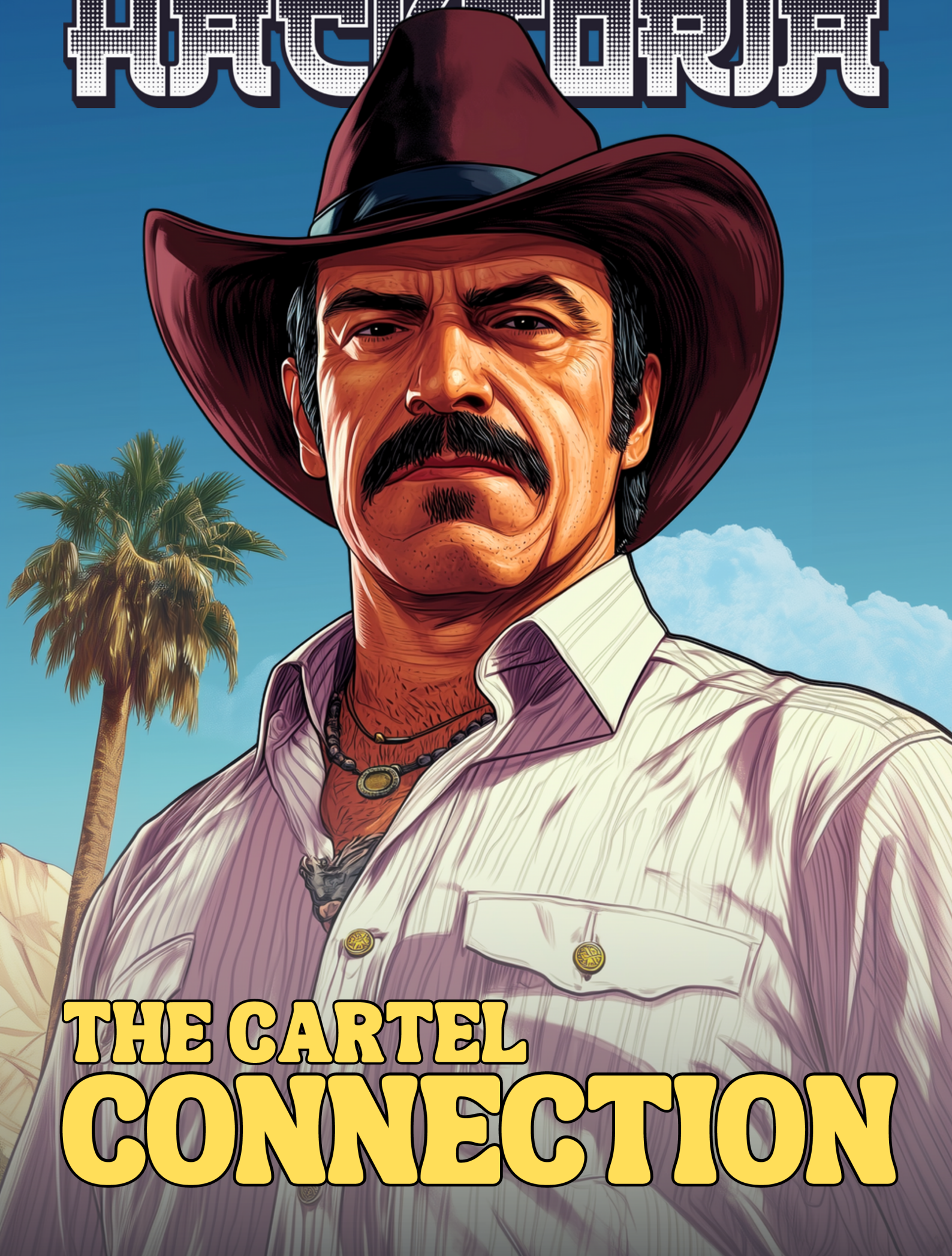


HAZARD



THE CARTEL CONNECTION

Chapter 1: Shadow in Bogotá

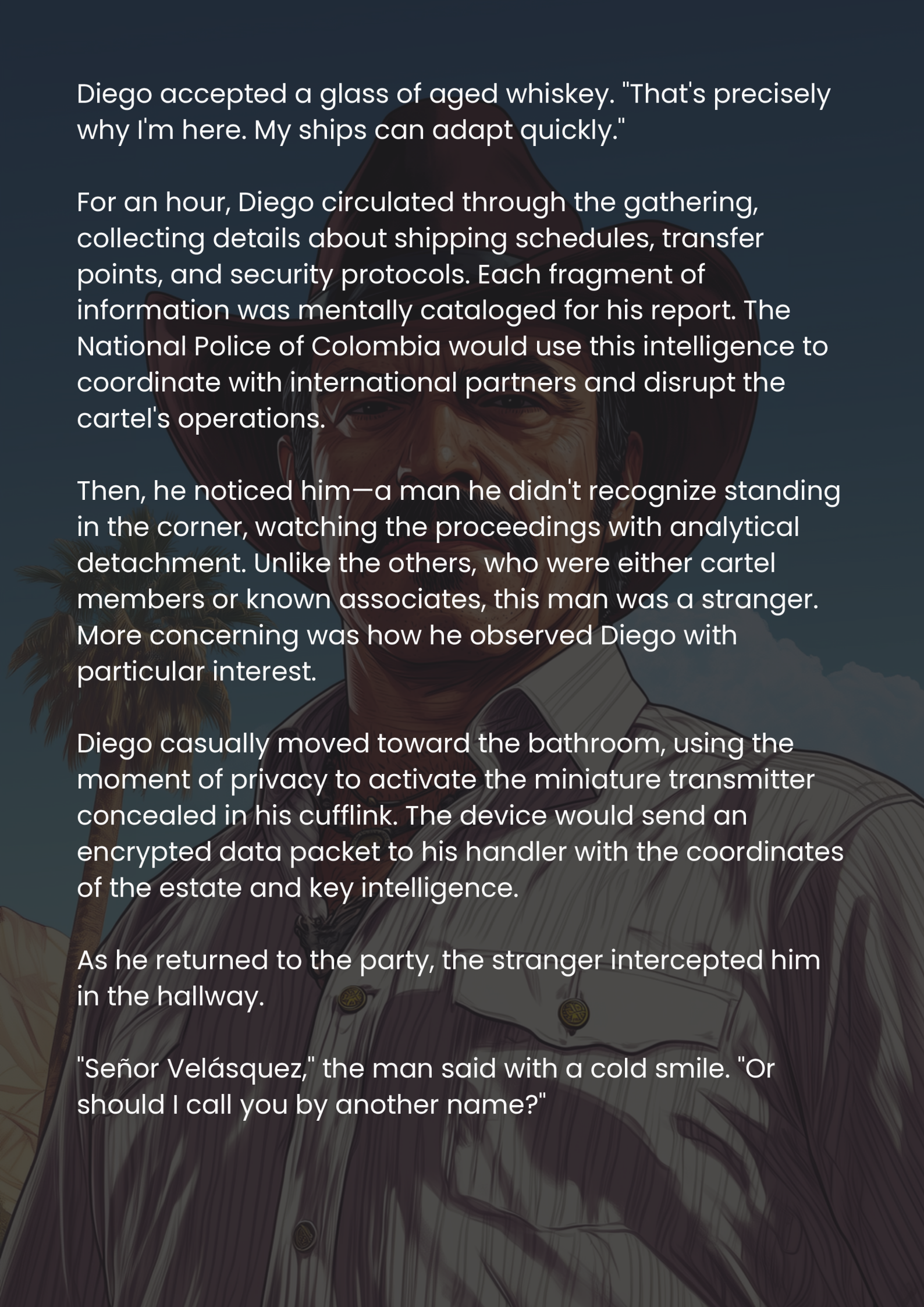
The sun was setting over Colombia's Caribbean coast, painting the horizon in brilliant shades of orange and red. In stark contrast to the natural beauty, Diego Alejandro Martinez Nunez adjusted his designer sunglasses and checked his Rolex—both props for his cover identity as a wealthy shipping magnate interested in expanding his operations. Three months undercover had earned him enough trust to secure an invitation to this exclusive gathering.

