

战地回魂



PRISONER OF  
WAR



# Chapter 1: First Contact



The girl could taste dust in her mouth, gritty between her teeth. She had been blindfolded for what felt like hours, jostled in the back of a pickup truck over terrain that seemed determined to break her bones.

When they finally removed the cloth from her eyes, the harsh Malian sun made her squint. Three men with covered faces and rifles pushed her toward a squat building of sun-bleached concrete. Its windows were barred, its walls scarred with bullet holes from some forgotten conflict.

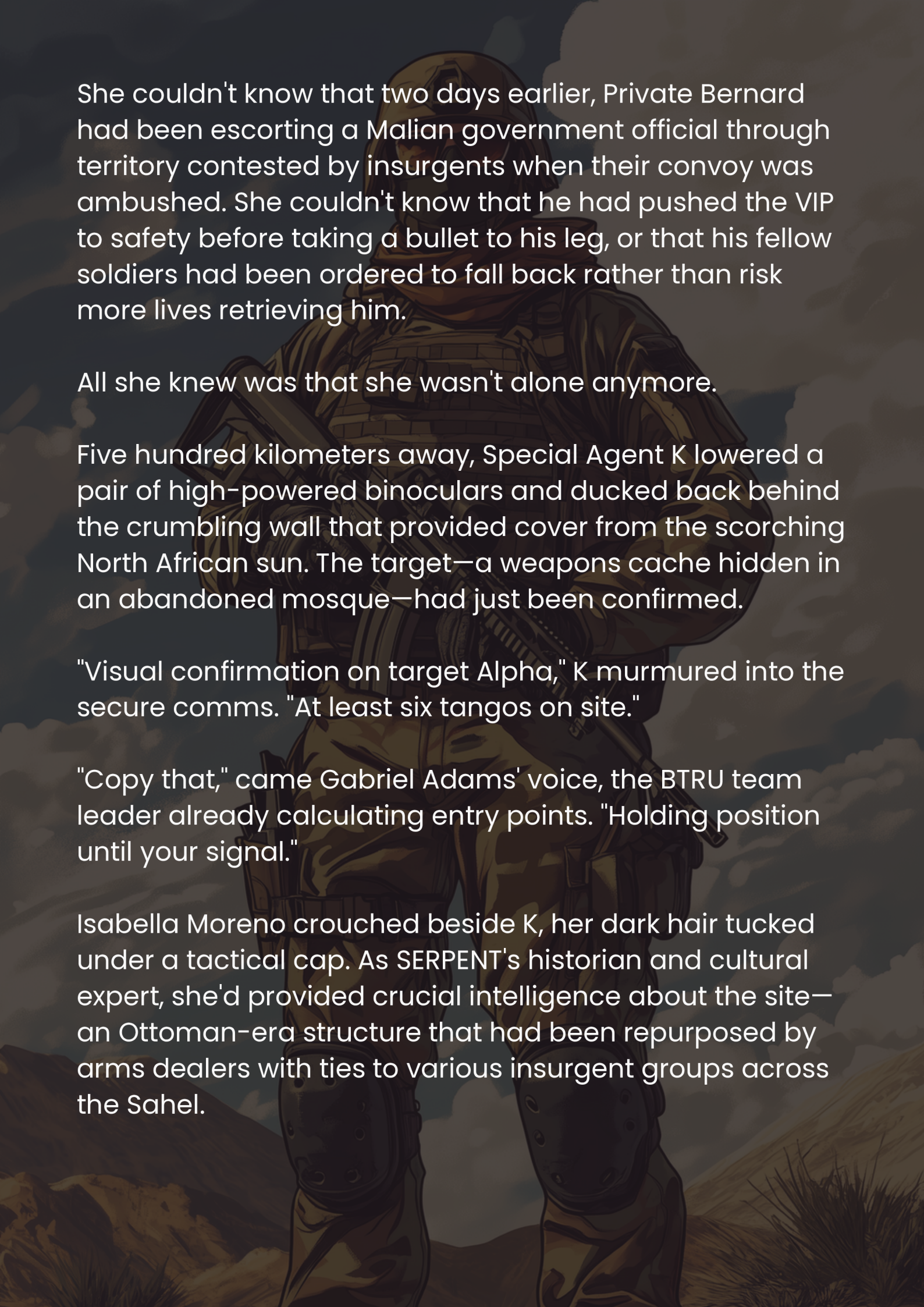
"Move," one of them commanded in accented French, prodding her forward.

She was ten years old. Too young to understand the complexities of the conflict that had swallowed her village, but old enough to know fear when she saw it in the eyes of the man inside.

He sat propped against the wall, his right leg wrapped in dirty bandages, dark with old blood. Despite his condition, he straightened when they pushed her in, his eyes assessing her with military precision before softening with concern.

"Je m'appelle Raphaël," he said quietly after their captors left, locking the heavy door behind them. "Raphaël Bernard."





She couldn't know that two days earlier, Private Bernard had been escorting a Malian government official through territory contested by insurgents when their convoy was ambushed. She couldn't know that he had pushed the VIP to safety before taking a bullet to his leg, or that his fellow soldiers had been ordered to fall back rather than risk more lives retrieving him.

All she knew was that she wasn't alone anymore.

