



快攻利快

the
Listeners

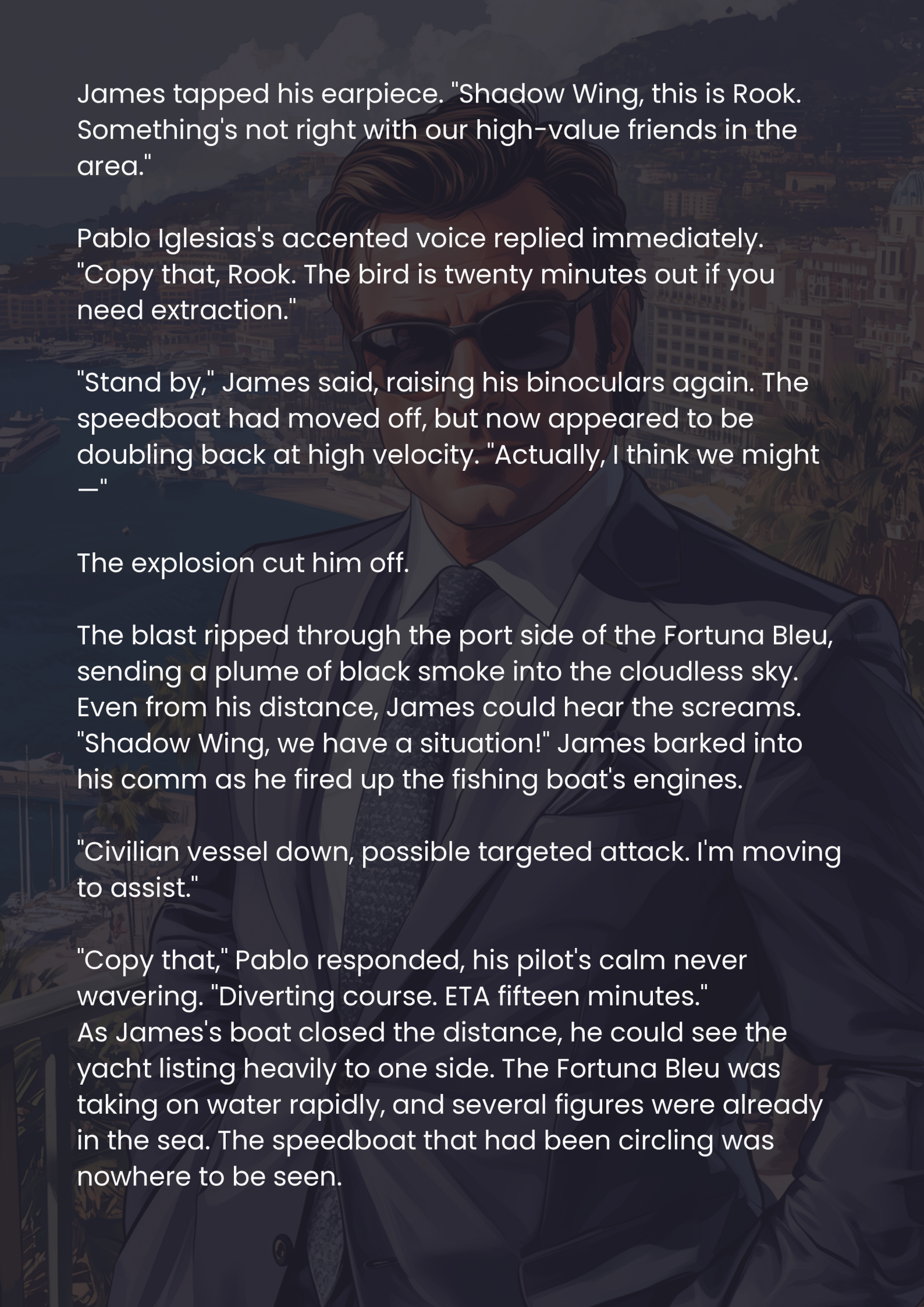
Chapter 1: Washed Ashore

The Mediterranean gleamed under the afternoon sun, its surface a deceptive blanket of tranquility. Aboard the Fortuna Bleu, a 70-foot luxury yacht cutting through the waters off the coast of Spain, eight-year-old Sophie Beaumont pointed excitedly at a pod of dolphins arcing through the waves.

"Maman! Look!" she called to her mother, Élise Beaumont, who smiled from her lounge chair on the upper deck. "They're beautiful, ma chérie," Élise replied, adjusting her sunglasses against the glare. It was their third day at sea, a much-needed escape while her husband Claude remained in Paris, managing the latest crisis threatening his shipping conglomerate.