"Señor Velásquez, welcome to my home," greeted Mateo Restrepo, the cartel's logistics coordinator. The sprawling beachfront estate was deliberately isolated, accessible only by a narrow coastal road that wound between the jungle-covered mountains and the sea.

"The pleasure is mine," Diego replied, adopting the confident swagger of his alias. "I've heard your operation is expanding. I'm interested in being part of that growth."

Restrepo guided him through the villa, where beautiful women served drinks to a dozen men in expensive suits—the cartel's upper echelon. Security personnel with barely concealed weapons maintained a watchful presence.

"Our American friends are making things difficult in the usual ports," Restrepo explained. "But we have developed new routes. More expensive, but more secure."



Diego accepted a glass of aged whiskey. "That's precisely why I'm here. My ships can adapt quickly."

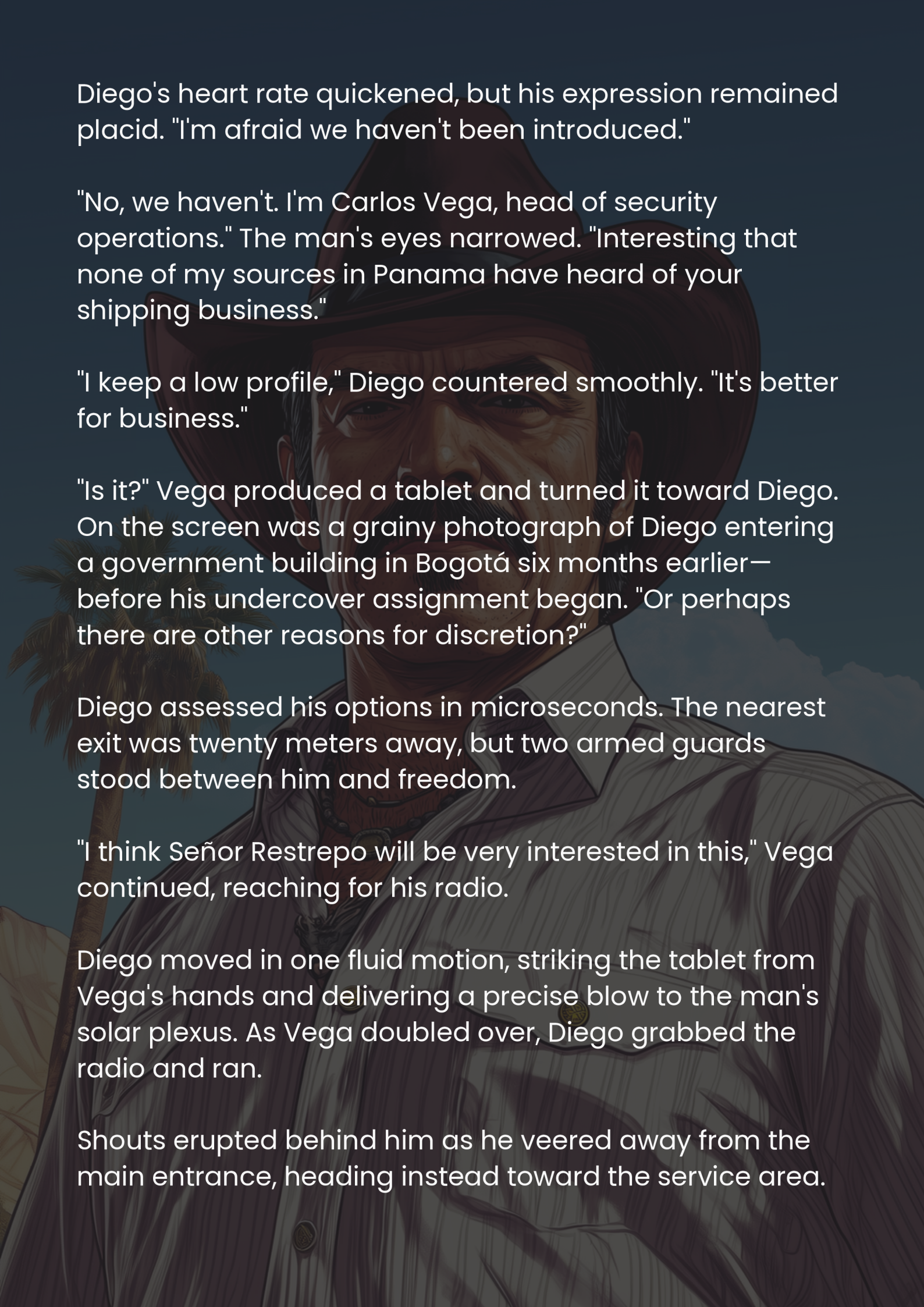
For an hour, Diego circulated through the gathering, collecting details about shipping schedules, transfer points, and security protocols. Each fragment of information was mentally cataloged for his report. The National Police of Colombia would use this intelligence to coordinate with international partners and disrupt the cartel's operations.

Then, he noticed him—a man he didn't recognize standing in the corner, watching the proceedings with analytical detachment. Unlike the others, who were either cartel members or known associates, this man was a stranger. More concerning was how he observed Diego with particular interest.

Diego casually moved toward the bathroom, using the moment of privacy to activate the miniature transmitter concealed in his cufflink. The device would send an encrypted data packet to his handler with the coordinates of the estate and key intelligence.

As he returned to the party, the stranger intercepted him in the hallway.

"Señor Velásquez," the man said with a cold smile. "Or should I call you by another name?"



Diego's heart rate quickened, but his expression remained placid. "I'm afraid we haven't been introduced."

"No, we haven't. I'm Carlos Vega, head of security operations." The man's eyes narrowed. "Interesting that none of my sources in Panama have heard of your shipping business."

"I keep a low profile," Diego countered smoothly. "It's better for business."