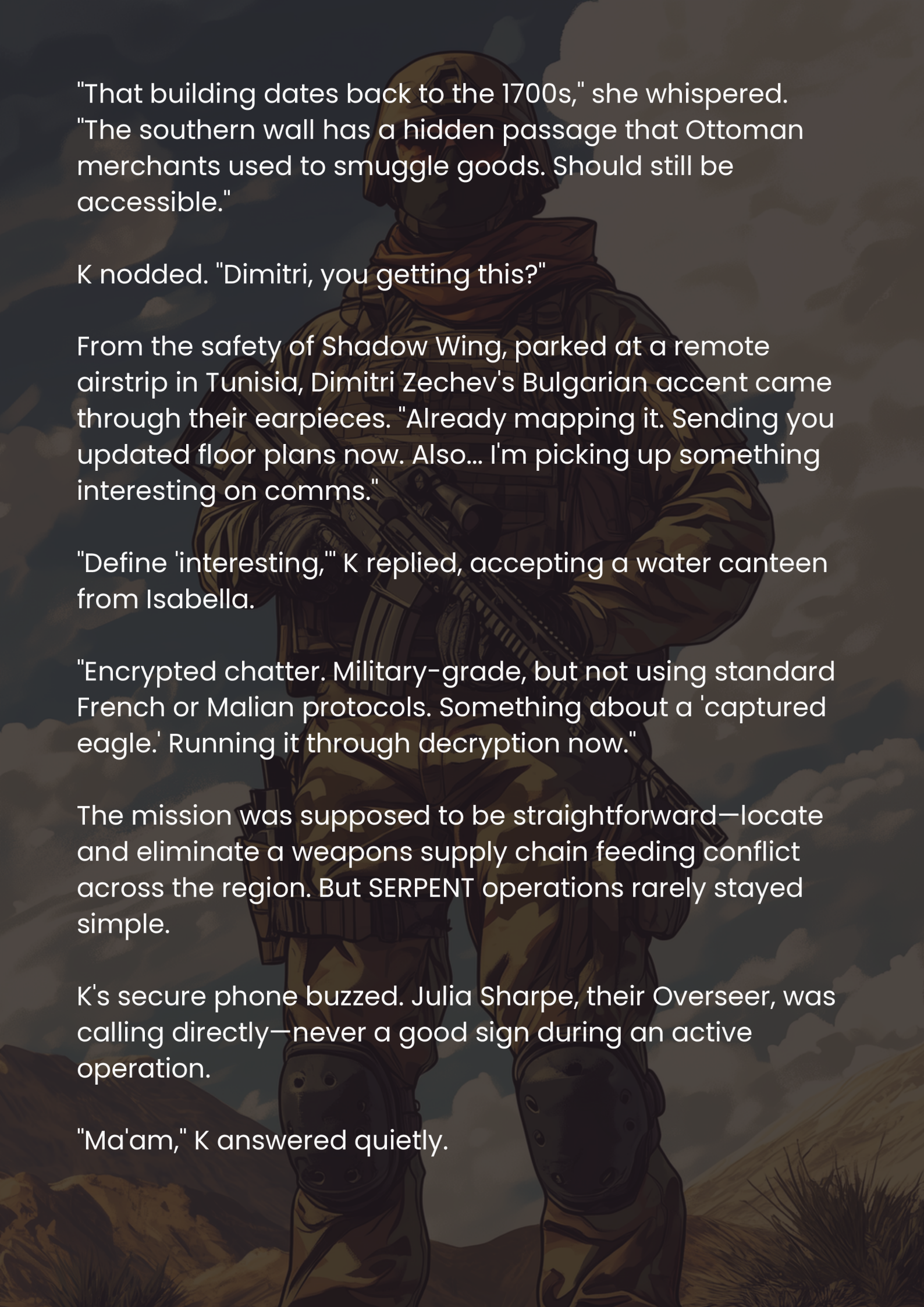
Five hundred kilometers away, Special Agent K lowered a pair of high-powered binoculars and ducked back behind the crumbling wall that provided cover from the scorching North African sun. The target—a weapons cache hidden in an abandoned mosque—had just been confirmed.

"Visual confirmation on target Alpha," K murmured into the secure comms. "At least six tingos on site."

"Copy that," came Gabriel Adams' voice, the BTRU team leader already calculating entry points. "Holding position until your signal."

Isabella Moreno crouched beside K, her dark hair tucked under a tactical cap. As SERPENT's historian and cultural expert, she'd provided crucial intelligence about the site—an Ottoman-era structure that had been repurposed by arms dealers with ties to various insurgent groups across the Sahel.





"That building dates back to the 1700s," she whispered. "The southern wall has a hidden passage that Ottoman merchants used to smuggle goods. Should still be accessible."

K nodded. "Dimitri, you getting this?"

From the safety of Shadow Wing, parked at a remote airstrip in Tunisia, Dimitri Zechev's Bulgarian accent came through their earpieces. "Already mapping it. Sending you updated floor plans now. Also... I'm picking up something interesting on comms."

"Define 'interesting,'" K replied, accepting a water canteen from Isabella.

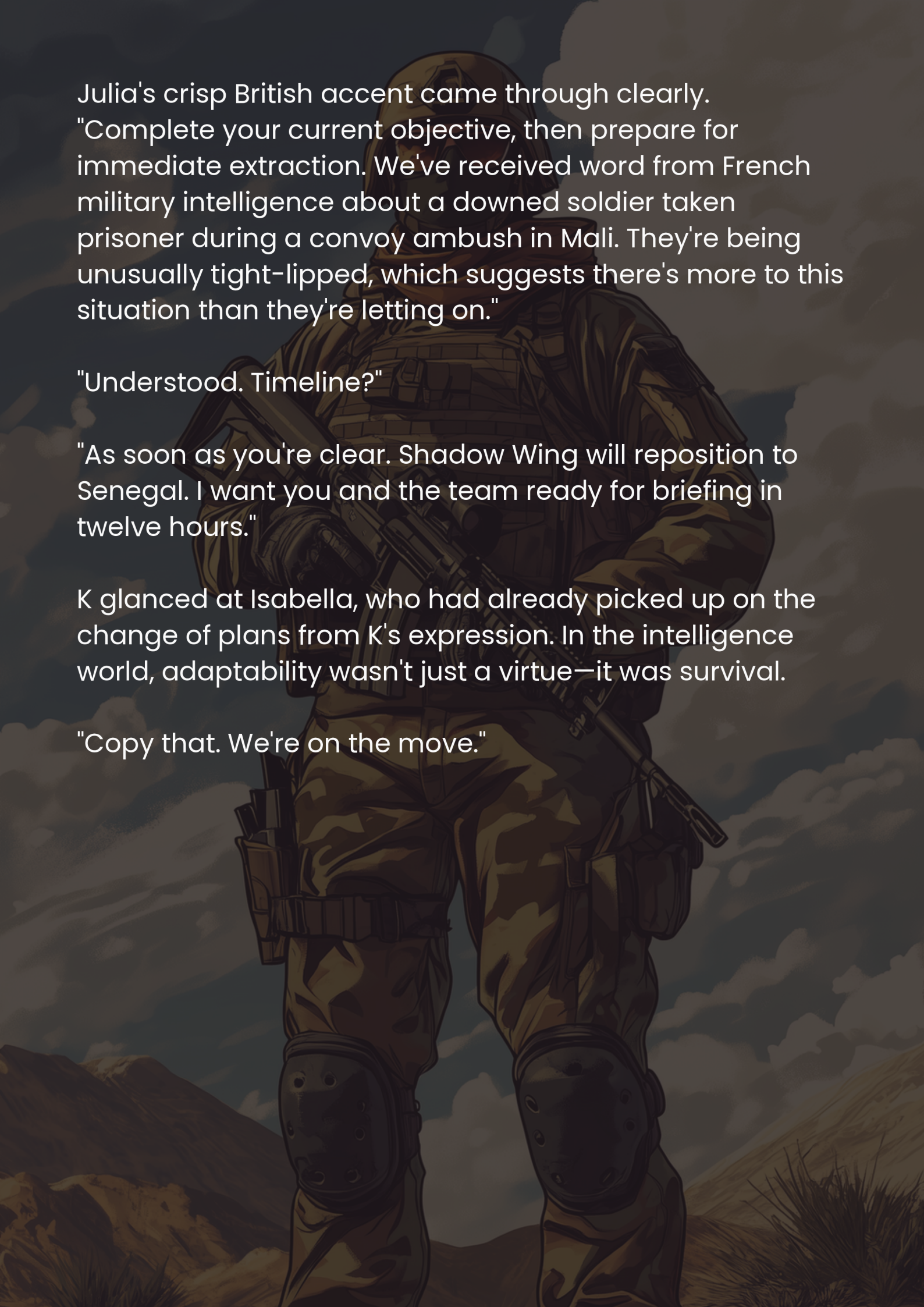
"Encrypted chatter. Military-grade, but not using standard French or Malian protocols. Something about a 'captured eagle.' Running it through decryption now."