Six nautical miles away, aboard a modest fishing vessel that appeared weathered but concealed state-of-the-art surveillance equipment, James Brown lowered his binoculars and frowned. The British operative had been monitoring a suspected arms dealer's movements along the coast for three days, but something about the luxury yacht had caught his attention.

"That's the fourth pass they've made," he muttered to himself, observing a speedboat that had circled the Beaumont vessel twice in the last hour. He'd dismissed it initially as local tour guides or paparazzi, but their pattern suggested something else entirely.



James tapped his earpiece. "Shadow Wing, this is Rook. Something's not right with our high-value friends in the area."

Pablo Iglesias's accented voice replied immediately. "Copy that, Rook. The bird is twenty minutes out if you need extraction."

"Stand by," James said, raising his binoculars again. The speedboat had moved off, but now appeared to be doubling back at high velocity. "Actually, I think we might —"

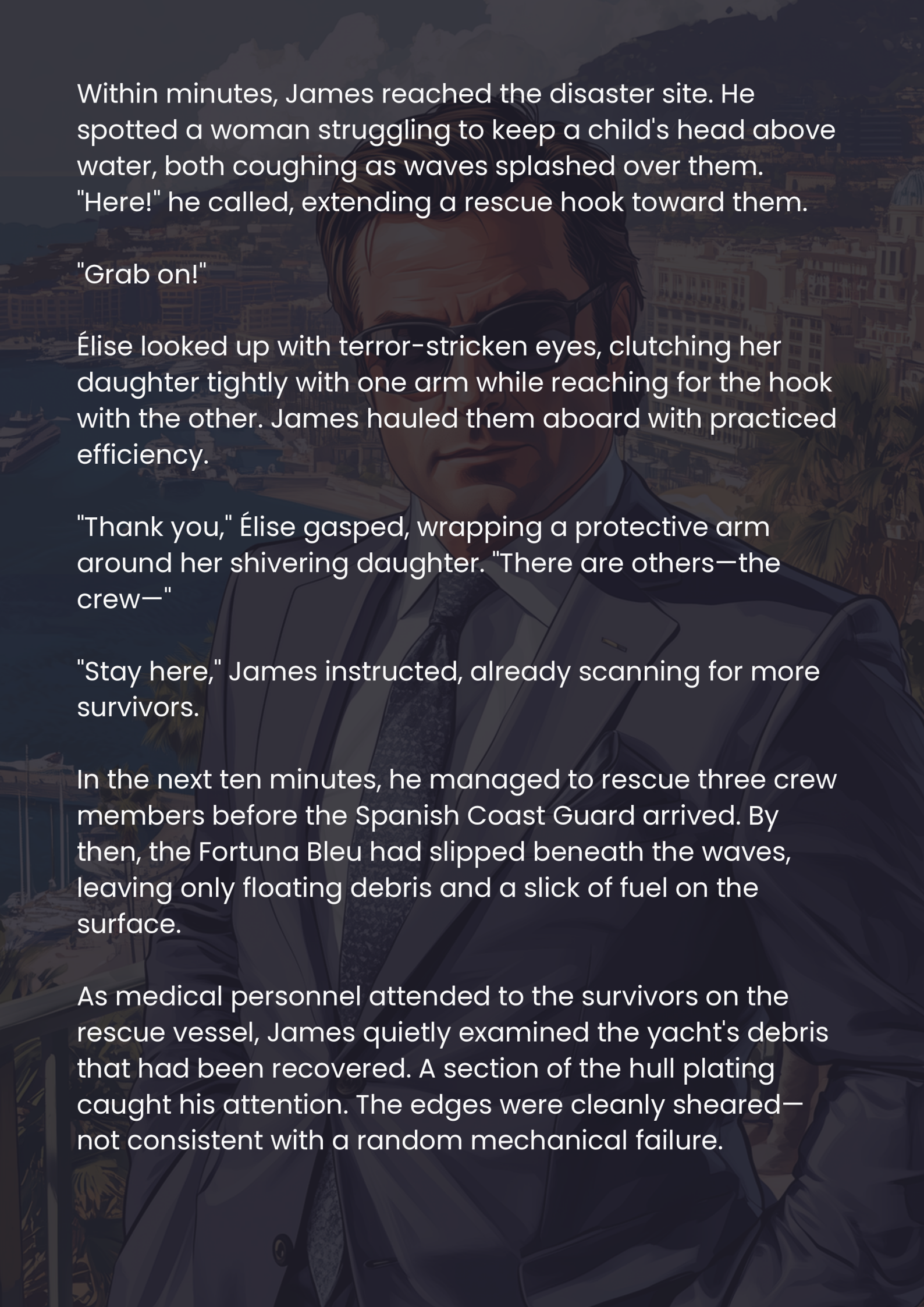
The explosion cut him off.