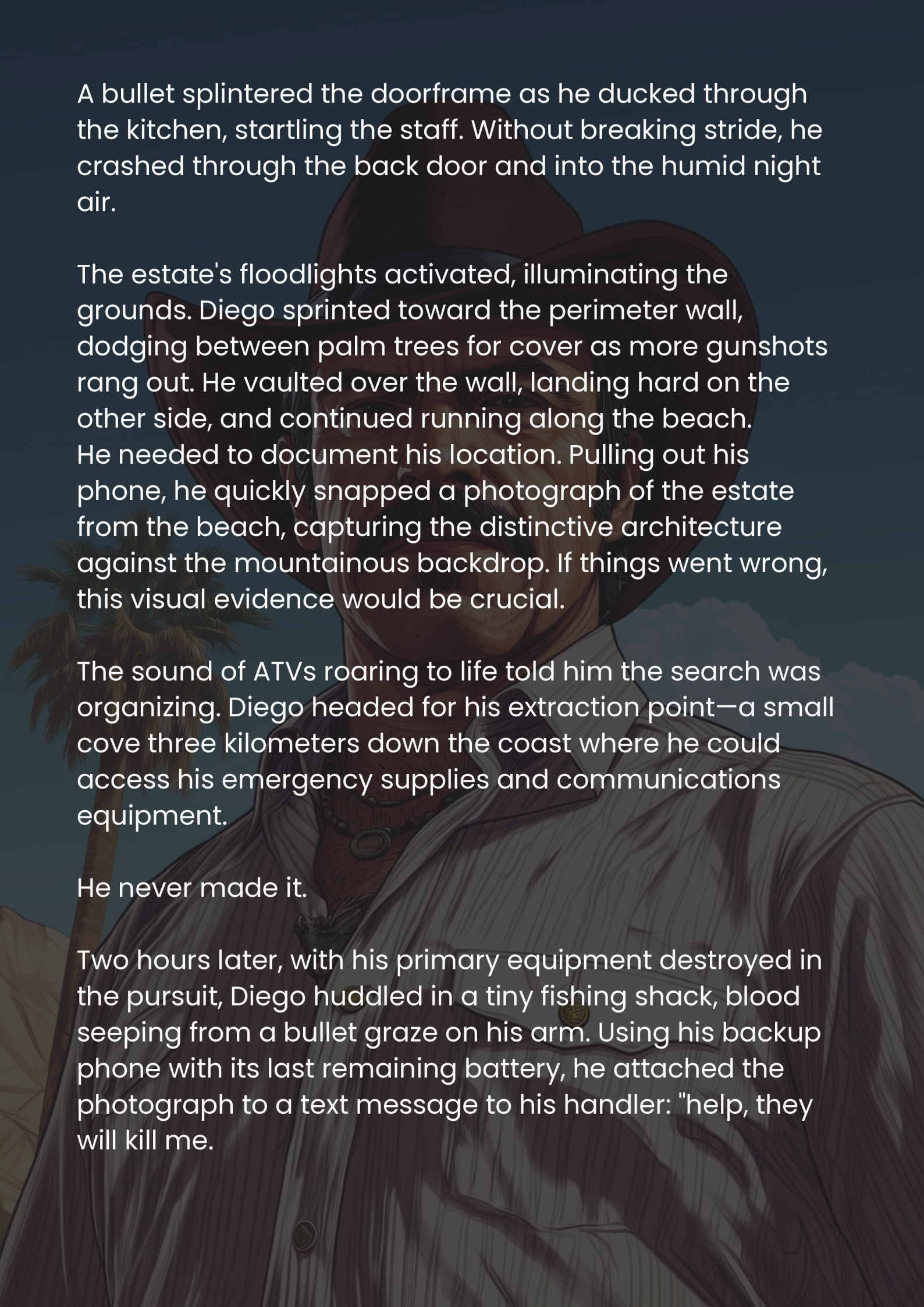
"Is it?" Vega produced a tablet and turned it toward Diego. On the screen was a grainy photograph of Diego entering a government building in Bogotá six months earlier—before his undercover assignment began. "Or perhaps there are other reasons for discretion?"

Diego assessed his options in microseconds. The nearest exit was twenty meters away, but two armed guards stood between him and freedom.

"I think Señor Restrepo will be very interested in this," Vega continued, reaching for his radio.

Diego moved in one fluid motion, striking the tablet from Vega's hands and delivering a precise blow to the man's solar plexus. As Vega doubled over, Diego grabbed the radio and ran.

Shouts erupted behind him as he veered away from the main entrance, heading instead toward the service area.



A bullet splintered the doorframe as he ducked through the kitchen, startling the staff. Without breaking stride, he crashed through the back door and into the humid night air.

The estate's floodlights activated, illuminating the grounds. Diego sprinted toward the perimeter wall, dodging between palm trees for cover as more gunshots rang out. He vaulted over the wall, landing hard on the other side, and continued running along the beach. He needed to document his location. Pulling out his phone, he quickly snapped a photograph of the estate from the beach, capturing the distinctive architecture against the mountainous backdrop. If things went wrong, this visual evidence would be crucial.

The sound of ATVs roaring to life told him the search was organizing. Diego headed for his extraction point—a small cove three kilometers down the coast where he could access his emergency supplies and communications equipment.

He never made it.

Two hours later, with his primary equipment destroyed in the pursuit, Diego huddled in a tiny fishing shack, blood seeping from a bullet graze on his arm. Using his backup phone with its last remaining battery, he attached the photograph to a text message to his handler: "help, they will kill me."

Chapter 2: Alarm Bells

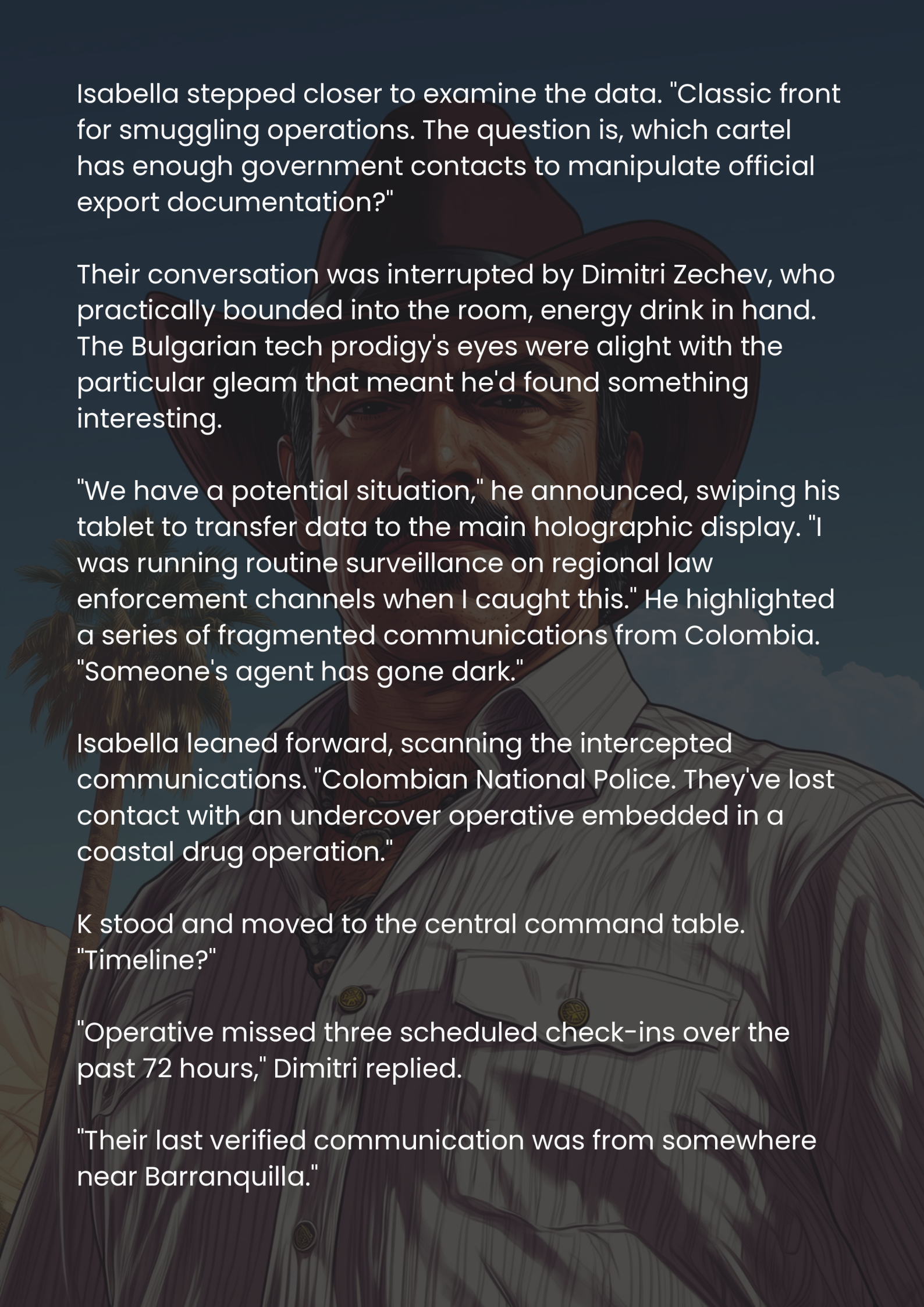
Thirty-five thousand feet above the Atlantic Ocean, the highly modified Bombardier Global 8000 known as "Shadow Wing" cruised smoothly through clear skies. To any observer, it appeared to be just another luxury private jet. Few would suspect that within its elegant fuselage operated one of the world's most advanced mobile intelligence centers.