The mission was supposed to be straightforward—locate and eliminate a weapons supply chain feeding conflict across the region. But SERPENT operations rarely stayed simple.

K's secure phone buzzed. Julia Sharpe, their Overseer, was calling directly—never a good sign during an active operation.

"Ma'am," K answered quietly.





Julia's crisp British accent came through clearly.  
"Complete your current objective, then prepare for immediate extraction. We've received word from French military intelligence about a downed soldier taken prisoner during a convoy ambush in Mali. They're being unusually tight-lipped, which suggests there's more to this situation than they're letting on."

"Understood. Timeline?"

"As soon as you're clear. Shadow Wing will reposition to Senegal. I want you and the team ready for briefing in twelve hours."

K glanced at Isabella, who had already picked up on the change of plans from K's expression. In the intelligence world, adaptability wasn't just a virtue—it was survival.

"Copy that. We're on the move."



## Chapter 2: Shadows in the Sahel

Fox Meyer wiped sweat from his brow as he navigated the bustling marketplace in Bamako, Mali's capital. His cover as an American agricultural consultant gave him reasonable freedom of movement, but the real reason for his presence had nothing to do with crop yields.

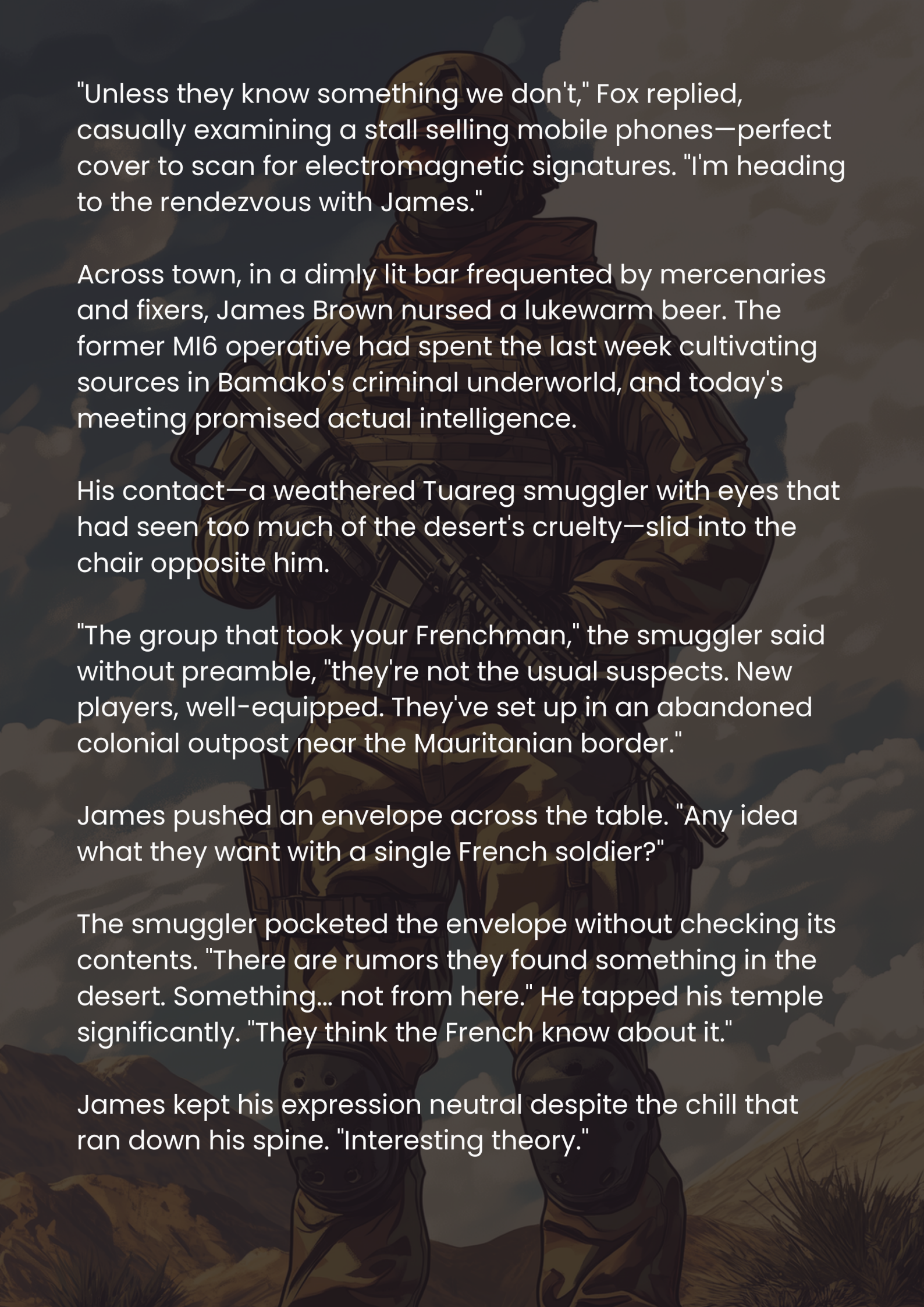
"Anything?" he murmured, seemingly adjusting his sunglasses but actually activating the secure comm link to Cassandra Laurent.

Cassandra, posing as a French diplomat at a climate conference, responded discretely from a hotel across the city. "Nothing concrete. The French embassy is buzzing, but they're keeping whatever happened tightly classified." Fox frowned. Three weeks ago, SERPENT's extraterrestrial monitoring systems had detected an unusual energy signature in the Mali-Mauritania border region—the kind associated with Volrac technology.

His role as Extraterrestrial Liaison made him particularly sensitive to the implications. If alien tech had fallen into the hands of insurgents, the consequences could be catastrophic.

"Our friend at the embassy confirmed a convoy was hit two days ago," Cassandra continued. "One soldier missing, presumed captured. The French aren't mounting a rescue operation, which is unusual for their military doctrine."





"Unless they know something we don't," Fox replied, casually examining a stall selling mobile phones—perfect cover to scan for electromagnetic signatures. "I'm heading to the rendezvous with James."