The blast ripped through the port side of the Fortuna Bleu, sending a plume of black smoke into the cloudless sky. Even from his distance, James could hear the screams. "Shadow Wing, we have a situation!" James barked into his comm as he fired up the fishing boat's engines.

"Civilian vessel down, possible targeted attack. I'm moving to assist."

"Copy that," Pablo responded, his pilot's calm never wavering. "Diverting course. ETA fifteen minutes."

As James's boat closed the distance, he could see the yacht listing heavily to one side. The Fortuna Bleu was taking on water rapidly, and several figures were already in the sea. The speedboat that had been circling was nowhere to be seen.



Within minutes, James reached the disaster site. He spotted a woman struggling to keep a child's head above water, both coughing as waves splashed over them. "Here!" he called, extending a rescue hook toward them.

"Grab on!"

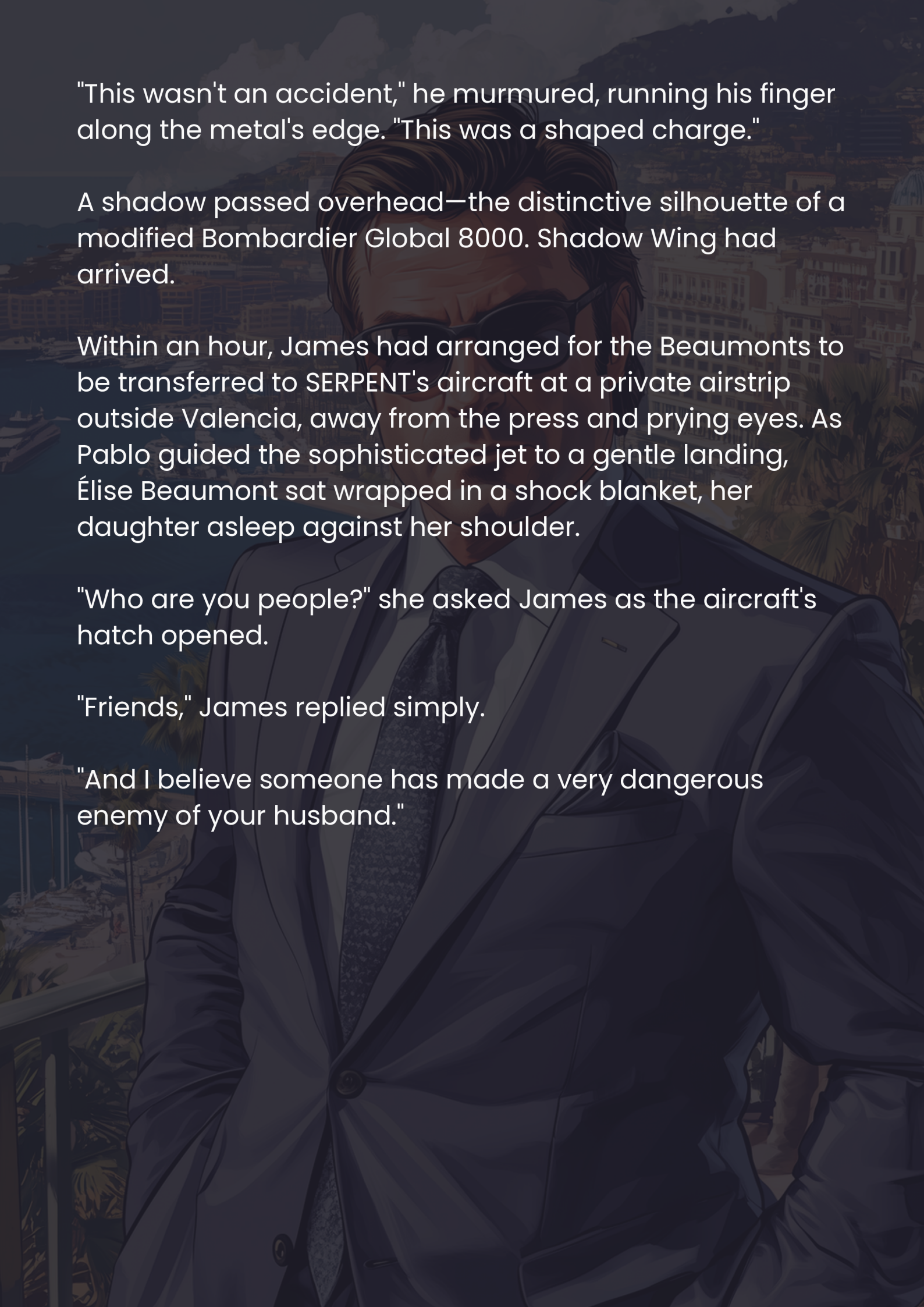
Élise looked up with terror-stricken eyes, clutching her daughter tightly with one arm while reaching for the hook with the other. James hauled them aboard with practiced efficiency.