Special Agent K sat in the analyst's war room, reviewing intelligence reports from across South America. Three holographic displays surrounded the workstation, each filled with data streams, satellite imagery, and communication intercepts.

After fifteen years in intelligence work, K had developed an intuition for patterns others might miss.

"You've been staring at that same data set for twenty minutes," observed Isabella Moreno, looking up from her own station across the room. The historian and cultural expert had been mapping the evolution of regional criminal enterprises, her expertise in Latin American power structures proving invaluable.

"Something feels off about these shipping manifests," K replied, gesturing to the holographic display. "Colombian coffee exports are up 22% according to official records, but production hasn't increased. The numbers don't add up."



Isabella stepped closer to examine the data. "Classic front for smuggling operations. The question is, which cartel has enough government contacts to manipulate official export documentation?"

Their conversation was interrupted by Dimitri Zechev, who practically bounded into the room, energy drink in hand. The Bulgarian tech prodigy's eyes were alight with the particular gleam that meant he'd found something interesting.

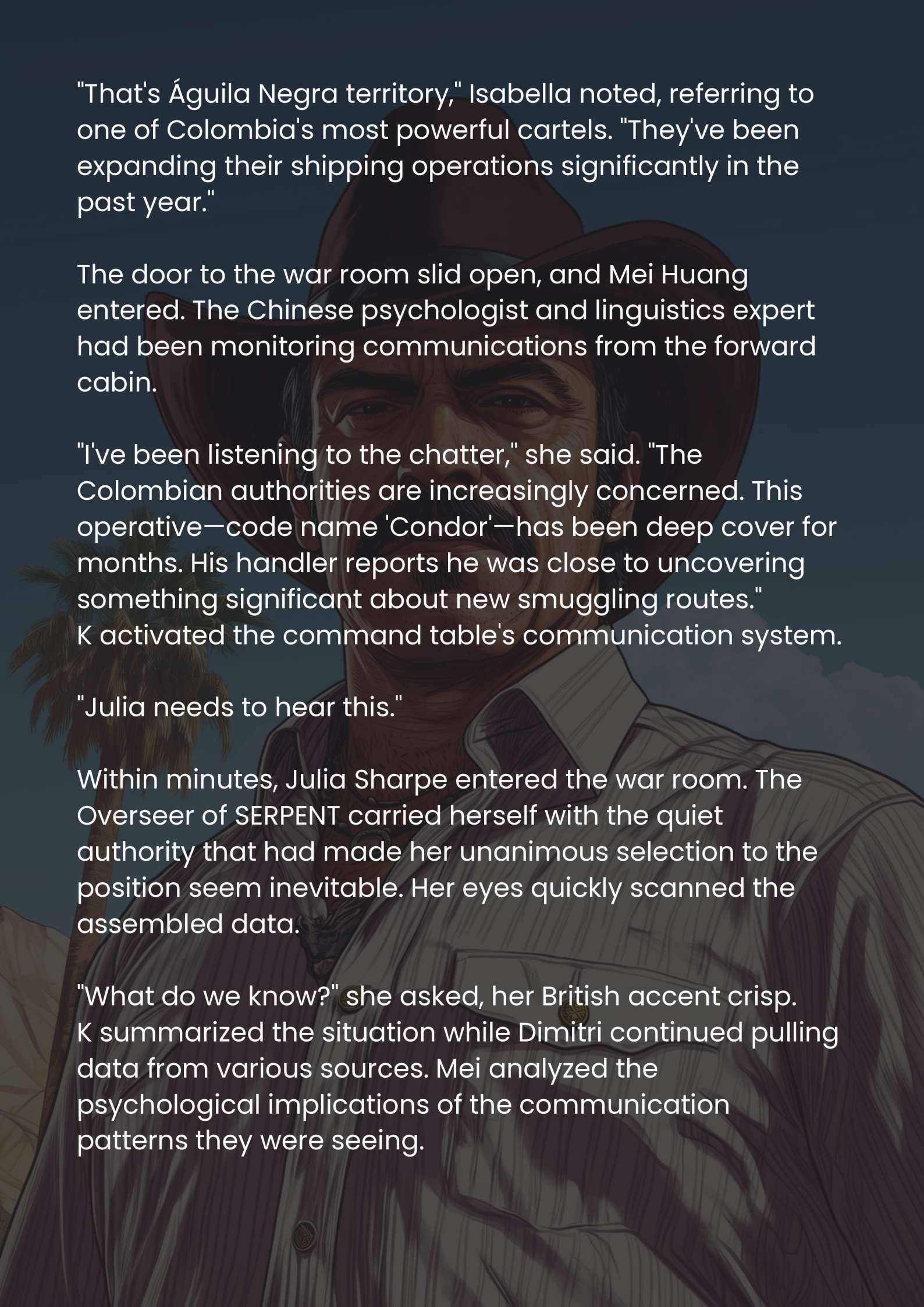
"We have a potential situation," he announced, swiping his tablet to transfer data to the main holographic display. "I was running routine surveillance on regional law enforcement channels when I caught this." He highlighted a series of fragmented communications from Colombia. "Someone's agent has gone dark."

Isabella leaned forward, scanning the intercepted communications. "Colombian National Police. They've lost contact with an undercover operative embedded in a coastal drug operation."

K stood and moved to the central command table. "Timeline?"

"Operative missed three scheduled check-ins over the past 72 hours," Dimitri replied.

"Their last verified communication was from somewhere near Barranquilla."



"That's Águila Negra territory," Isabella noted, referring to one of Colombia's most powerful cartels. "They've been expanding their shipping operations significantly in the past year."

