

HISTORICAL

A comic book style illustration of a man with a serious expression, wearing a dark trench coat. He is positioned in the foreground, looking slightly to the left. The background features a European city street with a prominent church tower on the right and other buildings on the left. The sky is a pale yellowish-green. The overall style is reminiscent of classic comic book art with bold lines and a limited color palette.

THE LATVIAN CONNECTION

Chapter 1: Shadows in Riga

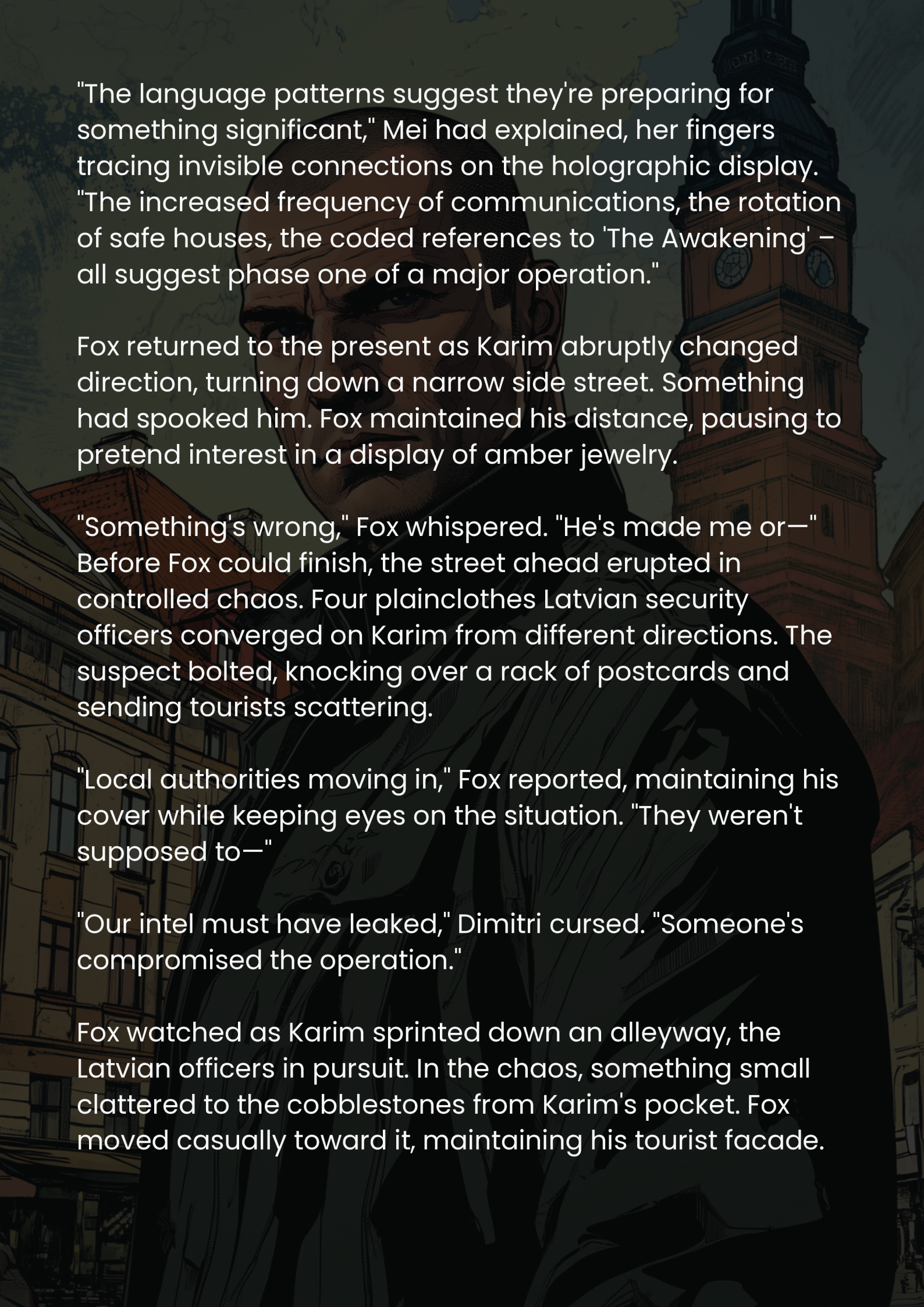
The old market square in Riga bustled with activity as vendors called out to passing tourists. Fox Meyer adjusted his scarf against the Baltic chill, his eyes never leaving the man in the charcoal overcoat thirty meters ahead. Fox blended perfectly with the crowd of visitors admiring the House of the Blackheads, its ornate facade a convenient distraction.

"Target still moving west along Kalēju iela," Fox murmured into his subvocal mic. "Same pattern as yesterday. Third coffee shop in two hours."

"Confirmed," came Dimitri Zechev's voice through Fox's earpiece. "Satellite tracking his position. He's definitely making drops. The question is: what kind?"

Fox had been in Riga for three days now, tracking the man identified only as Karim in their intelligence briefings. A suspected member of Ahemait, the border-crossing terrorist organization had been unusually active in the Baltic region lately, triggering alarm bells at SERPENT headquarters.

"I'm getting movement patterns that match what Mei predicted," Dimitri added. "He's establishing a network." Fox's mind flashed back to the briefing four days earlier. Mei Huang, their psychological and linguistics expert, had meticulously broken down communication patterns intercepted across Eastern Europe.