"Thank you," Élise gasped, wrapping a protective arm around her shivering daughter. "There are others—the crew—"

"Stay here," James instructed, already scanning for more survivors.

In the next ten minutes, he managed to rescue three crew members before the Spanish Coast Guard arrived. By then, the Fortuna Bleu had slipped beneath the waves, leaving only floating debris and a slick of fuel on the surface.

As medical personnel attended to the survivors on the rescue vessel, James quietly examined the yacht's debris that had been recovered. A section of the hull plating caught his attention. The edges were cleanly sheared—not consistent with a random mechanical failure.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands on a balcony. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking down. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a hillside under a cloudy sky.

"This wasn't an accident," he murmured, running his finger along the metal's edge. "This was a shaped charge."

A shadow passed overhead—the distinctive silhouette of a modified Bombardier Global 8000. Shadow Wing had arrived.

Within an hour, James had arranged for the Beaumonts to be transferred to SERPENT's aircraft at a private airstrip outside Valencia, away from the press and prying eyes. As Pablo guided the sophisticated jet to a gentle landing, Élise Beaumont sat wrapped in a shock blanket, her daughter asleep against her shoulder.

"Who are you people?" she asked James as the aircraft's hatch opened.

"Friends," James replied simply.

"And I believe someone has made a very dangerous enemy of your husband."

Chapter 2: Threads of Suspicion

Twenty thousand feet above the Bay of Biscay, Shadow Wing sliced through the clouds like a silver phantom. Within its meticulously modified cabin, the heart of SERPENT was beating at full rhythm.

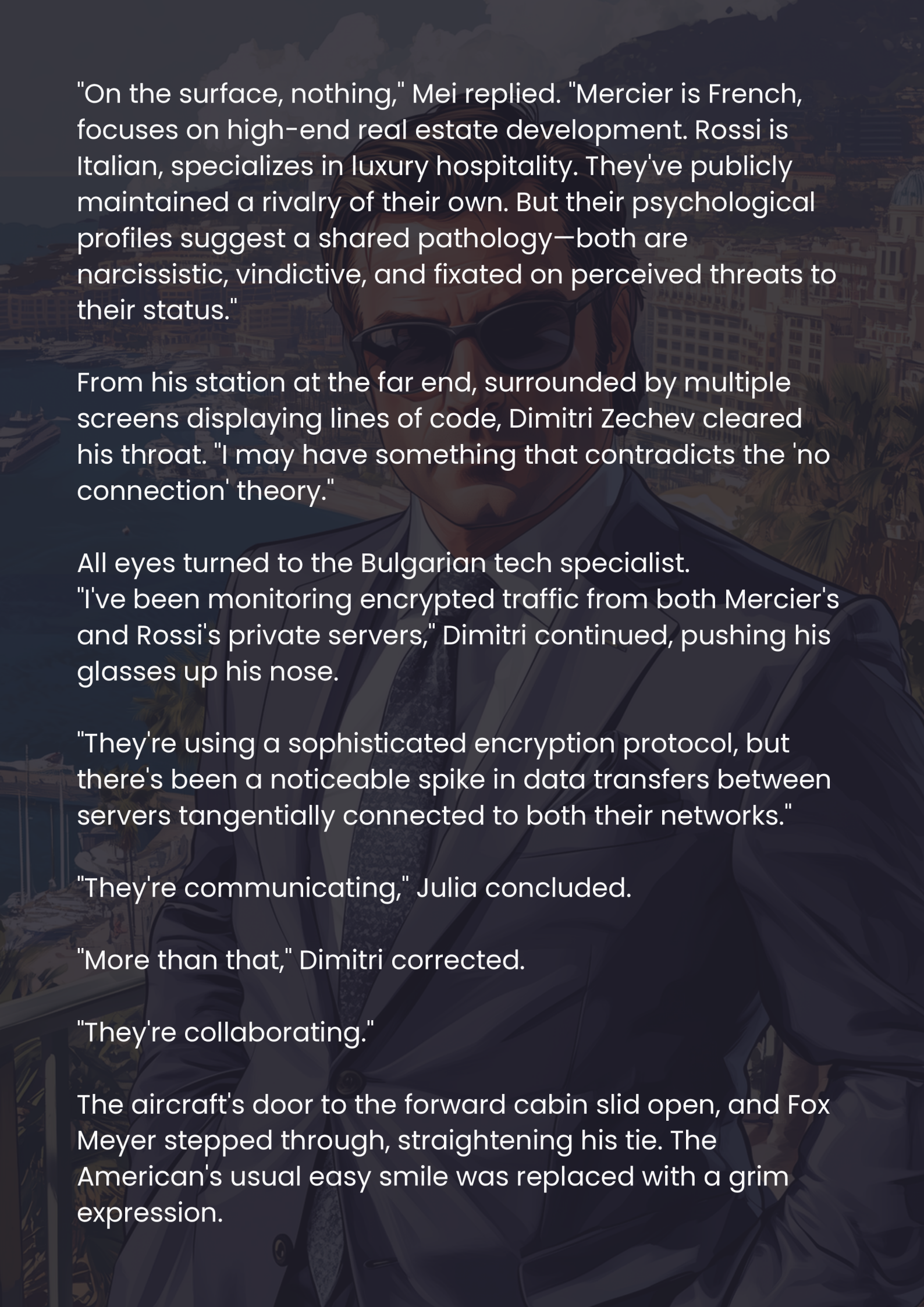
Isabella Moreno stood before the holographic command table, her fingers dancing across the projected interface as images and documents materialized around her.