Across town, in a dimly lit bar frequented by mercenaries and fixers, James Brown nursed a lukewarm beer. The former MI6 operative had spent the last week cultivating sources in Bamako's criminal underworld, and today's meeting promised actual intelligence.

His contact—a weathered Tuareg smuggler with eyes that had seen too much of the desert's cruelty—slid into the chair opposite him.

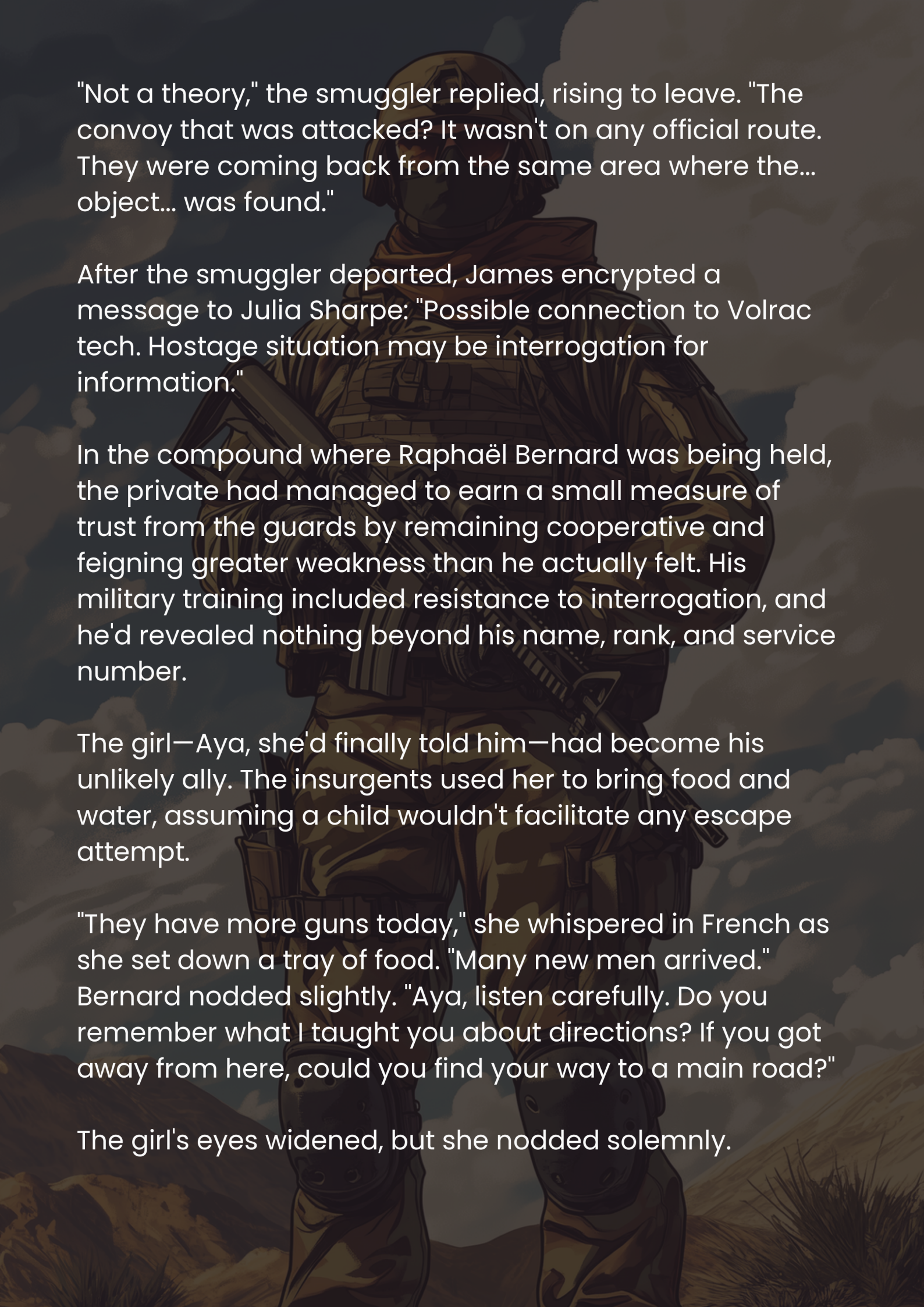
"The group that took your Frenchman," the smuggler said without preamble, "they're not the usual suspects. New players, well-equipped. They've set up in an abandoned colonial outpost near the Mauritanian border."

James pushed an envelope across the table. "Any idea what they want with a single French soldier?"

The smuggler pocketed the envelope without checking its contents. "There are rumors they found something in the desert. Something... not from here." He tapped his temple significantly. "They think the French know about it."

James kept his expression neutral despite the chill that ran down his spine. "Interesting theory."





"Not a theory," the smuggler replied, rising to leave. "The convoy that was attacked? It wasn't on any official route. They were coming back from the same area where the... object... was found."

After the smuggler departed, James encrypted a message to Julia Sharpe: "Possible connection to Volrac tech. Hostage situation may be interrogation for information."