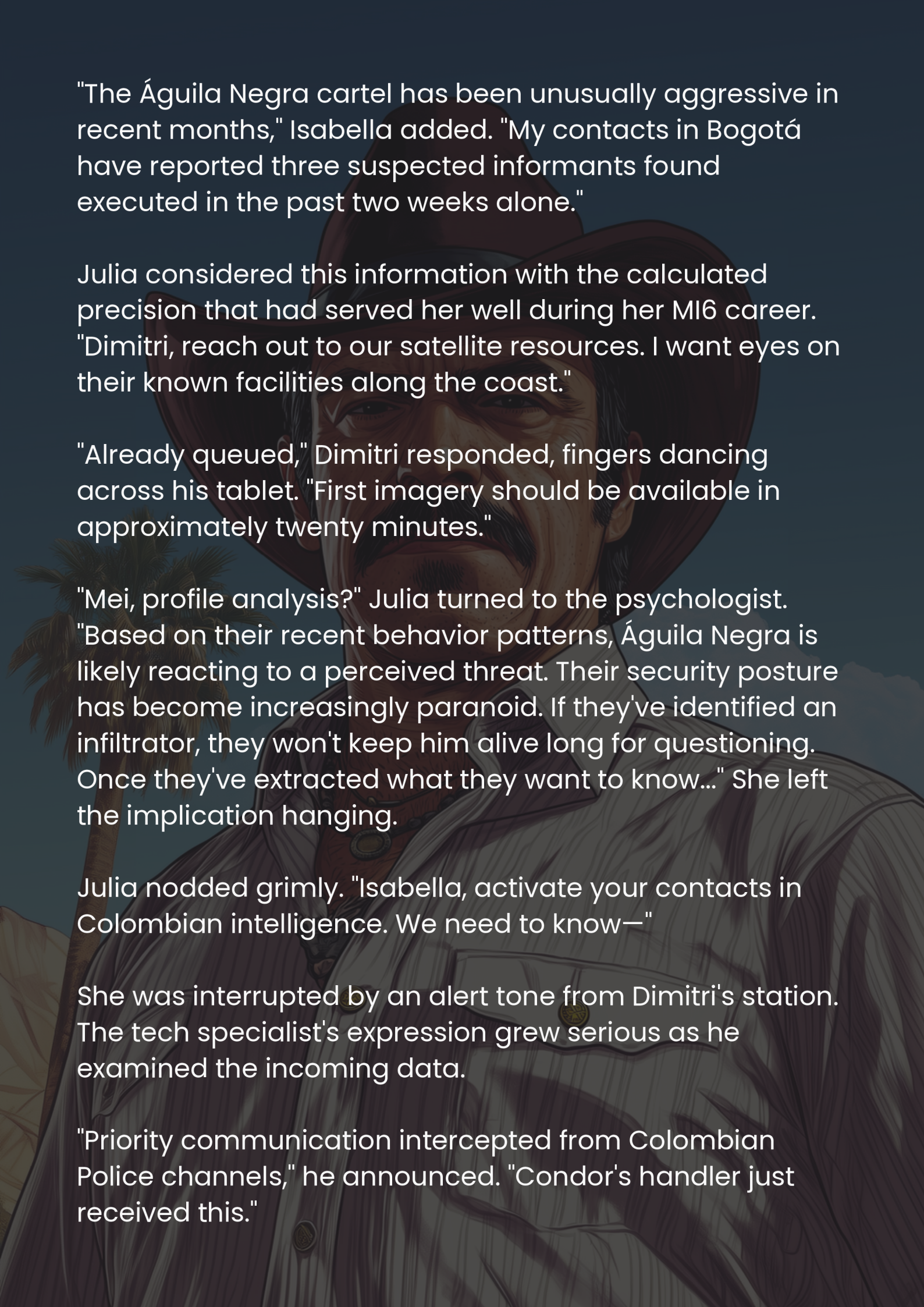
The door to the war room slid open, and Mei Huang entered. The Chinese psychologist and linguistics expert had been monitoring communications from the forward cabin.

"I've been listening to the chatter," she said. "The Colombian authorities are increasingly concerned. This operative—code name 'Condor'—has been deep cover for months. His handler reports he was close to uncovering something significant about new smuggling routes." K activated the command table's communication system.

"Julia needs to hear this."

Within minutes, Julia Sharpe entered the war room. The Overseer of SERPENT carried herself with the quiet authority that had made her unanimous selection to the position seem inevitable. Her eyes quickly scanned the assembled data.

"What do we know?" she asked, her British accent crisp. K summarized the situation while Dimitri continued pulling data from various sources. Mei analyzed the psychological implications of the communication patterns they were seeing.



"The Águila Negra cartel has been unusually aggressive in recent months," Isabella added. "My contacts in Bogotá have reported three suspected informants found executed in the past two weeks alone."

Julia considered this information with the calculated precision that had served her well during her MI6 career. "Dimitri, reach out to our satellite resources. I want eyes on their known facilities along the coast."

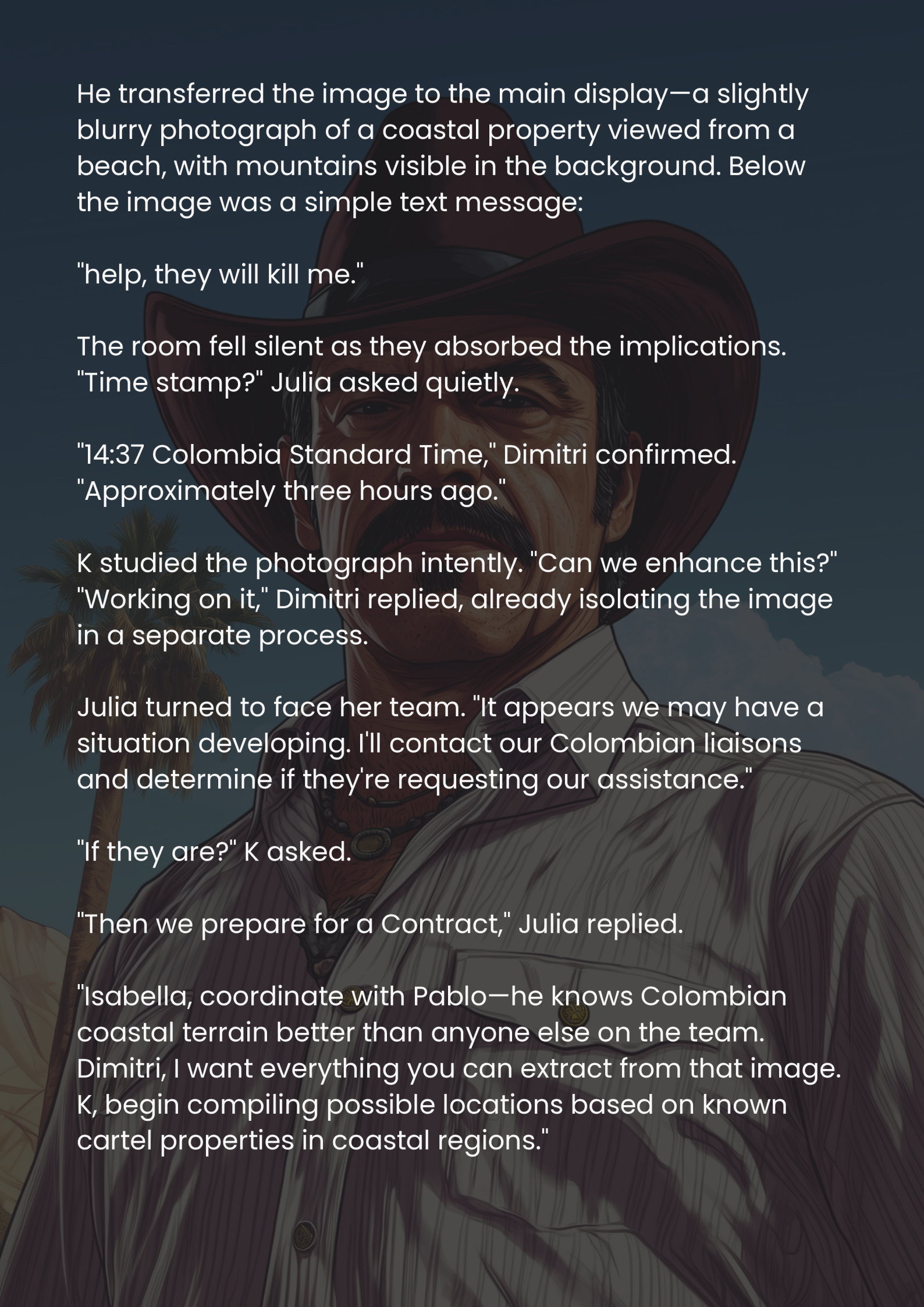
"Already queued," Dimitri responded, fingers dancing across his tablet. "First imagery should be available in approximately twenty minutes."