"The language patterns suggest they're preparing for something significant," Mei had explained, her fingers tracing invisible connections on the holographic display. "The increased frequency of communications, the rotation of safe houses, the coded references to 'The Awakening' – all suggest phase one of a major operation."

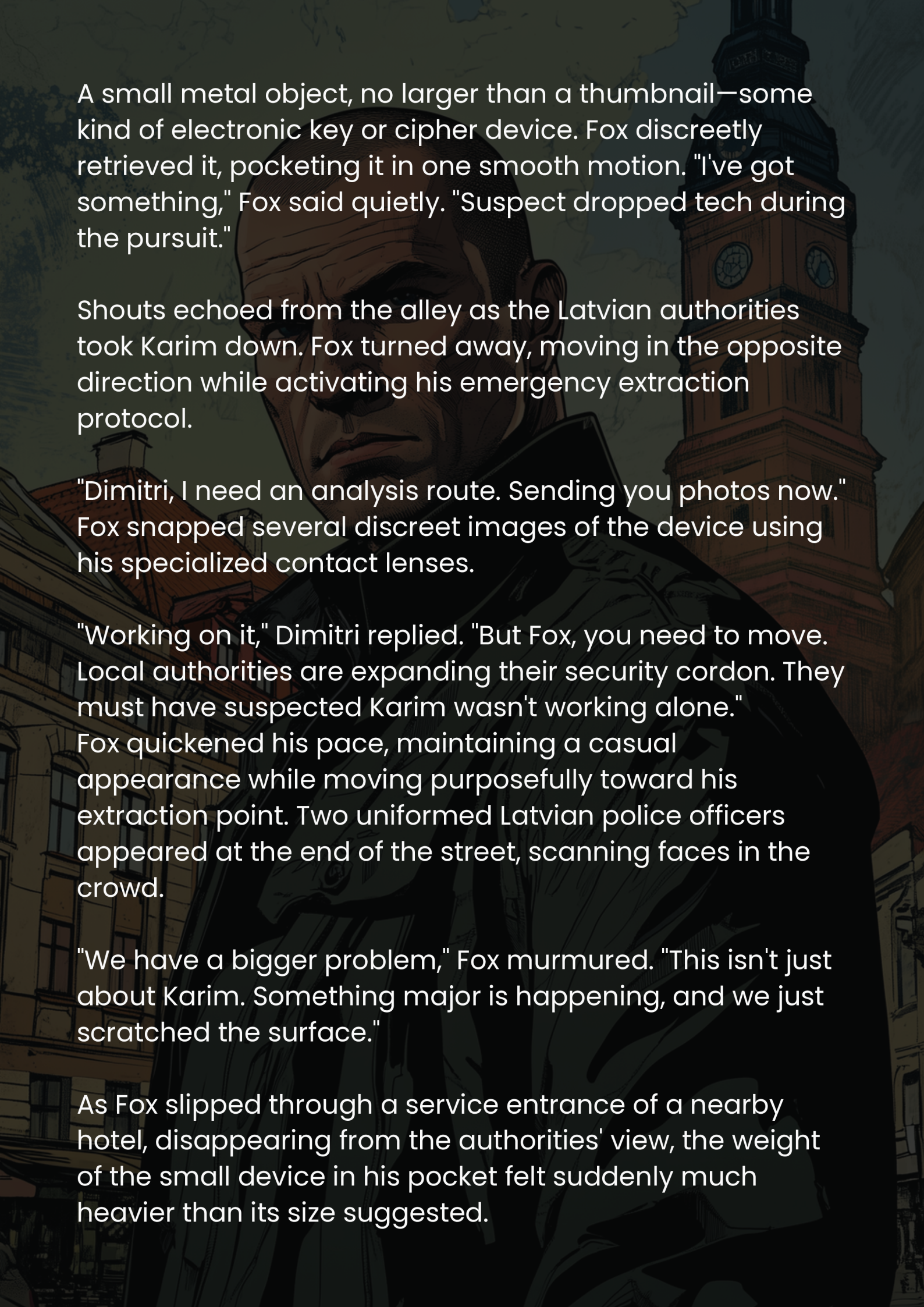
Fox returned to the present as Karim abruptly changed direction, turning down a narrow side street. Something had spooked him. Fox maintained his distance, pausing to pretend interest in a display of amber jewelry.

"Something's wrong," Fox whispered. "He's made me or—" Before Fox could finish, the street ahead erupted in controlled chaos. Four plainclothes Latvian security officers converged on Karim from different directions. The suspect bolted, knocking over a rack of postcards and sending tourists scattering.

"Local authorities moving in," Fox reported, maintaining his cover while keeping eyes on the situation. "They weren't supposed to—"

"Our intel must have leaked," Dimitri cursed. "Someone's compromised the operation."

Fox watched as Karim sprinted down an alleyway, the Latvian officers in pursuit. In the chaos, something small clattered to the cobblestones from Karim's pocket. Fox moved casually toward it, maintaining his tourist facade.



A small metal object, no larger than a thumbnail—some kind of electronic key or cipher device. Fox discreetly retrieved it, pocketing it in one smooth motion. "I've got something," Fox said quietly. "Suspect dropped tech during the pursuit."