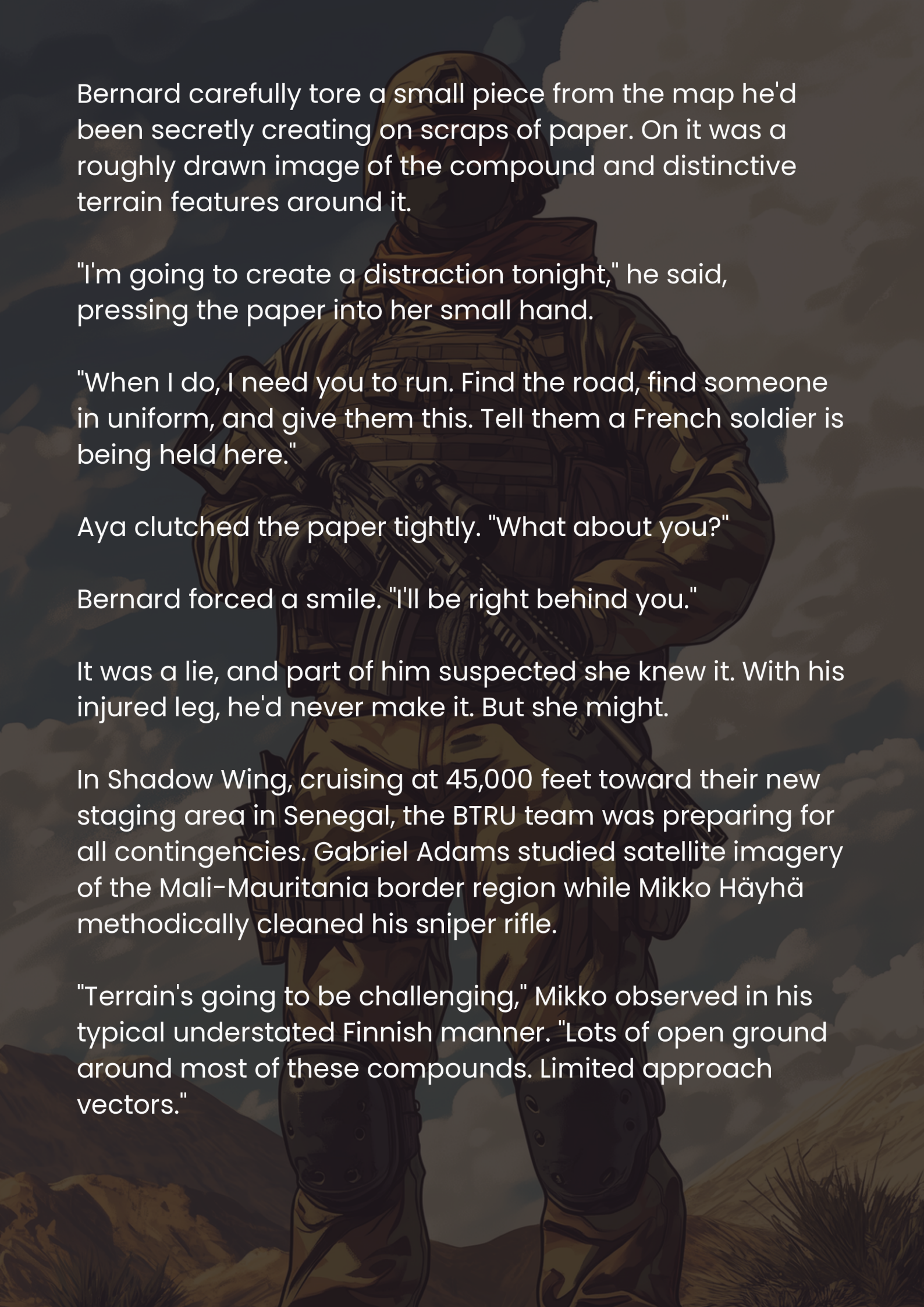
In the compound where Raphaël Bernard was being held, the private had managed to earn a small measure of trust from the guards by remaining cooperative and feigning greater weakness than he actually felt. His military training included resistance to interrogation, and he'd revealed nothing beyond his name, rank, and service number.

The girl—Aya, she'd finally told him—had become his unlikely ally. The insurgents used her to bring food and water, assuming a child wouldn't facilitate any escape attempt.

"They have more guns today," she whispered in French as she set down a tray of food. "Many new men arrived." Bernard nodded slightly. "Aya, listen carefully. Do you remember what I taught you about directions? If you got away from here, could you find your way to a main road?"

The girl's eyes widened, but she nodded solemnly.





Bernard carefully tore a small piece from the map he'd been secretly creating on scraps of paper. On it was a roughly drawn image of the compound and distinctive terrain features around it.

"I'm going to create a distraction tonight," he said, pressing the paper into her small hand.

"When I do, I need you to run. Find the road, find someone in uniform, and give them this. Tell them a French soldier is being held here."

Aya clutched the paper tightly. "What about you?"

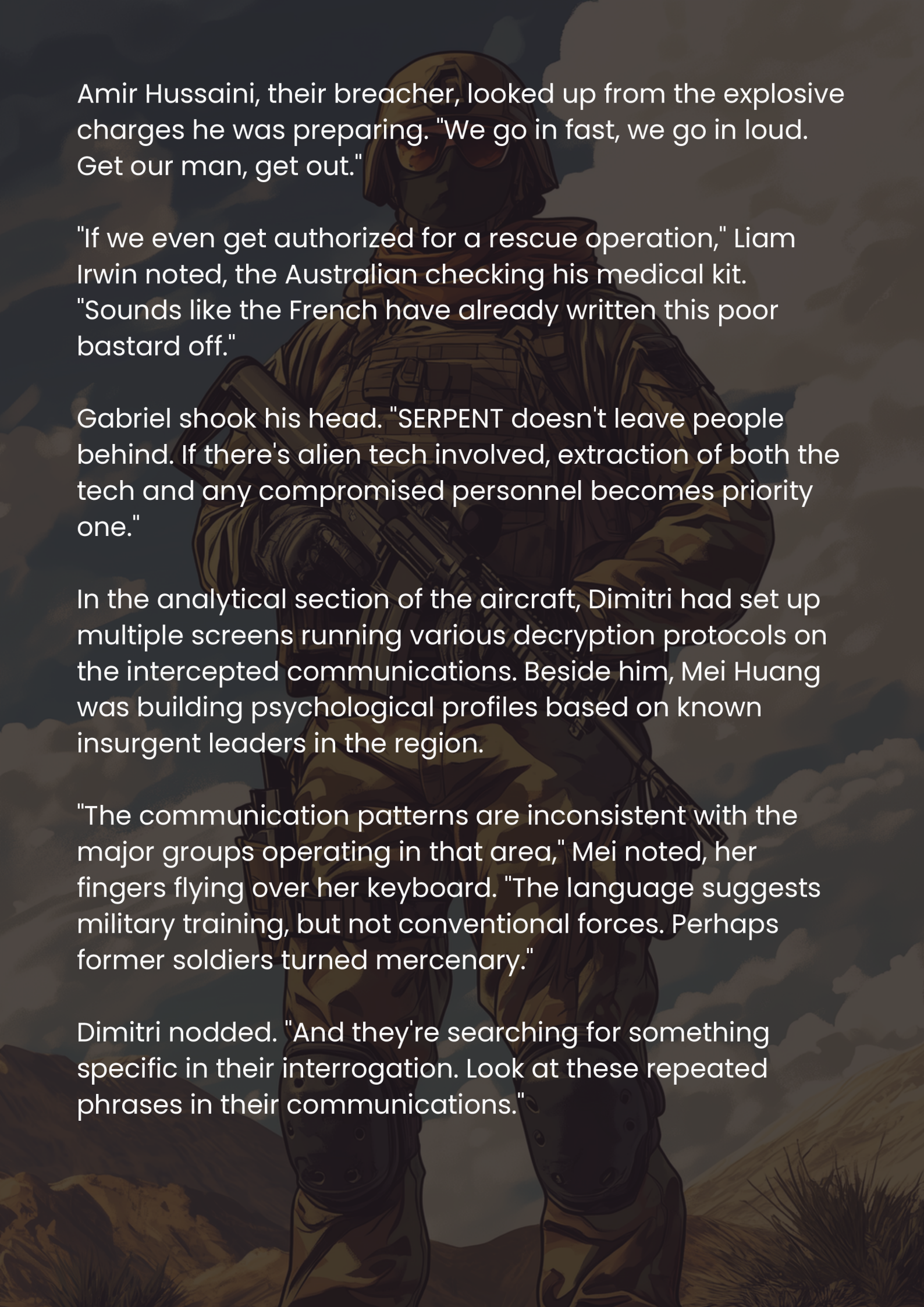
Bernard forced a smile. "I'll be right behind you."