"Mei, profile analysis?" Julia turned to the psychologist. "Based on their recent behavior patterns, Águila Negra is likely reacting to a perceived threat. Their security posture has become increasingly paranoid. If they've identified an infiltrator, they won't keep him alive long for questioning. Once they've extracted what they want to know..." She left the implication hanging.

Julia nodded grimly. "Isabella, activate your contacts in Colombian intelligence. We need to know—"

She was interrupted by an alert tone from Dimitri's station. The tech specialist's expression grew serious as he examined the incoming data.

"Priority communication intercepted from Colombian Police channels," he announced. "Condor's handler just received this."

A man with a mustache wearing a brown cowboy hat and a woman in a military uniform are visible in the background. The man is looking towards the camera, and the woman is partially visible on the right side. The background is a dark, moody landscape with palm trees and a cloudy sky.

He transferred the image to the main display—a slightly blurry photograph of a coastal property viewed from a beach, with mountains visible in the background. Below the image was a simple text message:

"help, they will kill me."

The room fell silent as they absorbed the implications.

"Time stamp?" Julia asked quietly.

"14:37 Colombia Standard Time," Dimitri confirmed.

"Approximately three hours ago."

K studied the photograph intently. "Can we enhance this?"

"Working on it," Dimitri replied, already isolating the image in a separate process.

Julia turned to face her team. "It appears we may have a situation developing. I'll contact our Colombian liaisons and determine if they're requesting our assistance."

"If they are?" K asked.

"Then we prepare for a Contract," Julia replied.

"Isabella, coordinate with Pablo—he knows Colombian coastal terrain better than anyone else on the team. Dimitri, I want everything you can extract from that image. K, begin compiling possible locations based on known cartel properties in coastal regions."

Chapter 3: Mobilization

K leaned back from the holographic display, rubbing tired eyes after hours of intensive analysis. The war room of Shadow Wing had transformed into a focused hive of activity, with each team member pursuing their specialty with practiced precision.

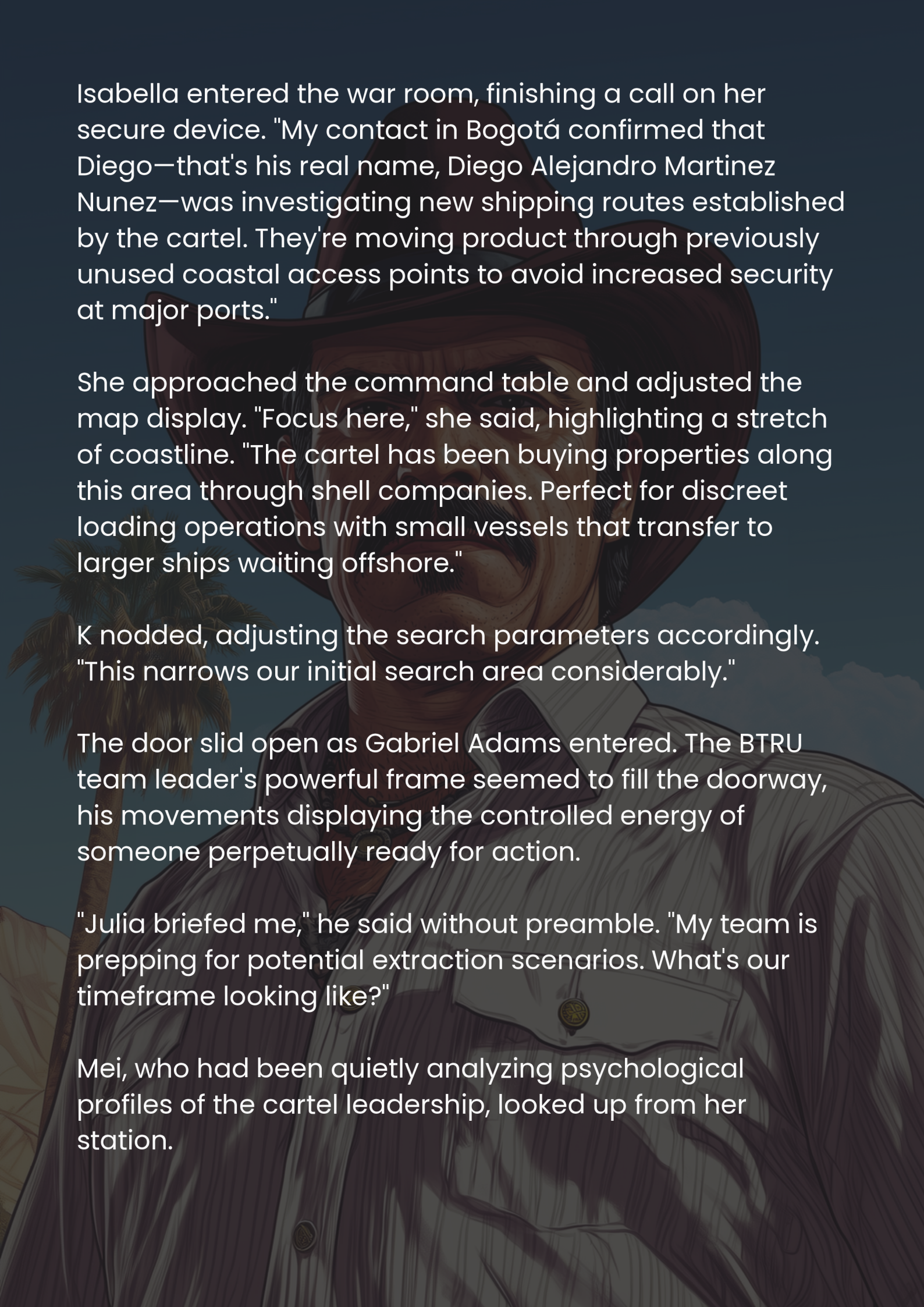
"Coastal regions of Colombia extend nearly 1,700 kilometers between the Pacific and Caribbean," K mused, manipulating a three-dimensional map.

"But we can narrow the search parameters based on the Águila Negra's known territories."

Dimitri grunted from his workstation, where multiple displays showed the enhanced photograph from various analytical angles.

"I've extracted what I can from the image," he said. "The metadata was stripped during transmission, but I've identified architectural elements consistent with luxury properties along Colombia's northern coast."

He gestured, and a series of reference images appeared alongside the original photograph. "Those mountains in the background have a distinctive profile. I'm running topographical matching algorithms now."



Isabella entered the war room, finishing a call on her secure device. "My contact in Bogotá confirmed that Diego—that's his real name, Diego Alejandro Martinez Nunez—was investigating new shipping routes established by the cartel. They're moving product through previously unused coastal access points to avoid increased security at major ports."