Shouts echoed from the alley as the Latvian authorities took Karim down. Fox turned away, moving in the opposite direction while activating his emergency extraction protocol.

"Dimitri, I need an analysis route. Sending you photos now." Fox snapped several discreet images of the device using his specialized contact lenses.

"Working on it," Dimitri replied. "But Fox, you need to move. Local authorities are expanding their security cordon. They must have suspected Karim wasn't working alone." Fox quickened his pace, maintaining a casual appearance while moving purposefully toward his extraction point. Two uniformed Latvian police officers appeared at the end of the street, scanning faces in the crowd.

"We have a bigger problem," Fox murmured. "This isn't just about Karim. Something major is happening, and we just scratched the surface."

As Fox slipped through a service entrance of a nearby hotel, disappearing from the authorities' view, the weight of the small device in his pocket felt suddenly much heavier than its size suggested.

Chapter 2: Threads Unraveling

Isabella Moreno tucked a strand of dark hair behind her ear as she carefully examined the 1974 KGB file displayed on her tablet. The Shadow Wing's advanced translation software had converted the Russian text, but understanding the context required her historian's expertise.

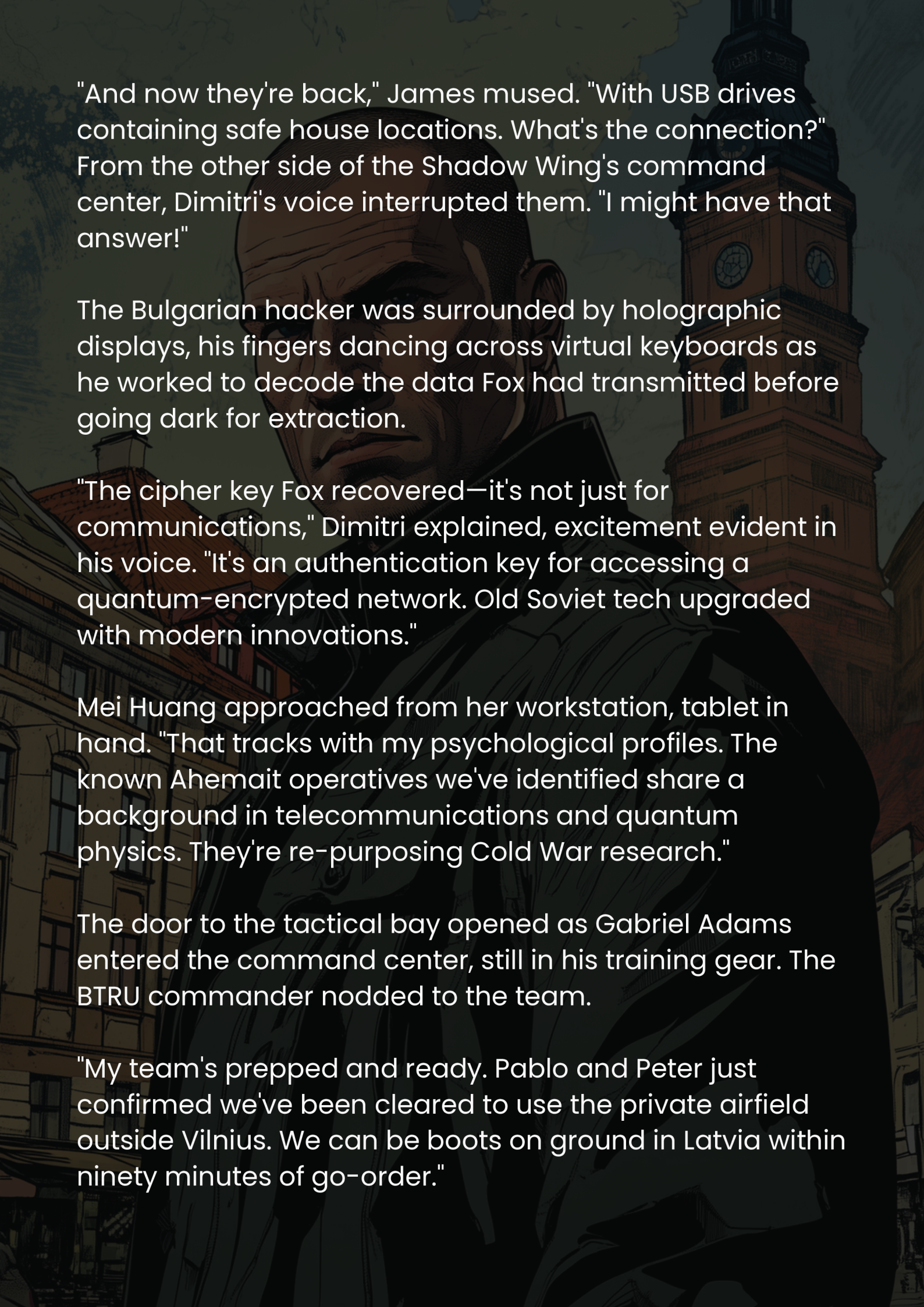
"Fascinating," she murmured, eyes widening as connections began forming in her mind.

The door to her workspace slid open as James Brown entered, impeccably dressed as always despite having just returned from an asset meeting in Tallinn.

"Please tell me you found something useful," he said, loosening his tie. "My contacts in Estonia are nervous. Very nervous."