"Claude Beaumont," she said, addressing the team gathered in the war room.

"French national, 58 years old. Built his fortune in shipping and expanded into luxury resorts along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines. Started with almost nothing twenty years ago and now controls a business empire worth approximately 2.7 billion euros."

Mei Huang, seated at her workstation, added, "And he's made powerful enemies along the way." Her screen displayed psychological profiles of two men. "Jean-Pierre Mercier and Antonio Rossi. Both old-money European businessmen who've watched Beaumont's meteoric rise with increasing hostility."

"What's their connection?" Julia Sharpe asked from the head of the table. The Overseer's gaze was sharp, missing nothing.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands on a balcony. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking slightly to the side. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a body of water under a hazy sky.

"On the surface, nothing," Mei replied. "Mercier is French, focuses on high-end real estate development. Rossi is Italian, specializes in luxury hospitality. They've publicly maintained a rivalry of their own. But their psychological profiles suggest a shared pathology—both are narcissistic, vindictive, and fixated on perceived threats to their status."

From his station at the far end, surrounded by multiple screens displaying lines of code, Dimitri Zechev cleared his throat. "I may have something that contradicts the 'no connection' theory."

All eyes turned to the Bulgarian tech specialist. "I've been monitoring encrypted traffic from both Mercier's and Rossi's private servers," Dimitri continued, pushing his glasses up his nose.