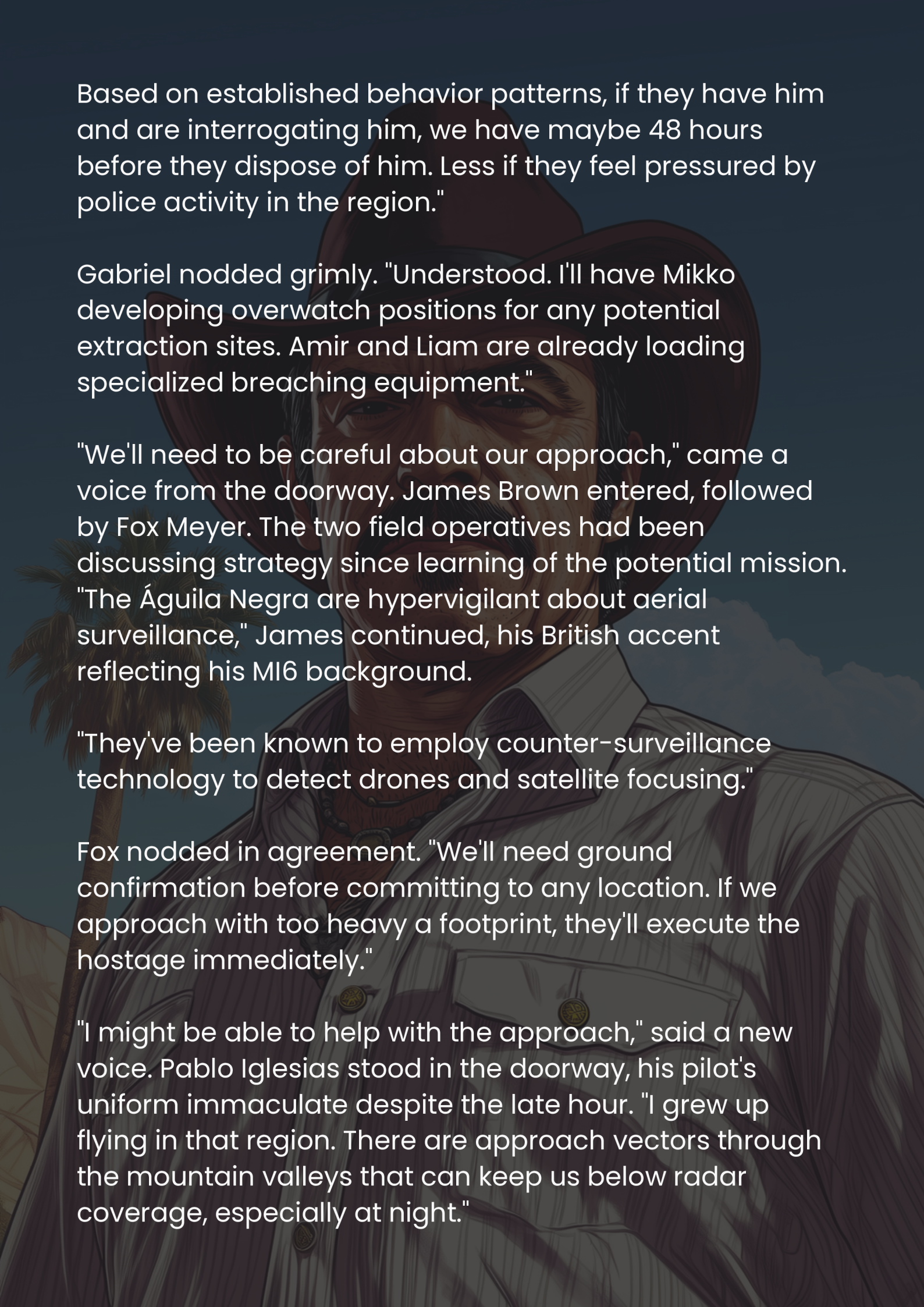
She approached the command table and adjusted the map display. "Focus here," she said, highlighting a stretch of coastline. "The cartel has been buying properties along this area through shell companies. Perfect for discreet loading operations with small vessels that transfer to larger ships waiting offshore."

K nodded, adjusting the search parameters accordingly. "This narrows our initial search area considerably."

The door slid open as Gabriel Adams entered. The BTRU team leader's powerful frame seemed to fill the doorway, his movements displaying the controlled energy of someone perpetually ready for action.

"Julia briefed me," he said without preamble. "My team is prepping for potential extraction scenarios. What's our timeframe looking like?"

Mei, who had been quietly analyzing psychological profiles of the cartel leadership, looked up from her station.



Based on established behavior patterns, if they have him and are interrogating him, we have maybe 48 hours before they dispose of him. Less if they feel pressured by police activity in the region."

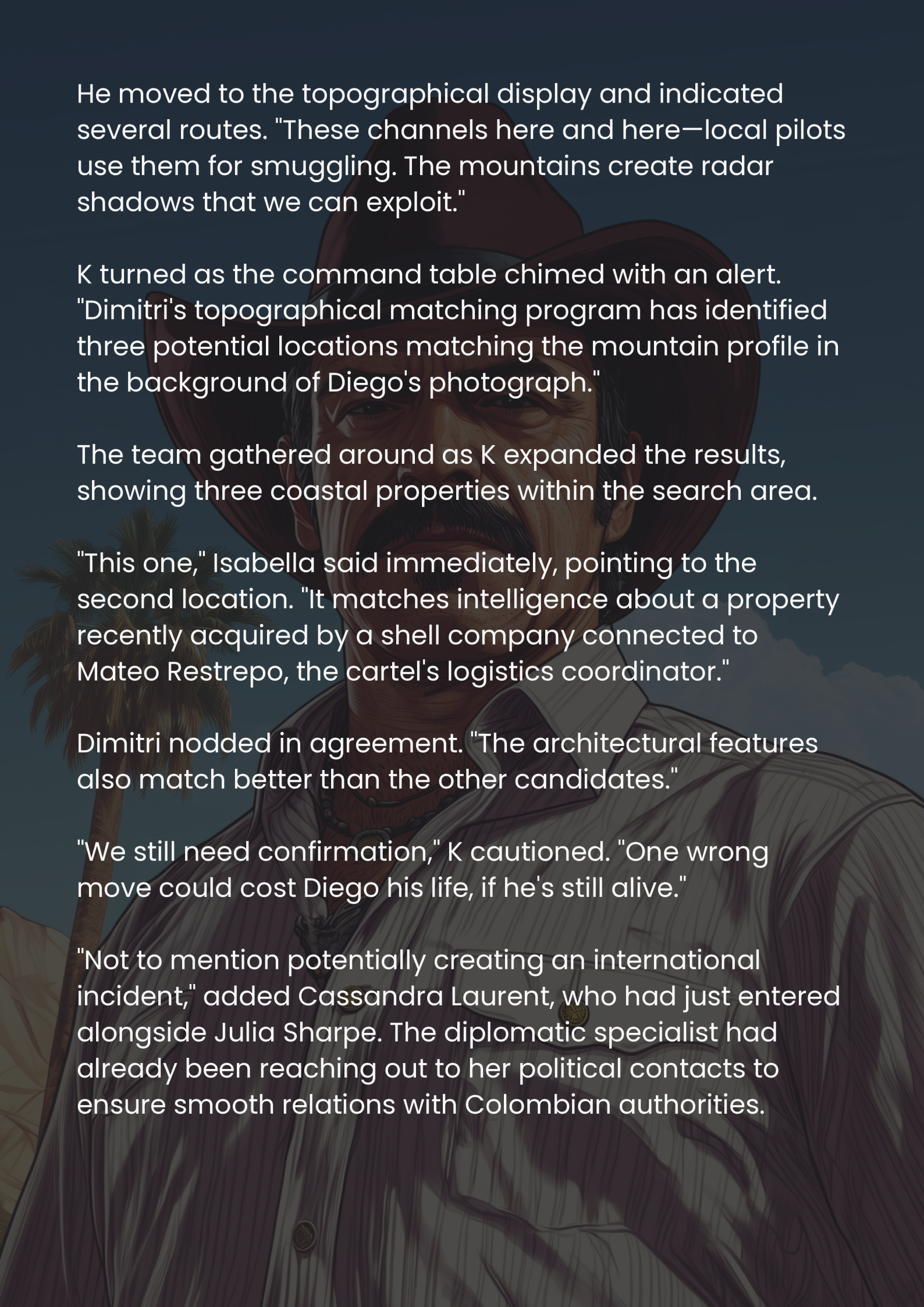
Gabriel nodded grimly. "Understood. I'll have Mikko developing overwatch positions for any potential extraction sites. Amir and Liam are already loading specialized breaching equipment."