Isabella nodded, turning her tablet toward him. "Ahemait has operated in Latvia before. During the Cold War, they positioned themselves as ideological mercenaries, working both sides. This KGB file details a 1974 operation where they infiltrated a Soviet research facility near Riga." James frowned, studying the documents. "What were they after?"

"That's where it gets interesting," Isabella replied, swiping to show another document. "The facility was developing communication systems using theoretical quantum entanglement principles. Far ahead of its time."



"And now they're back," James mused. "With USB drives containing safe house locations. What's the connection?" From the other side of the Shadow Wing's command center, Dimitri's voice interrupted them. "I might have that answer!"

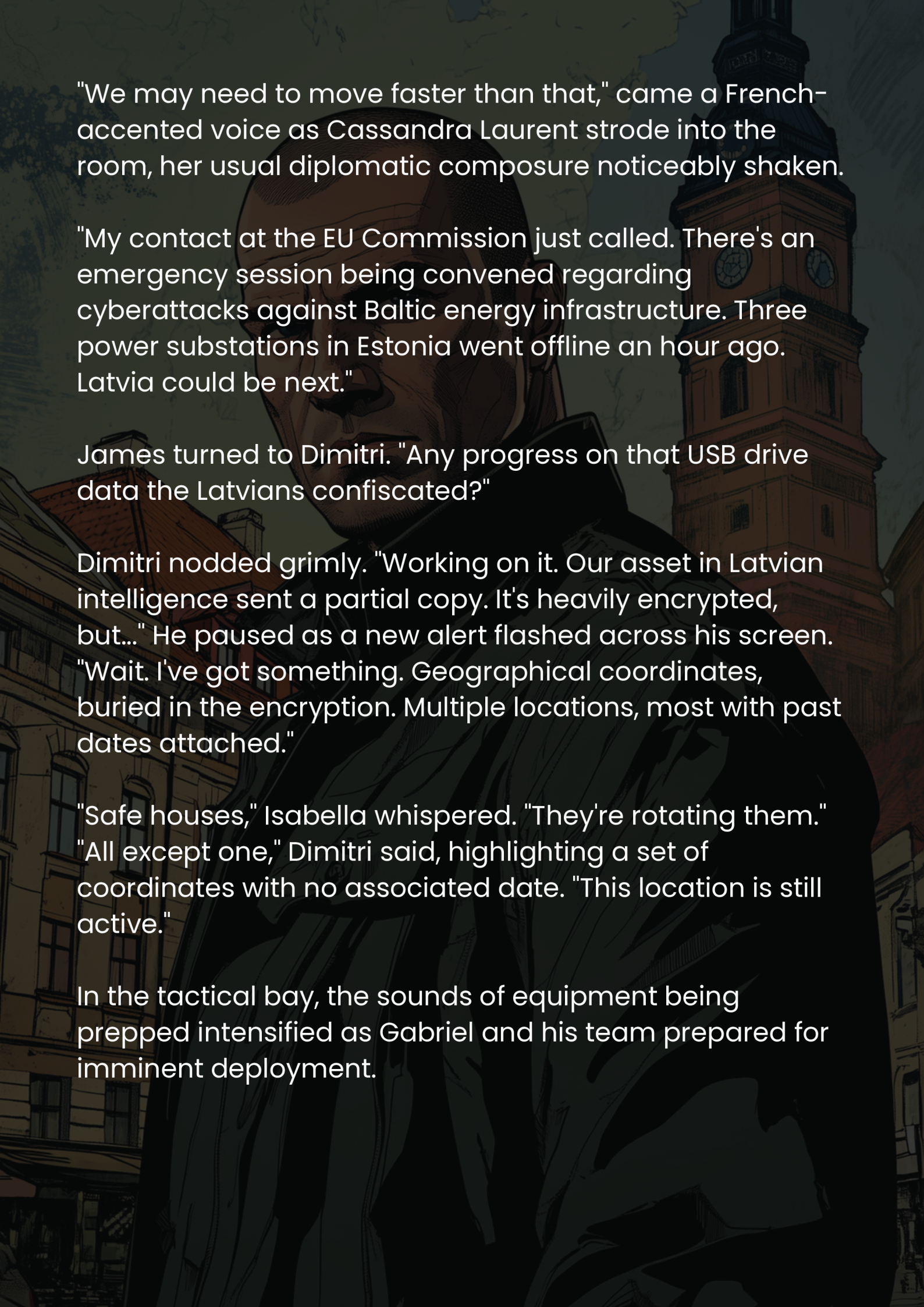
The Bulgarian hacker was surrounded by holographic displays, his fingers dancing across virtual keyboards as he worked to decode the data Fox had transmitted before going dark for extraction.

"The cipher key Fox recovered—it's not just for communications," Dimitri explained, excitement evident in his voice. "It's an authentication key for accessing a quantum-encrypted network. Old Soviet tech upgraded with modern innovations."

Mei Huang approached from her workstation, tablet in hand. "That tracks with my psychological profiles. The known Ahemait operatives we've identified share a background in telecommunications and quantum physics. They're re-purposing Cold War research."

The door to the tactical bay opened as Gabriel Adams entered the command center, still in his training gear. The BTRU commander nodded to the team.

"My team's prepped and ready. Pablo and Peter just confirmed we've been cleared to use the private airfield outside Vilnius. We can be boots on ground in Latvia within ninety minutes of go-order."