It was a lie, and part of him suspected she knew it. With his injured leg, he'd never make it. But she might.

In Shadow Wing, cruising at 45,000 feet toward their new staging area in Senegal, the BTRU team was preparing for all contingencies. Gabriel Adams studied satellite imagery of the Mali-Mauritania border region while Mikko Häyhä methodically cleaned his sniper rifle.

"Terrain's going to be challenging," Mikko observed in his typical understated Finnish manner. "Lots of open ground around most of these compounds. Limited approach vectors."





Amir Hussaini, their breacher, looked up from the explosive charges he was preparing. "We go in fast, we go in loud. Get our man, get out."

"If we even get authorized for a rescue operation," Liam Irwin noted, the Australian checking his medical kit. "Sounds like the French have already written this poor bastard off."

Gabriel shook his head. "SERPENT doesn't leave people behind. If there's alien tech involved, extraction of both the tech and any compromised personnel becomes priority one."

In the analytical section of the aircraft, Dimitri had set up multiple screens running various decryption protocols on the intercepted communications. Beside him, Mei Huang was building psychological profiles based on known insurgent leaders in the region.

"The communication patterns are inconsistent with the major groups operating in that area," Mei noted, her fingers flying over her keyboard. "The language suggests military training, but not conventional forces. Perhaps former soldiers turned mercenary."

Dimitri nodded. "And they're searching for something specific in their interrogation. Look at these repeated phrases in their communications."



A full-page illustration of a soldier in modern combat gear, including a helmet, goggles, and a tactical vest, standing in a desert environment with mountains in the background. The soldier is holding a rifle. The image is dark and moody, with a brown and grey color palette.

Mei leaned closer to his screen.

"They believe the French have found Volrac technology and are keeping it secret. They're holding the soldier to extract information about its location."

"But why not just torture him for the information?" Dimitri wondered.

Mei's expression darkened.

"Because they're not sure he knows. They're keeping him alive while they verify his value. The moment they determine he either doesn't know or won't talk..."

She didn't need to finish the sentence.



## Chapter 3: The Message

The night was moonless when Bernard created his distraction. Using materials he'd slowly gathered over days—a torn piece of his uniform, the tray their food came on, and a small amount of fuel he'd managed to siphon from a neglected generator—he started a small fire in the corner of their cell.

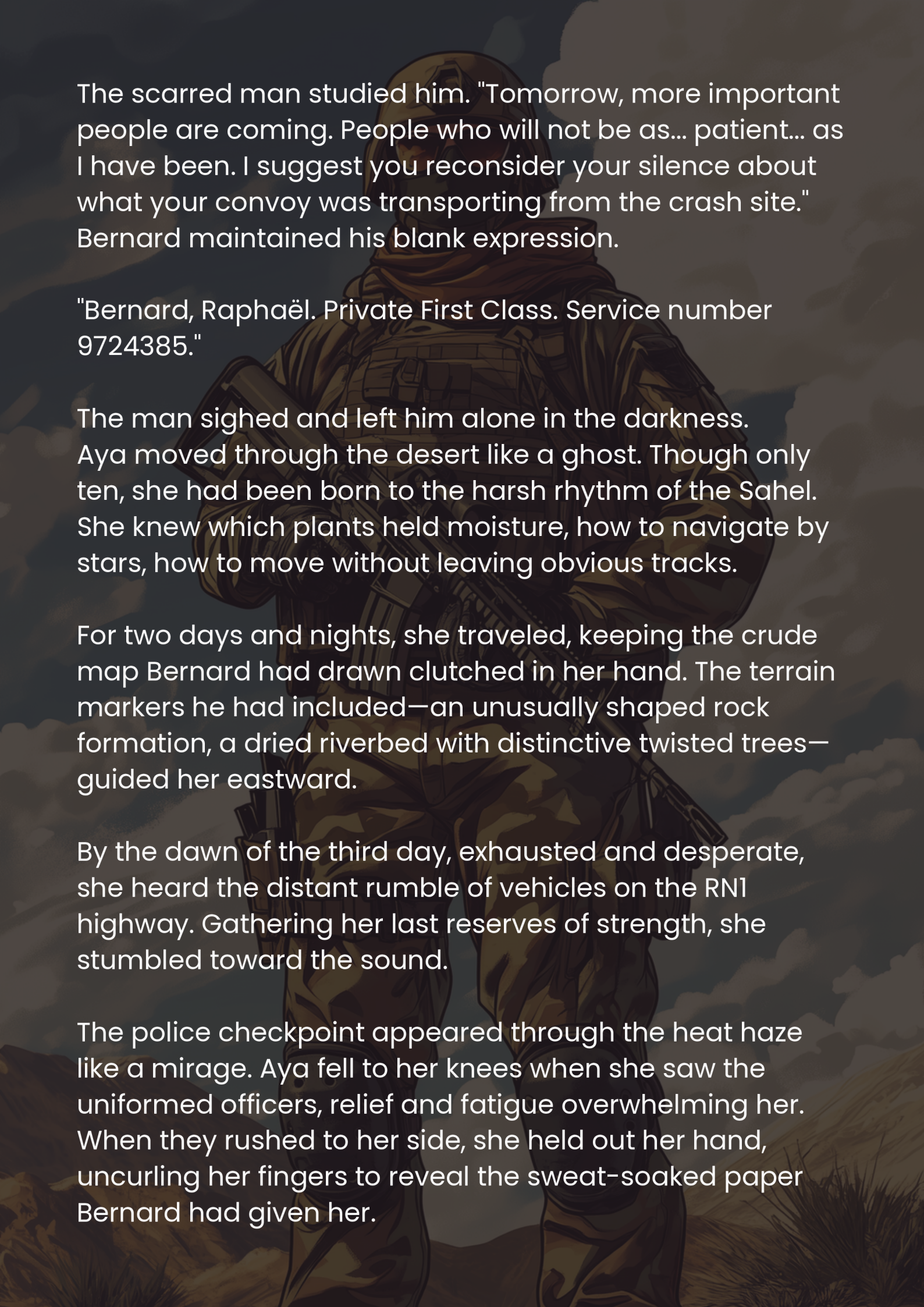
As smoke began to fill the room, he called out in what he hoped was convincing panic. When the guards rushed in, cursing and distracted by the flames, Aya slipped past them into the darkness. Bernard launched himself at the closest guard despite his injured leg, creating further chaos to cover her escape.