"We'll need to be careful about our approach," came a voice from the doorway. James Brown entered, followed by Fox Meyer. The two field operatives had been discussing strategy since learning of the potential mission. "The Águila Negra are hypervigilant about aerial surveillance," James continued, his British accent reflecting his MI6 background.

"They've been known to employ counter-surveillance technology to detect drones and satellite focusing."

Fox nodded in agreement. "We'll need ground confirmation before committing to any location. If we approach with too heavy a footprint, they'll execute the hostage immediately."

"I might be able to help with the approach," said a new voice. Pablo Iglesias stood in the doorway, his pilot's uniform immaculate despite the late hour. "I grew up flying in that region. There are approach vectors through the mountain valleys that can keep us below radar coverage, especially at night."



He moved to the topographical display and indicated several routes. "These channels here and here—local pilots use them for smuggling. The mountains create radar shadows that we can exploit."

K turned as the command table chimed with an alert. "Dimitri's topographical matching program has identified three potential locations matching the mountain profile in the background of Diego's photograph."

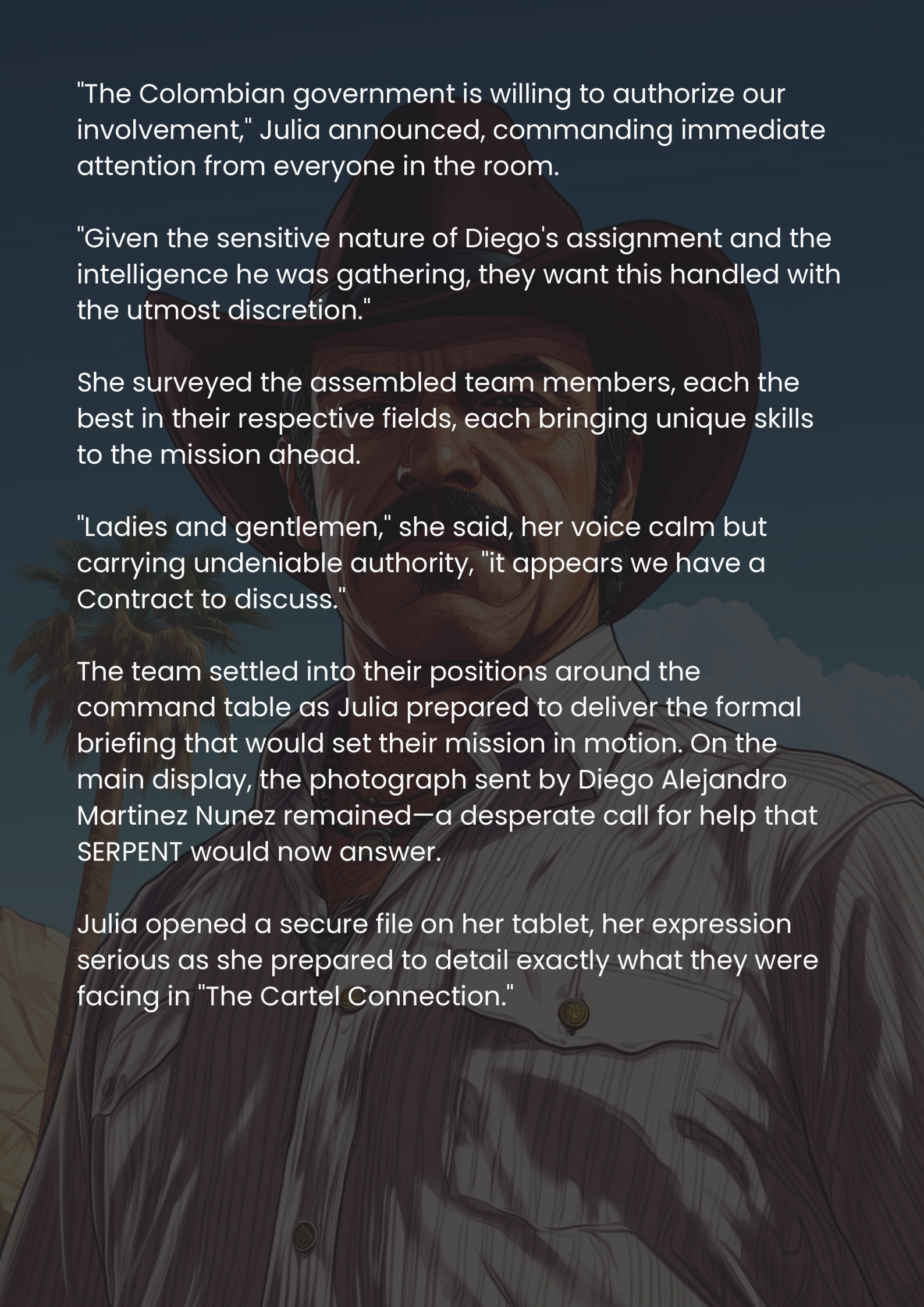
The team gathered around as K expanded the results, showing three coastal properties within the search area.

"This one," Isabella said immediately, pointing to the second location. "It matches intelligence about a property recently acquired by a shell company connected to Mateo Restrepo, the cartel's logistics coordinator."

Dimitri nodded in agreement. "The architectural features also match better than the other candidates."

"We still need confirmation," K cautioned. "One wrong move could cost Diego his life, if he's still alive."

"Not to mention potentially creating an international incident," added Cassandra Laurent, who had just entered alongside Julia Sharpe. The diplomatic specialist had already been reaching out to her political contacts to ensure smooth relations with Colombian authorities.



"The Colombian government is willing to authorize our involvement," Julia announced, commanding immediate attention from everyone in the room.

"Given the sensitive nature of Diego's assignment and the intelligence he was gathering, they want this handled with the utmost discretion."

She surveyed the assembled team members, each the best in their respective fields, each bringing unique skills to the mission ahead.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, her voice calm but carrying undeniable authority, "it appears we have a Contract to discuss."

The team settled into their positions around the command table as Julia prepared to deliver the formal briefing that would set their mission in motion. On the main display, the photograph sent by Diego Alejandro Martinez Nunez remained—a desperate call for help that SERPENT would now answer.

Julia opened a secure file on her tablet, her expression serious as she prepared to detail exactly what they were facing in "The Cartel Connection."

Briefing

Greetings, Special Agent.

We were contacted by our friends at the National Police of Colombia. They've been investigating a drug cartel. Now this is not anything new, especially in their region. However, last week one of their undercover operatives went missing.

Special Agent "Diego Alejandro Martinez Nunez" went dark for several days, after which his handler received a single photograph with the text "help, they will kill me". Not a trace was found after this contact, which occurred yesterday afternoon at 14:37 Colombia Standard Time.

There is a slim chance the special agent is still alive. We also know the cartel operates only inside Colombia, mostly involved in moving goods overseas using various ships. This should narrow our search down to mostly coastal regions.

Your assignment is to find where the picture was taken. Colombian police is on high alert and ready to move as soon as we have a location.

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

Materials

starting-image-cartel-connection.png

Answer Instruction

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

Answer Format:

streetname-number-neighborhood-city-district-country

Answer Example:

calle-9-sagoc-santiago-de-tolu-sucre-colombia

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.