"We may need to move faster than that," came a French-accented voice as Cassandra Laurent strode into the room, her usual diplomatic composure noticeably shaken.

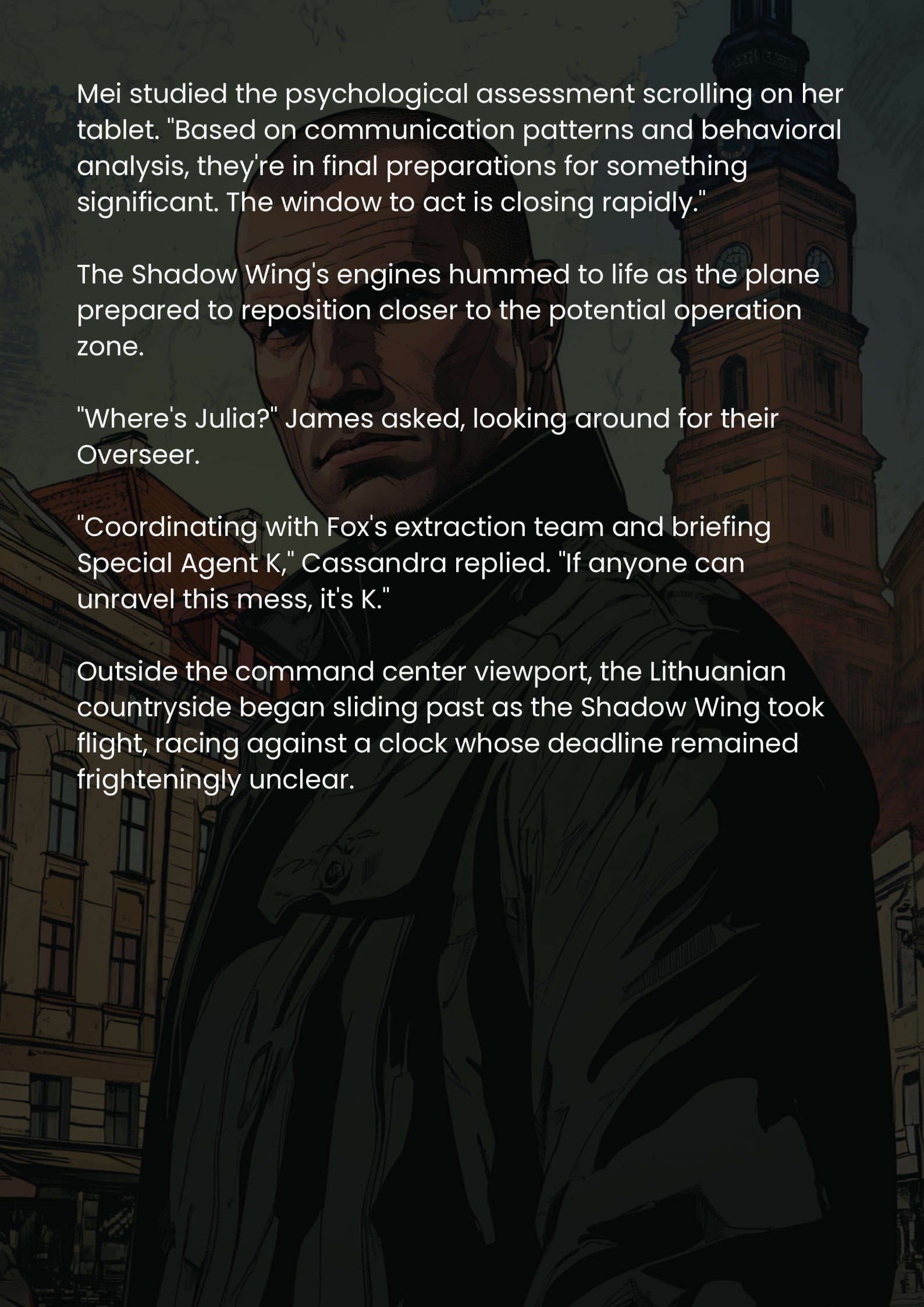
"My contact at the EU Commission just called. There's an emergency session being convened regarding cyberattacks against Baltic energy infrastructure. Three power substations in Estonia went offline an hour ago. Latvia could be next."

James turned to Dimitri. "Any progress on that USB drive data the Latvians confiscated?"

Dimitri nodded grimly. "Working on it. Our asset in Latvian intelligence sent a partial copy. It's heavily encrypted, but..." He paused as a new alert flashed across his screen. "Wait. I've got something. Geographical coordinates, buried in the encryption. Multiple locations, most with past dates attached."

"Safe houses," Isabella whispered. "They're rotating them."
"All except one," Dimitri said, highlighting a set of coordinates with no associated date. "This location is still active."

In the tactical bay, the sounds of equipment being prepped intensified as Gabriel and his team prepared for imminent deployment.



Mei studied the psychological assessment scrolling on her tablet. "Based on communication patterns and behavioral analysis, they're in final preparations for something significant. The window to act is closing rapidly."

The Shadow Wing's engines hummed to life as the plane prepared to reposition closer to the potential operation zone.

"Where's Julia?" James asked, looking around for their Overseer.

"Coordinating with Fox's extraction team and briefing Special Agent K," Cassandra replied. "If anyone can unravel this mess, it's K."