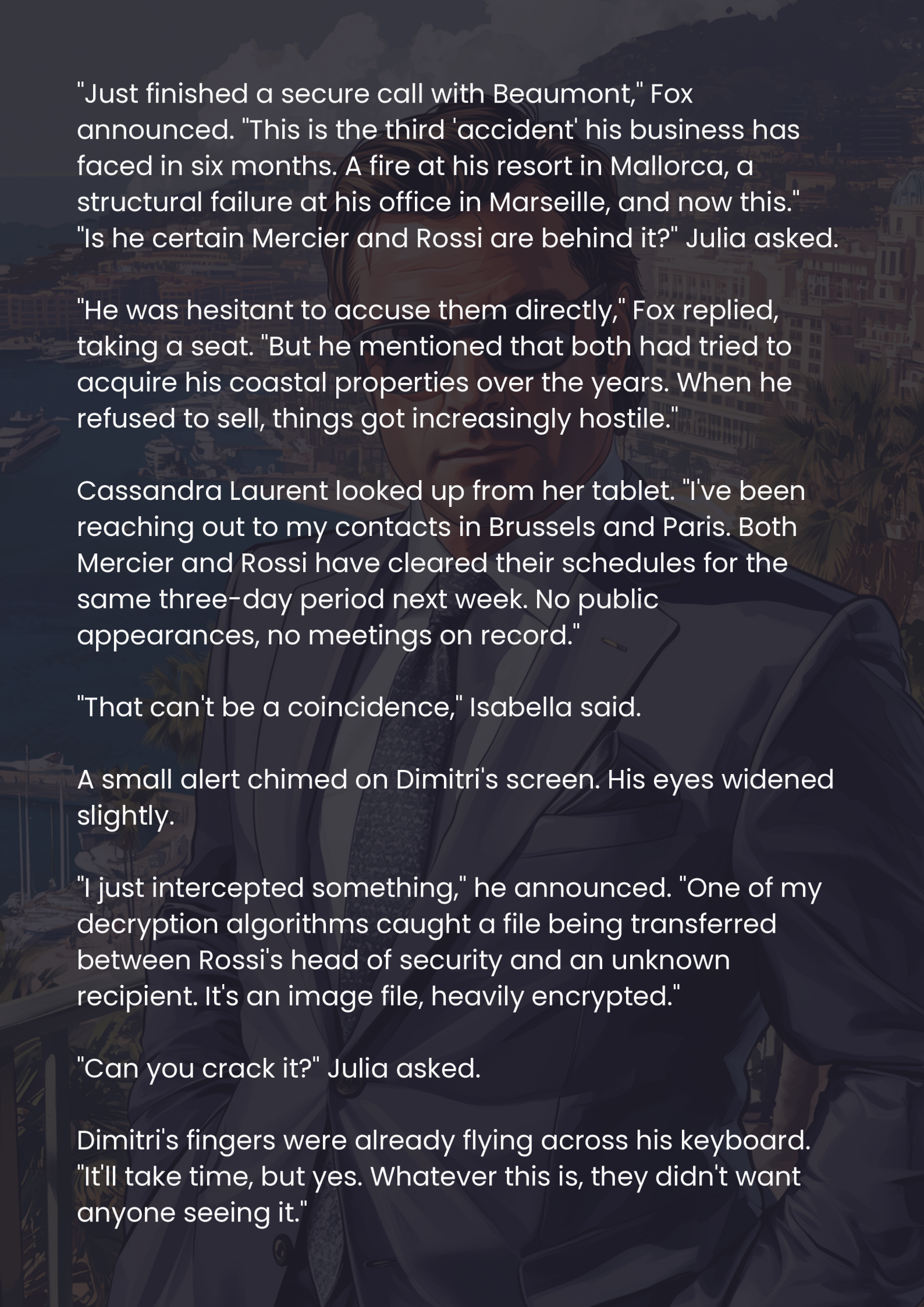
"They're using a sophisticated encryption protocol, but there's been a noticeable spike in data transfers between servers tangentially connected to both their networks."

"They're communicating," Julia concluded.

"More than that," Dimitri corrected.

"They're collaborating."

The aircraft's door to the forward cabin slid open, and Fox Meyer stepped through, straightening his tie. The American's usual easy smile was replaced with a grim expression.



"Just finished a secure call with Beaumont," Fox announced. "This is the third 'accident' his business has faced in six months. A fire at his resort in Mallorca, a structural failure at his office in Marseille, and now this." "Is he certain Mercier and Rossi are behind it?" Julia asked.

"He was hesitant to accuse them directly," Fox replied, taking a seat. "But he mentioned that both had tried to acquire his coastal properties over the years. When he refused to sell, things got increasingly hostile."

Cassandra Laurent looked up from her tablet. "I've been reaching out to my contacts in Brussels and Paris. Both Mercier and Rossi have cleared their schedules for the same three-day period next week. No public appearances, no meetings on record."

