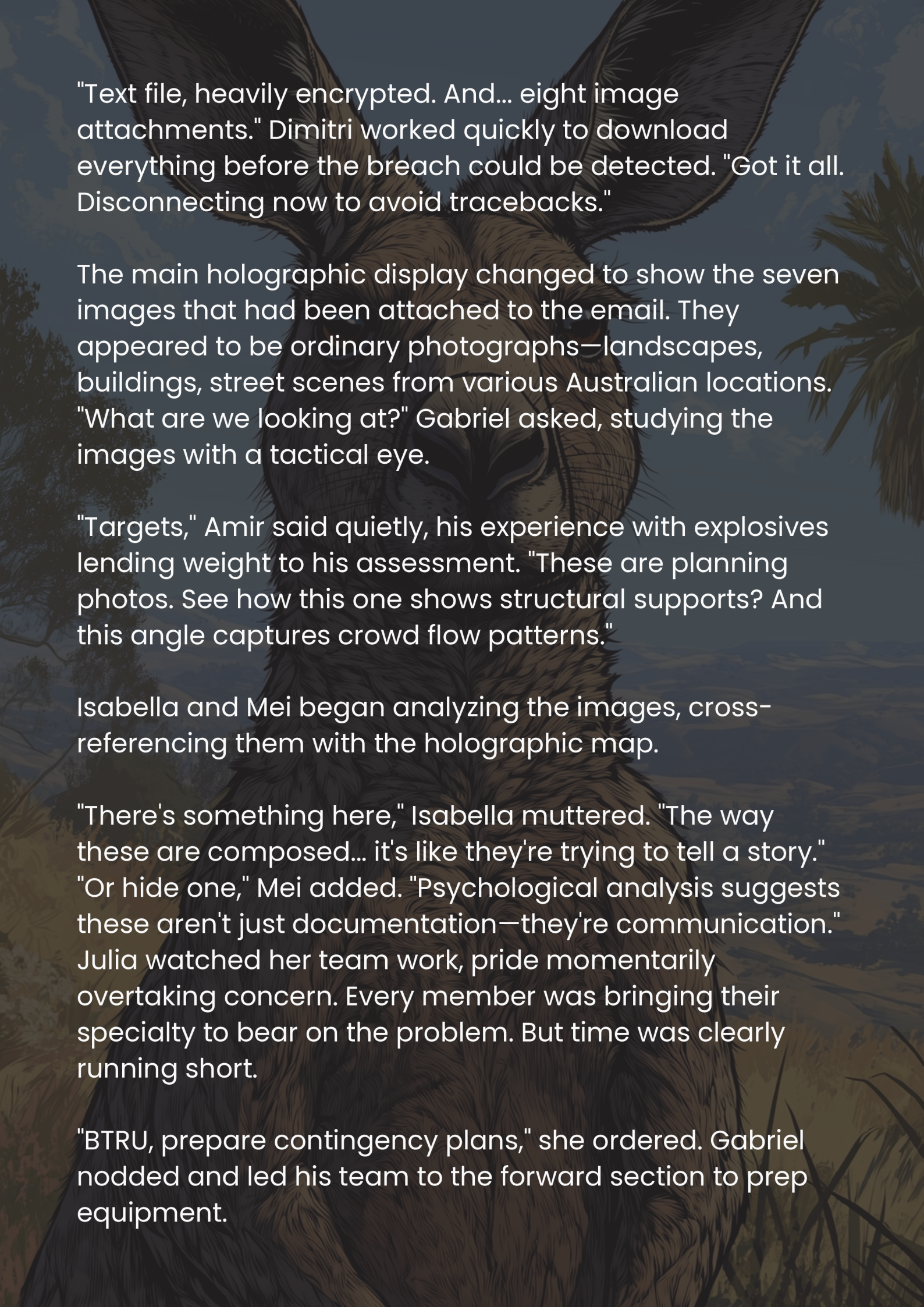
"I've got a breach!" he shouted, a rare excitement in his voice. "Red Team protocols just cracked their secondary email server. The authentication token from the phone clone finally propagated!"

The team converged around his station as data began flowing across his screens.

"One email," Dimitri said, somewhat deflated. "Just one, but it's recent. Sent yesterday."

"What does it contain?" Julia demanded.





"Text file, heavily encrypted. And... eight image attachments." Dimitri worked quickly to download everything before the breach could be detected. "Got it all. Disconnecting now to avoid tracebacks."

The main holographic display changed to show the seven images that had been attached to the email. They appeared to be ordinary photographs—landscapes, buildings, street scenes from various Australian locations. "What are we looking at?" Gabriel asked, studying the images with a tactical eye.