Outside the command center viewport, the Lithuanian countryside began sliding past as the Shadow Wing took flight, racing against a clock whose deadline remained frighteningly unclear.

Chapter 3: Convergence

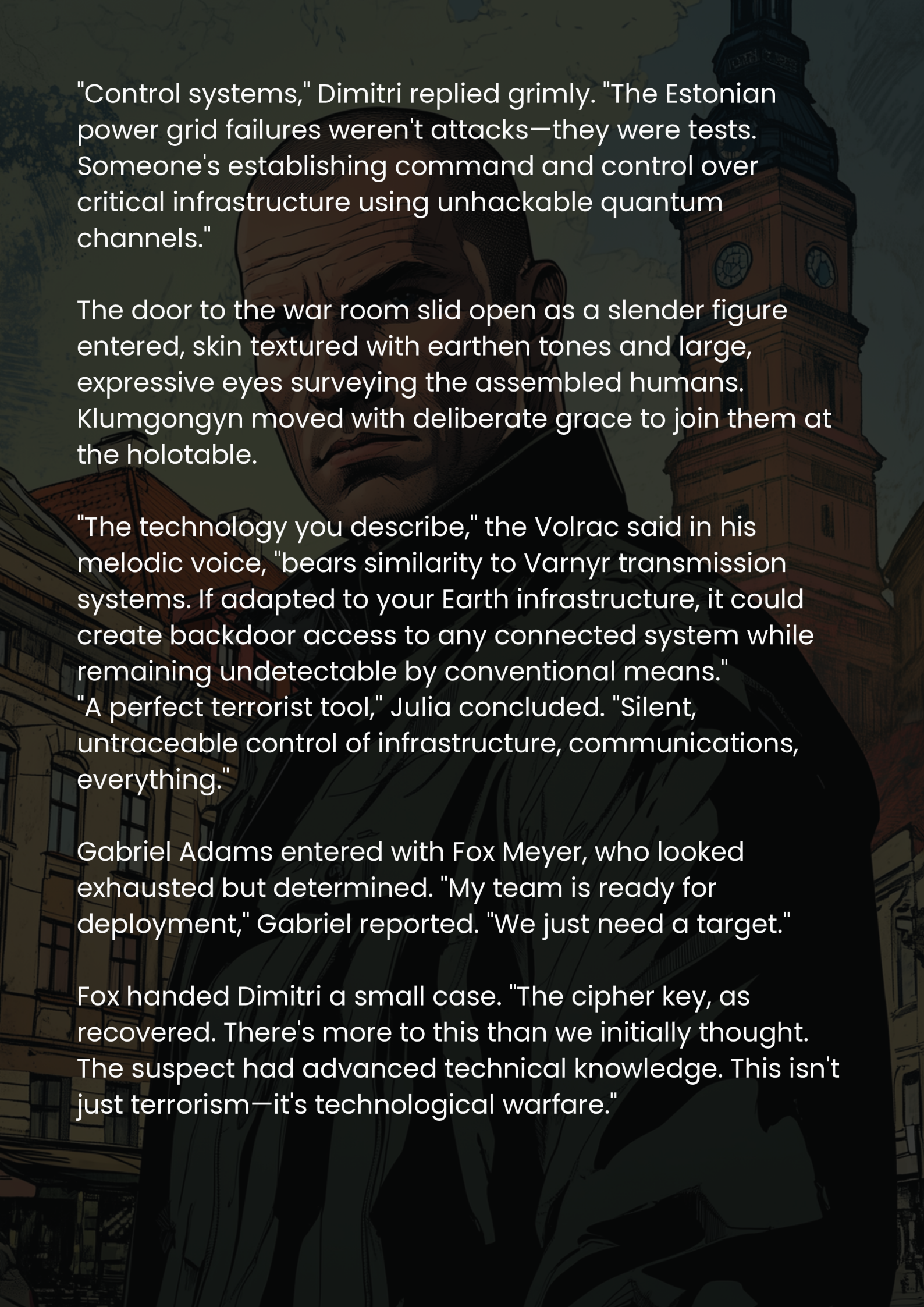
The Shadow Wing's war room hummed with activity as Julia Sharpe stood at the center, orchestrating SERPENT's response to the rapidly evolving situation. Holographic displays surrounded her, showing real-time intelligence feeds, satellite imagery, and data analysis.

"Fox's extraction was successful," she announced, bringing a moment of relief to the tension-filled room. "He'll rendezvous with us in Vilnius within the hour."

Dimitri had barely left his station in eighteen hours, sustained by energy drinks and determination. His eyes were rimmed with fatigue, but his fingers moved with precision across his interfaces.

"I've cracked another layer of the USB encryption," he announced. "The Latvian authorities don't know what they have. These aren't just safe house locations—they're nodes in a network. Quantum communication nodes." Isabella approached the central holotable, bringing up historical documents she'd assembled. "During the Cold War, the Soviets established a network of quantum communication bunkers across Eastern Europe. The technology was theoretical then, but the infrastructure remained. Ahemait is reactivating them, upgrading the tech."

"For what purpose?" Julia asked, her analytical mind already racing through possibilities.



"Control systems," Dimitri replied grimly. "The Estonian power grid failures weren't attacks—they were tests. Someone's establishing command and control over critical infrastructure using unhackable quantum channels."