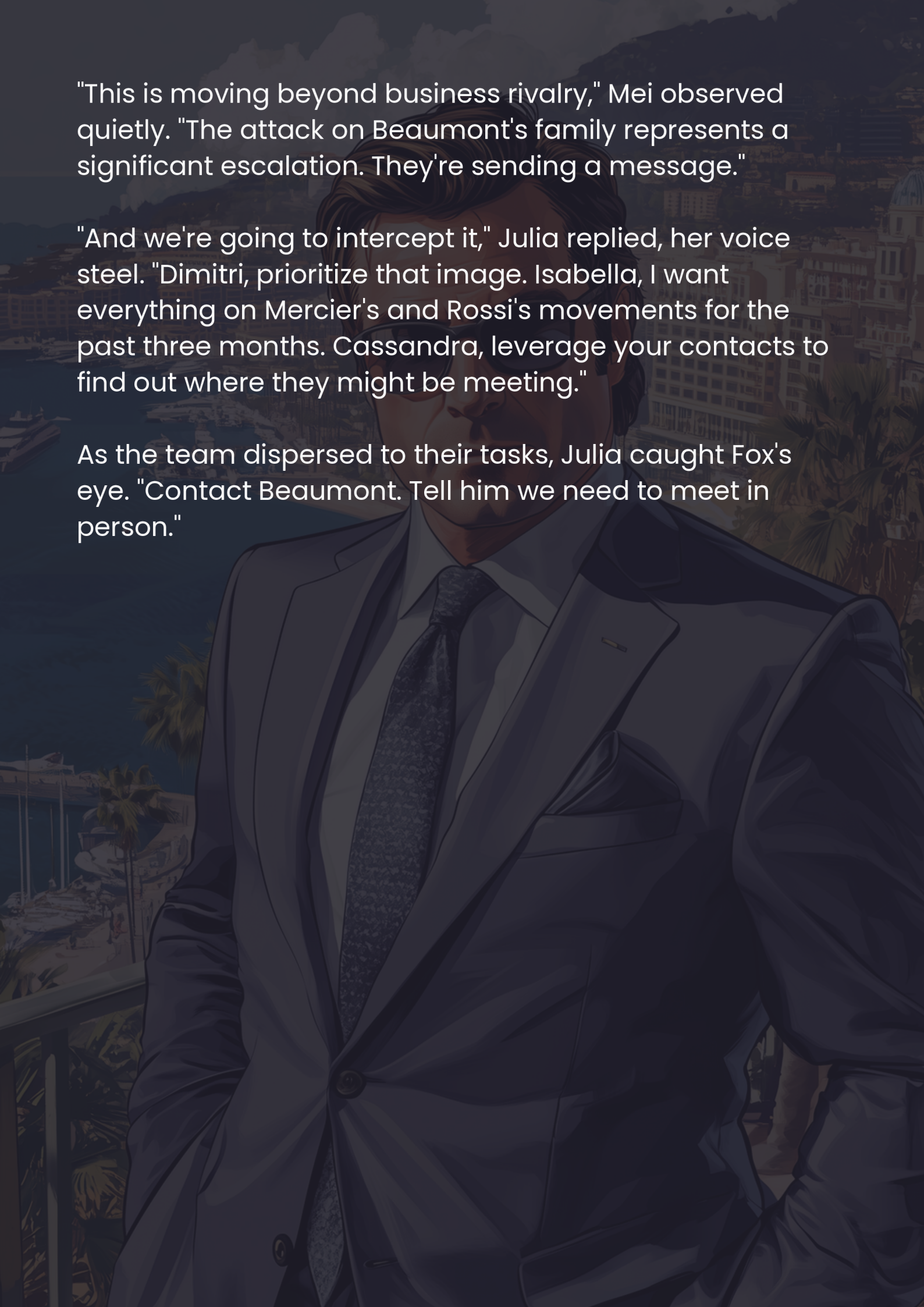
"That can't be a coincidence," Isabella said.

A small alert chimed on Dimitri's screen. His eyes widened slightly.

"I just intercepted something," he announced. "One of my decryption algorithms caught a file being transferred between Rossi's head of security and an unknown recipient. It's an image file, heavily encrypted."

"Can you crack it?" Julia asked.

Dimitri's fingers were already flying across his keyboard. "It'll take time, but yes. Whatever this is, they didn't want anyone seeing it."

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands on a balcony. He is wearing dark sunglasses. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and palm trees under a clear sky. The image is overlaid with semi-transparent text.

"This is moving beyond business rivalry," Mei observed quietly. "The attack on Beaumont's family represents a significant escalation. They're sending a message."

"And we're going to intercept it," Julia replied, her voice steel. "Dimitri, prioritize that image. Isabella, I want everything on Mercier's and Rossi's movements for the past three months. Cassandra, leverage your contacts to find out where they might be meeting."

As the team dispersed to their tasks, Julia caught Fox's eye. "Contact Beaumont. Tell him we need to meet in person."

Chapter 3: The Hunt Begins

Shadow Wing descended through the morning mist, touching down on the private airstrip outside Paris with barely a sound.

As the engines wound down, Julia Sharpe stood by the window, watching the black limousine approach across the tarmac.

"He's here," she announced to the cabin.