The last thing he saw before a rifle butt connected with his temple was Aya's small figure disappearing into the night. When he regained consciousness, his injured leg had been re-bound—tightly enough to prevent infection but painfully enough to serve as punishment. The leader of his captors, a tall man with a scar running down his cheek, stood over him.

"That was foolish," the man said in perfect French. "The girl will die in the desert."

Bernard said nothing, but a small flame of hope burned in his chest. Aya was smart and resourceful. She knew to travel only at night, to conserve the water he'd saved for her. She had a chance.





The scarred man studied him. "Tomorrow, more important people are coming. People who will not be as... patient... as I have been. I suggest you reconsider your silence about what your convoy was transporting from the crash site." Bernard maintained his blank expression.

"Bernard, Raphaël. Private First Class. Service number 9724385."

The man sighed and left him alone in the darkness. Aya moved through the desert like a ghost. Though only ten, she had been born to the harsh rhythm of the Sahel. She knew which plants held moisture, how to navigate by stars, how to move without leaving obvious tracks.

For two days and nights, she traveled, keeping the crude map Bernard had drawn clutched in her hand. The terrain markers he had included—an unusually shaped rock formation, a dried riverbed with distinctive twisted trees—guided her eastward.

By the dawn of the third day, exhausted and desperate, she heard the distant rumble of vehicles on the RN1 highway. Gathering her last reserves of strength, she stumbled toward the sound.

The police checkpoint appeared through the heat haze like a mirage. Aya fell to her knees when she saw the uniformed officers, relief and fatigue overwhelming her. When they rushed to her side, she held out her hand, uncurling her fingers to reveal the sweat-soaked paper Bernard had given her.





"Un soldat français," she managed to say before unconsciousness claimed her. "Il a besoin d'aide."

Pablo Iglesias guided Shadow Wing into a perfect landing on the discreet airstrip outside Dakar, Senegal. Beside him, Peter Jansen was already running post-flight checks, ensuring the modified Bombardier Global 8000 would be ready for immediate departure if needed.

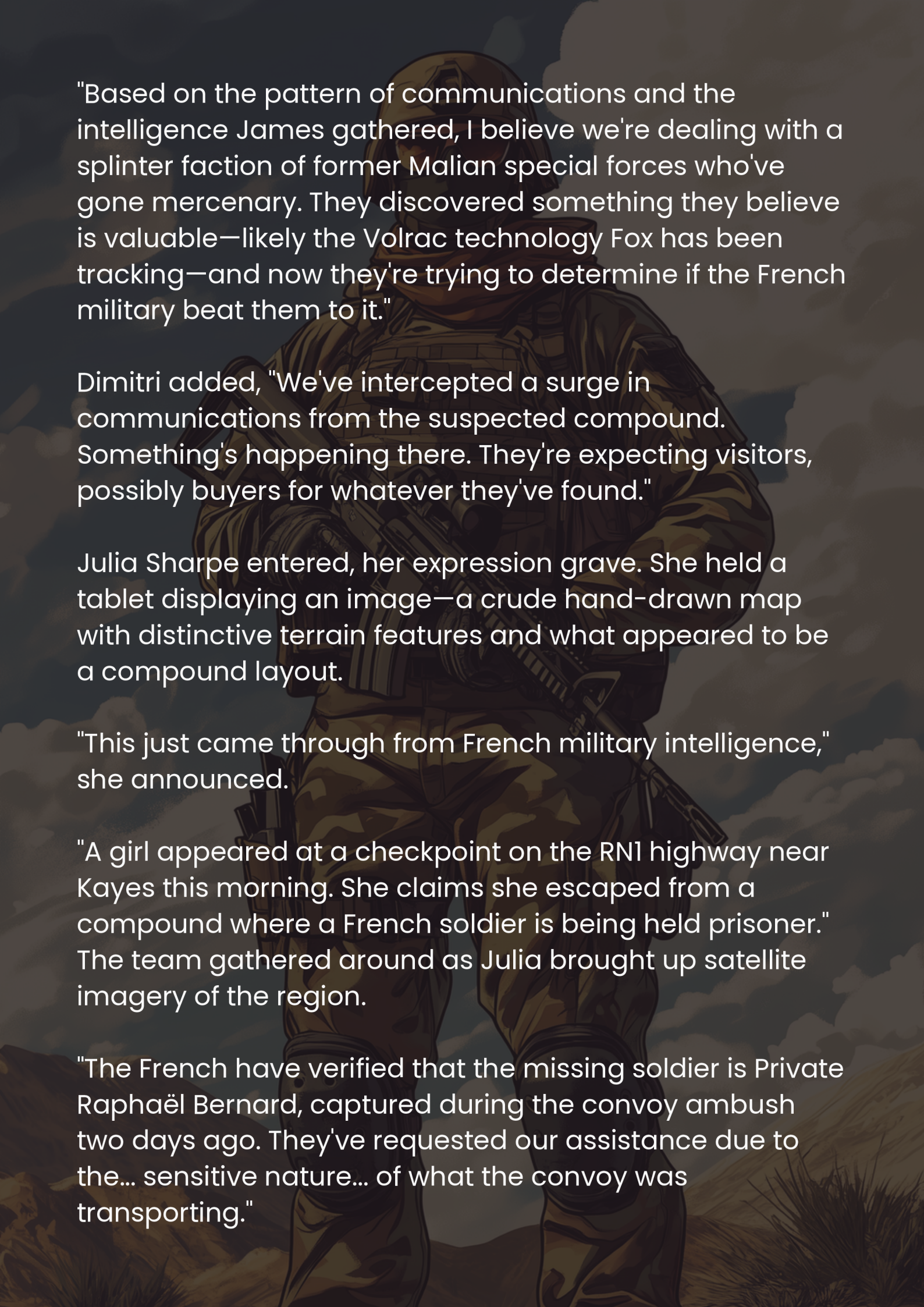
"Storms gathering to the east," Peter noted, studying weather patterns on his display. "Mali-Mauritania border region is going to be difficult to access by air in about 48 hours."

Pablo nodded grimly. "Then we'd better resolve this quickly." The Chilean pilot had seen enough rescue operations to know that time was the enemy in hostage situations. Every hour reduced the chances of a successful extraction.

In the main cabin, converted to SERPENT's mobile command center, the team was assembling. Special Agent K and Isabella had arrived from their previous operation, both still dusty from the North African desert. Fox and Cassandra had made it back from Bamako, bringing James Brown and his intelligence from local sources.

Mei Huang was busy compiling a comprehensive psychological assessment of the hostage situation.





"Based on the pattern of communications and the intelligence James gathered, I believe we're dealing with a splinter faction of former Malian special forces who've gone mercenary. They discovered something they believe is valuable—likely the Volrac technology Fox has been tracking—and now they're trying to determine if the French military beat them to it."