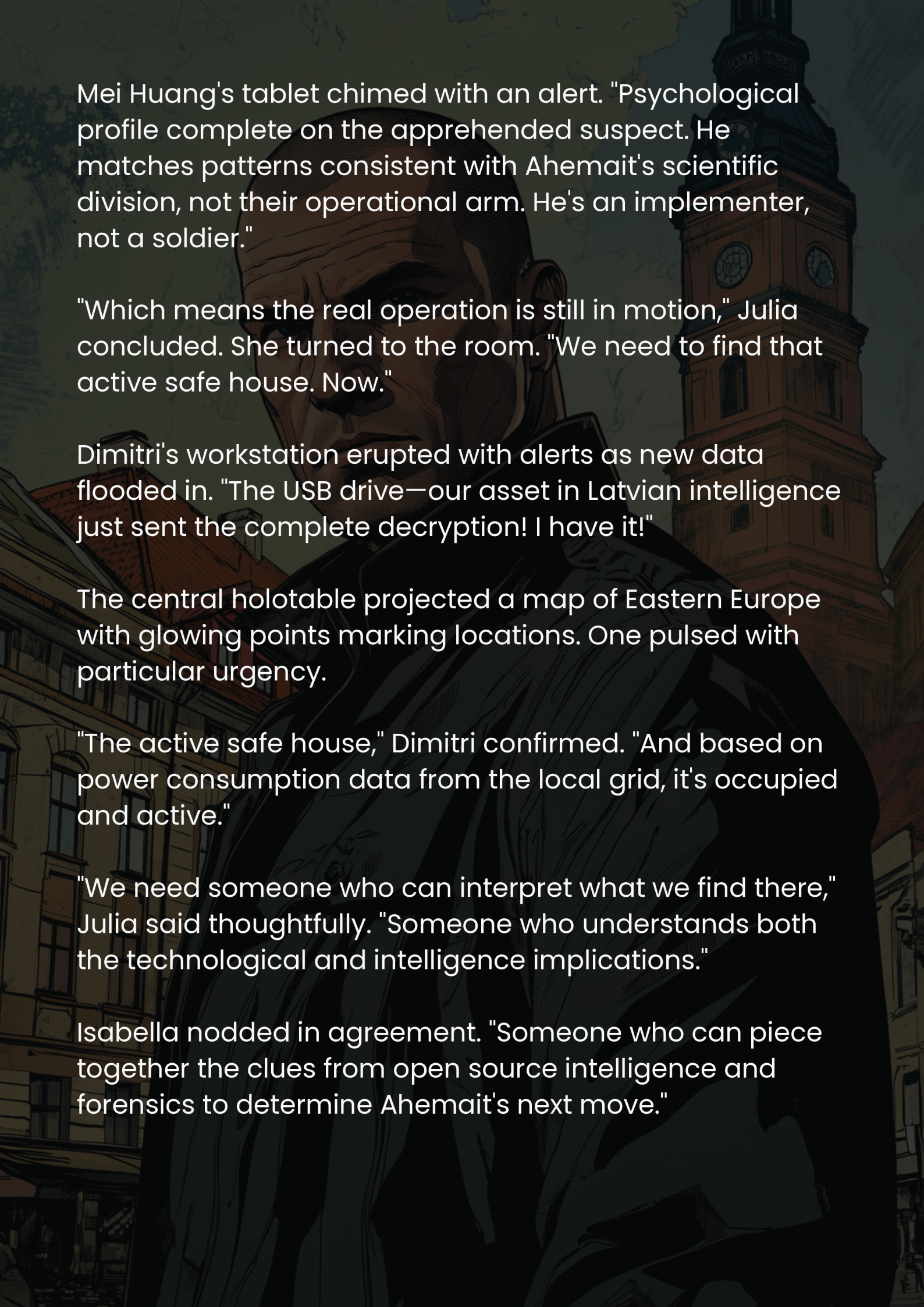
The door to the war room slid open as a slender figure entered, skin textured with earthen tones and large, expressive eyes surveying the assembled humans. Klumgongyn moved with deliberate grace to join them at the holotable.

"The technology you describe," the Volrac said in his melodic voice, "bears similarity to Varnyr transmission systems. If adapted to your Earth infrastructure, it could create backdoor access to any connected system while remaining undetectable by conventional means."

"A perfect terrorist tool," Julia concluded. "Silent, untraceable control of infrastructure, communications, everything."

Gabriel Adams entered with Fox Meyer, who looked exhausted but determined. "My team is ready for deployment," Gabriel reported. "We just need a target."

Fox handed Dimitri a small case. "The cipher key, as recovered. There's more to this than we initially thought. The suspect had advanced technical knowledge. This isn't just terrorism—it's technological warfare."



Mei Huang's tablet chimed with an alert. "Psychological profile complete on the apprehended suspect. He matches patterns consistent with Ahemait's scientific division, not their operational arm. He's an implementer, not a soldier."

"Which means the real operation is still in motion," Julia concluded. She turned to the room. "We need to find that active safe house. Now."