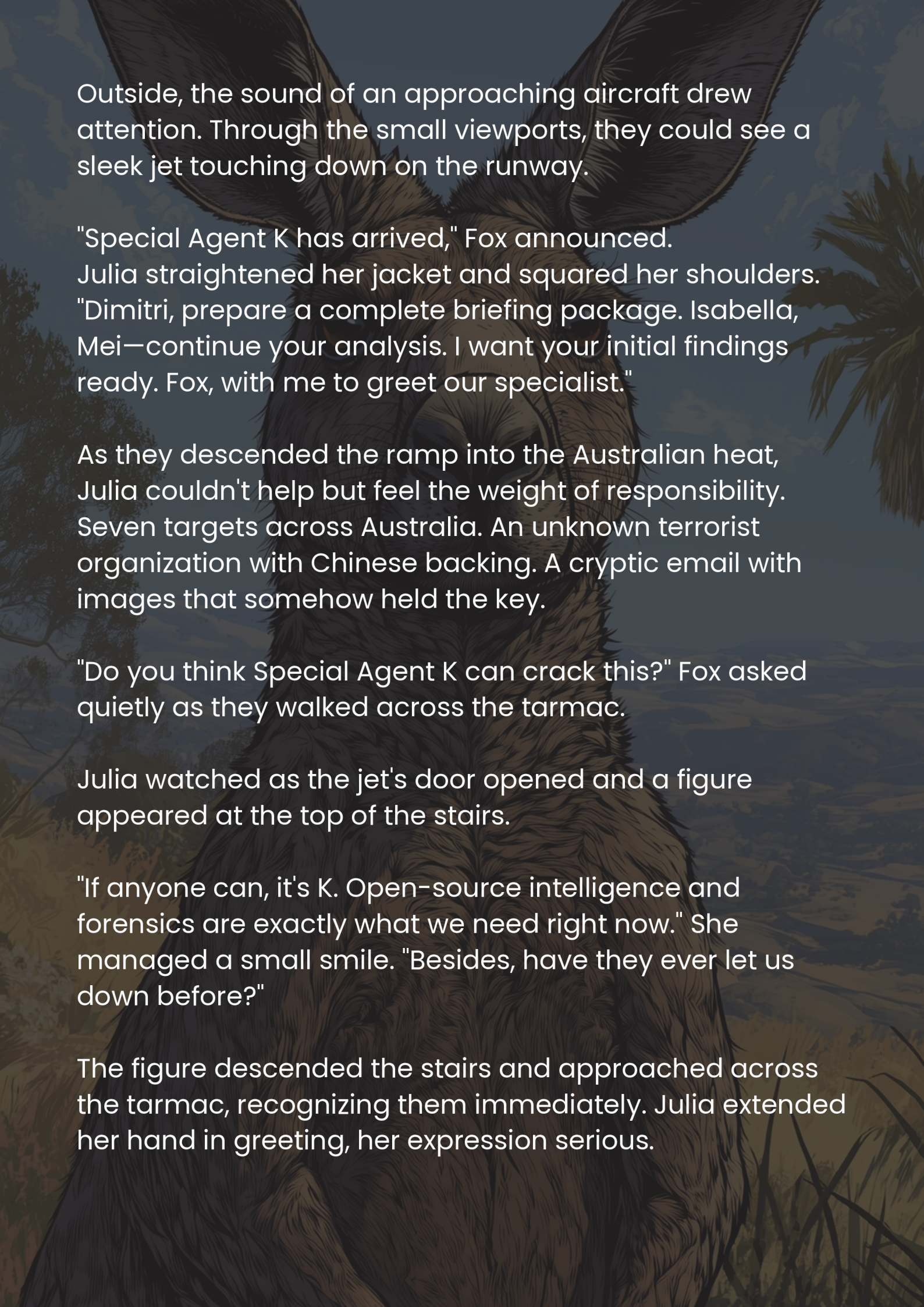
"Targets," Amir said quietly, his experience with explosives lending weight to his assessment. "These are planning photos. See how this one shows structural supports? And this angle captures crowd flow patterns."

Isabella and Mei began analyzing the images, cross-referencing them with the holographic map.

"There's something here," Isabella muttered. "The way these are composed... it's like they're trying to tell a story." "Or hide one," Mei added. "Psychological analysis suggests these aren't just documentation—they're communication." Julia watched her team work, pride momentarily overtaking concern. Every member was bringing their specialty to bear on the problem. But time was clearly running short.

"BTRU, prepare contingency plans," she ordered. Gabriel nodded and led his team to the forward section to prep equipment.





Outside, the sound of an approaching aircraft drew attention. Through the small viewports, they could see a sleek jet touching down on the runway.

"Special Agent K has arrived," Fox announced. Julia straightened her jacket and squared her shoulders. "Dimitri, prepare a complete briefing package. Isabella, Mei—continue your analysis. I want your initial findings ready. Fox, with me to greet our specialist."

As they descended the ramp into the Australian heat, Julia couldn't help but feel the weight of responsibility. Seven targets across Australia. An unknown terrorist organization with Chinese backing. A cryptic email with images that somehow held the key.