Dimitri added, "We've intercepted a surge in communications from the suspected compound. Something's happening there. They're expecting visitors, possibly buyers for whatever they've found."

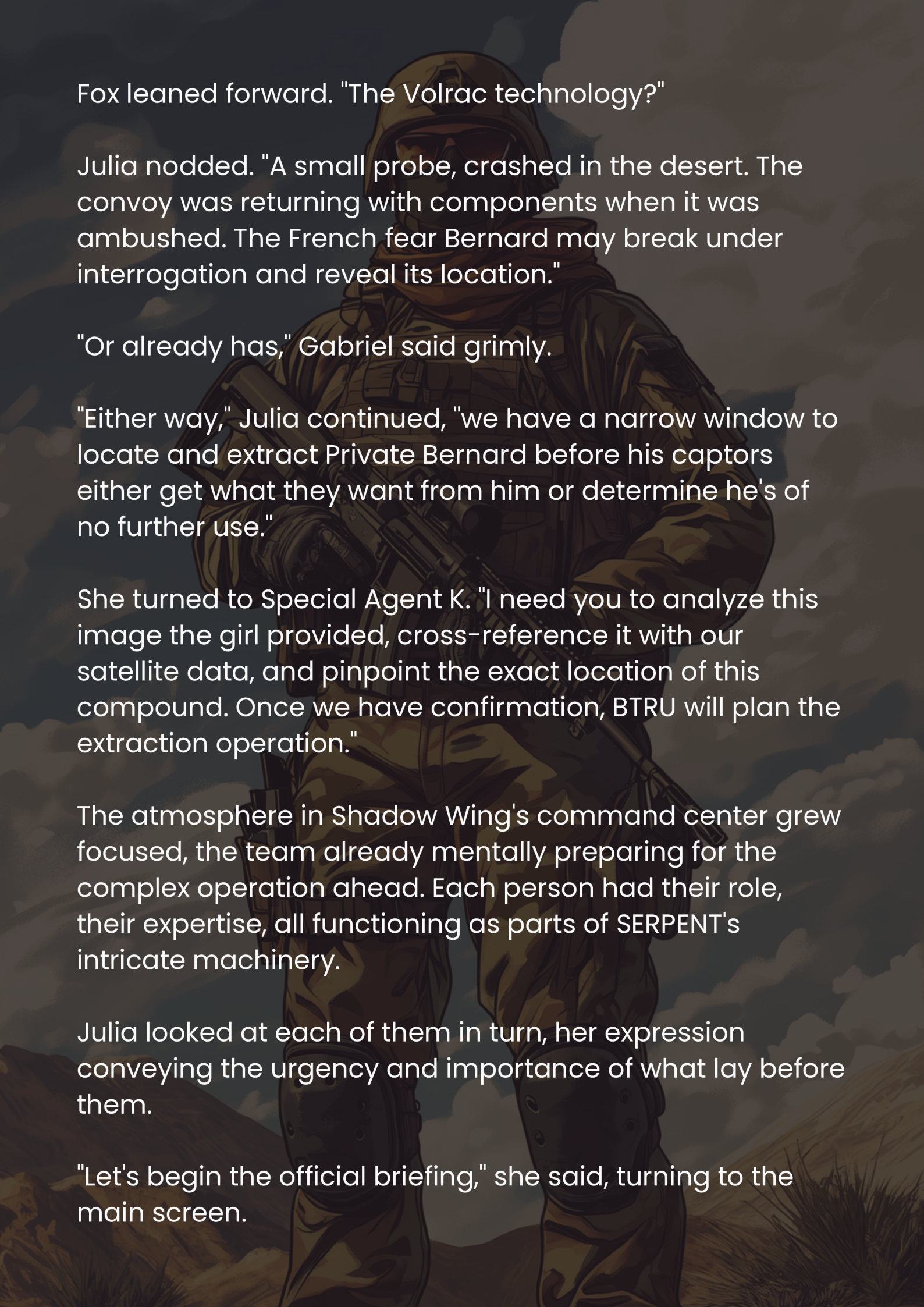
Julia Sharpe entered, her expression grave. She held a tablet displaying an image—a crude hand-drawn map with distinctive terrain features and what appeared to be a compound layout.

"This just came through from French military intelligence," she announced.

"A girl appeared at a checkpoint on the RN1 highway near Kayes this morning. She claims she escaped from a compound where a French soldier is being held prisoner." The team gathered around as Julia brought up satellite imagery of the region.

"The French have verified that the missing soldier is Private Raphaël Bernard, captured during the convoy ambush two days ago. They've requested our assistance due to the... sensitive nature... of what the convoy was transporting."





Fox leaned forward. "The Volrac technology?"

Julia nodded. "A small probe, crashed in the desert. The convoy was returning with components when it was ambushed. The French fear Bernard may break under interrogation and reveal its location."

"Or already has," Gabriel said grimly.

"Either way," Julia continued, "we have a narrow window to locate and extract Private Bernard before his captors either get what they want from him or determine he's of no further use."

She turned to Special Agent K. "I need you to analyze this image the girl provided, cross-reference it with our satellite data, and pinpoint the exact location of this compound. Once we have confirmation, BTRU will plan the extraction operation."

The atmosphere in Shadow Wing's command center grew focused, the team already mentally preparing for the complex operation ahead. Each person had their role, their expertise, all functioning as parts of SERPENT's intricate machinery.

Julia looked at each of them in turn, her expression conveying the urgency and importance of what lay before them.

"Let's begin the official briefing," she said, turning to the main screen.



# Briefing



Greetings, Special Agent.

Two days ago, during a routine escort of a Malian VIP, the convoy was ambushed by unknown insurgent forces. The VIP and most of the convoy managed to return fire and make it out alive. One of the soldiers however, Raphaël Bernard, was hit in the right leg and taken prisoner by the insurgents. Not being able to reach private Bernard before being captured, French forces were ordered to stand down and not give chase.

Continuing efforts of the French government to locate the missing private have yielded no results. Up until this morning, when a young girl approached a local police unit. She conveyed to them she had escaped a childrens home where she was kept against her will. The man who helped her escape, gave her a picture of the place they were being held. We have reason to believe this man is the missing private, Raphaël Bernard.

The girl approached the officers on the RNI near "Posté de contrôle KAYES". Below you find the image given to the girl, as well as the AOR (Area of Operation) of the remaining French detachment. It's your job to locate the building where the French private is being held. Once the location is confirmed, French special forces will conduct a raid to extract Raphaël Bernard.

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



# Materials

map-prisoner-of-war.png  
compound-prisoner-of-war.png

## Answer Instruction

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

Construct the answer using the full name of the location, as listed on Google Maps.

Example: habitat-d-azure-hotel-champagne

## 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.