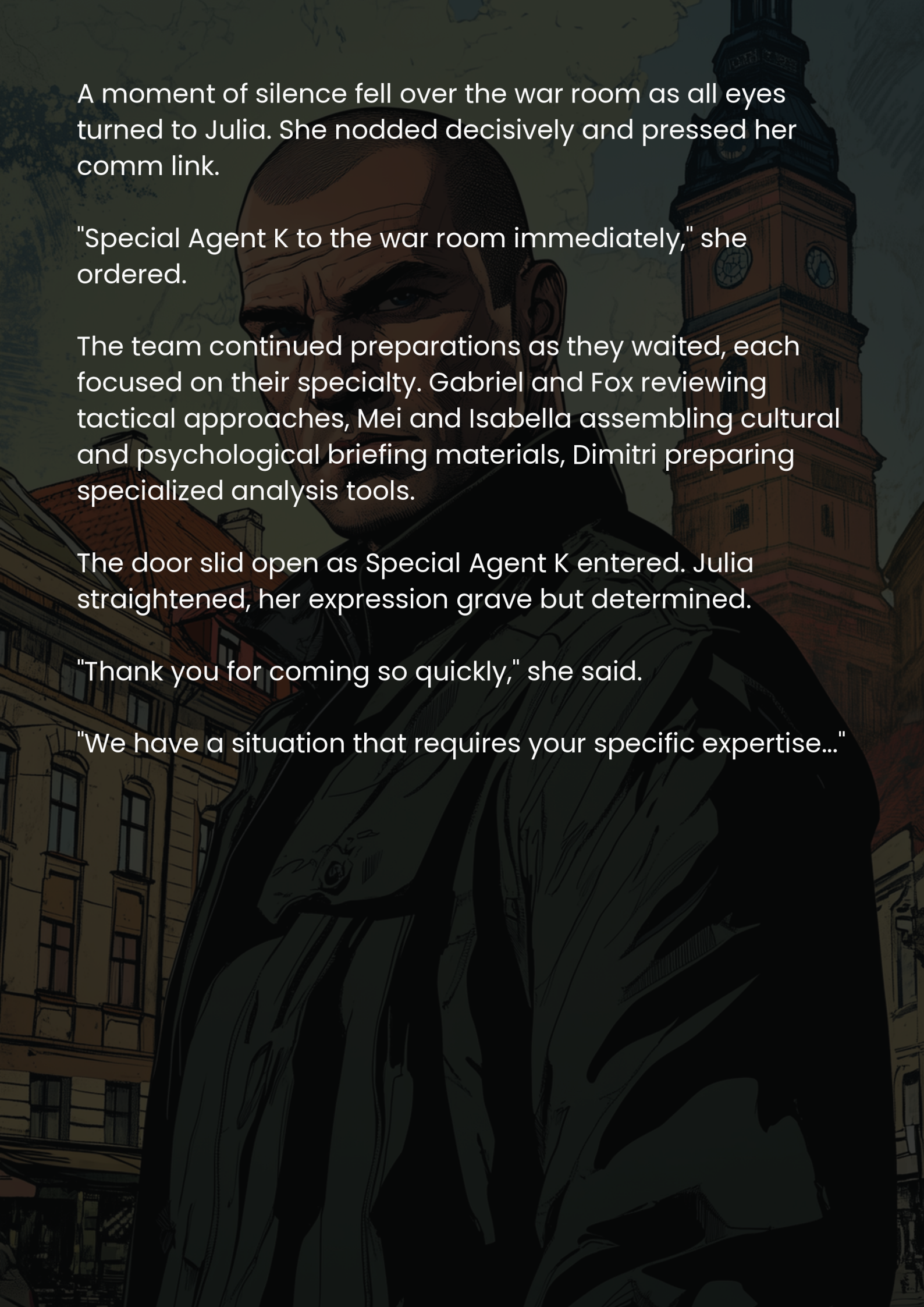
Dimitri's workstation erupted with alerts as new data flooded in. "The USB drive—our asset in Latvian intelligence just sent the complete decryption! I have it!"

The central holotable projected a map of Eastern Europe with glowing points marking locations. One pulsed with particular urgency.

"The active safe house," Dimitri confirmed. "And based on power consumption data from the local grid, it's occupied and active."

"We need someone who can interpret what we find there," Julia said thoughtfully. "Someone who understands both the technological and intelligence implications."

Isabella nodded in agreement. "Someone who can piece together the clues from open source intelligence and forensics to determine Ahemait's next move."



A moment of silence fell over the war room as all eyes turned to Julia. She nodded decisively and pressed her comm link.

"Special Agent K to the war room immediately," she ordered.

The team continued preparations as they waited, each focused on their specialty. Gabriel and Fox reviewing tactical approaches, Mei and Isabella assembling cultural and psychological briefing materials, Dimitri preparing specialized analysis tools.

The door slid open as Special Agent K entered. Julia straightened, her expression grave but determined.

"Thank you for coming so quickly," she said.

"We have a situation that requires your specific expertise..."

Briefing

Greetings, Special Agent.

Last week a man was apprehended by Latvian authorities on suspicion of espionage. Traveling with suspicious items and brandishing a fake passport. He's currently being held for questioning in Riga.

As far as the Latvian authorities know, he's part of a group called Ahemait. They're a terrorist organization known to operate without borders. Leaving us to believe this might not be local.

Among the items that were confiscated is a USB drive containing safe-house locations. They seem to rotate these locations, as most had past dates on them. However, one of them is currently still active. You might see where this is going, but we need you to figure out where the safe-house is.

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

Materials

starting-image-latvian-connection.png

Answer Instruction

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

Get your findings in the following format, in English:

country-city-streetname

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.