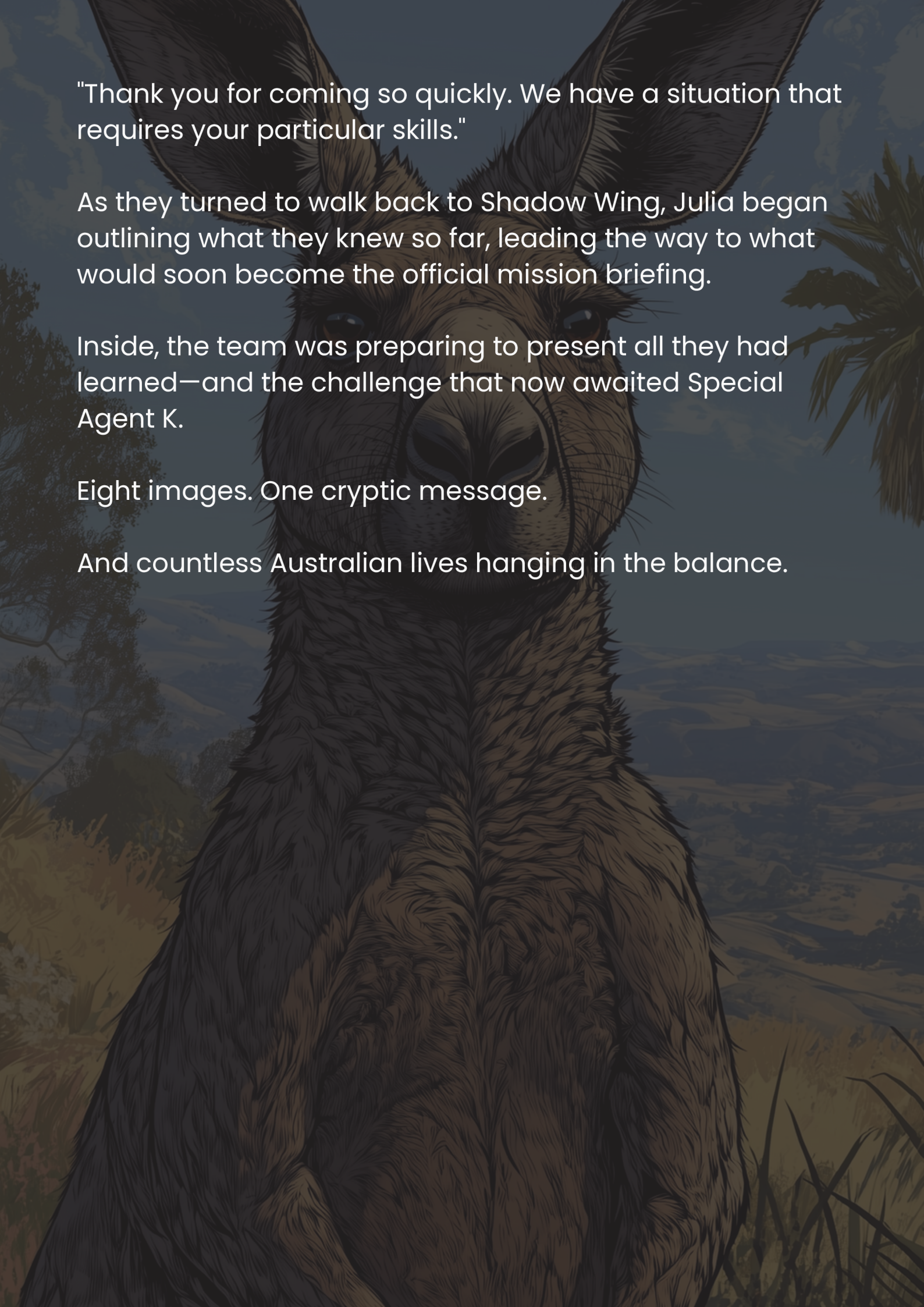
"Do you think Special Agent K can crack this?" Fox asked quietly as they walked across the tarmac.

Julia watched as the jet's door opened and a figure appeared at the top of the stairs.

"If anyone can, it's K. Open-source intelligence and forensics are exactly what we need right now." She managed a small smile. "Besides, have they ever let us down before?"

The figure descended the stairs and approached across the tarmac, recognizing them immediately. Julia extended her hand in greeting, her expression serious.





"Thank you for coming so quickly. We have a situation that requires your particular skills."

As they turned to walk back to Shadow Wing, Julia began outlining what they knew so far, leading the way to what would soon become the official mission briefing.

Inside, the team was preparing to present all they had learned—and the challenge that now awaited Special Agent K.

Eight images. One cryptic message.

And countless Australian lives hanging in the balance.





## Briefing

Greetings, Special Agent.

We need your assistance in an urgent matter. Our client, the Australian Secret Intelligence Agency, ASIS for short, has requested our help to uncover a terrorist organization. This group, whose name is yet to be uncovered, has shown intent on bombing several locations around Australia. Their origins are confirmed to be domestic, with money coming in from Chinese non-government actors.

Several hours ago, our Red Team was able to breach one of the terrorist groups' email accounts. There was a single email, containing a cryptic looking text and a total of seven images. We need you to figure out what these seven images and text mean. Are they connected? Is this a rabbit hole? With our current information, we have reason to believe these images are directly related to the suspected plans for bombings.

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





## Materials

Ido-location-1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8.jpg  
starting-text-Ido.txt

## Answer Instruction

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

You will know it when you have it, it's a long code.

## 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.