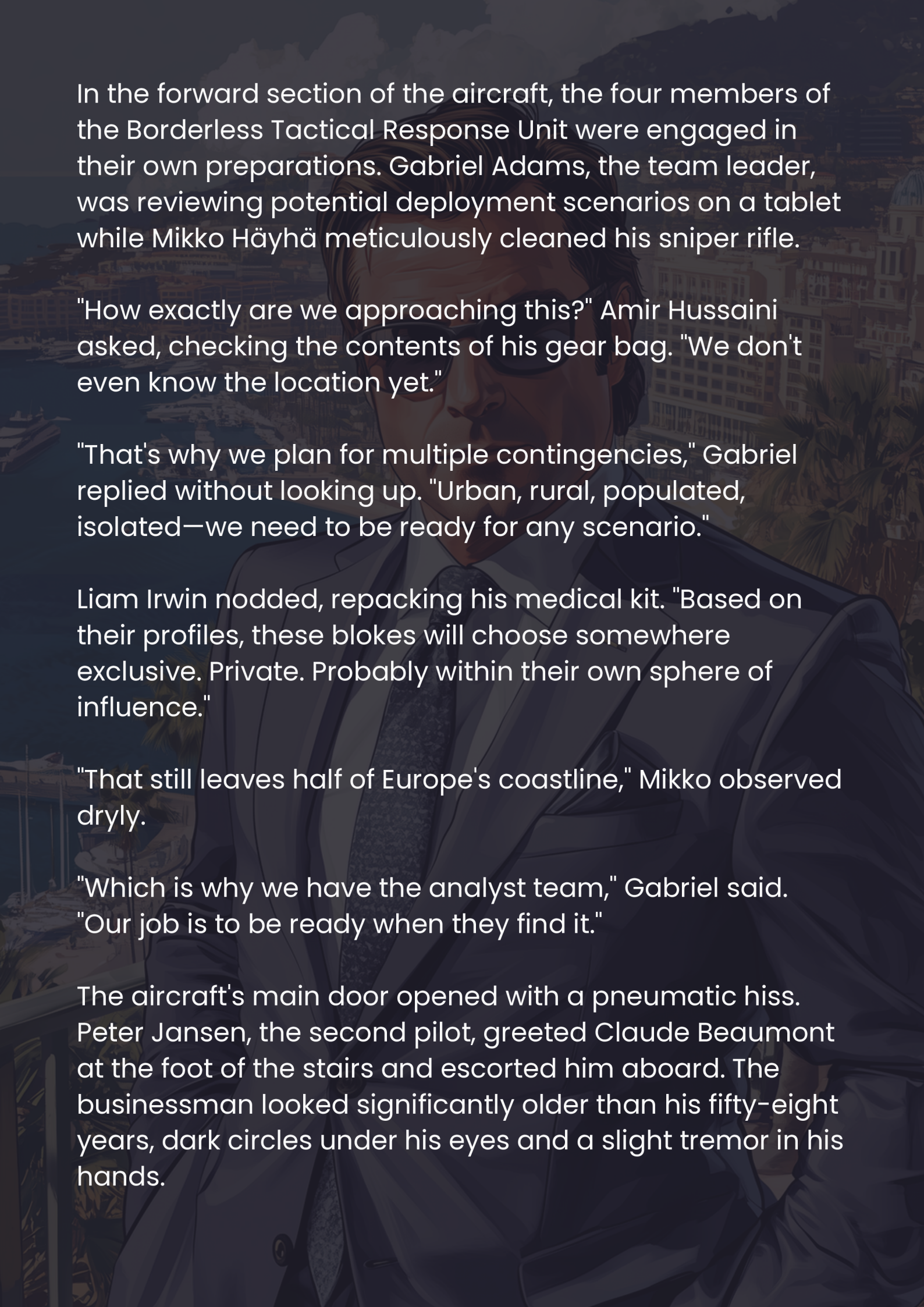
Special Agent K looked up from the holographic display, where fragments of the decrypted image were slowly assembling like a digital puzzle. "Timing's good. Dimitri and I have made progress."

Julia turned away from the window. "Show me."

K gestured to the display. "We've managed to recover about sixty percent of the image. It's a location—somewhere coastal, judging by the architecture and surroundings. Western or Southern European in style." "Do we have enough for identification?"

"Not yet," K admitted.

"But there are distinctive elements emerging. This building has unique features. Once we have the complete image, I'm confident we can pinpoint it."

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, is shown from the chest up. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking down. The background is a blurred cityscape with buildings and palm trees.

In the forward section of the aircraft, the four members of the Borderless Tactical Response Unit were engaged in their own preparations. Gabriel Adams, the team leader, was reviewing potential deployment scenarios on a tablet while Mikko Häyhä meticulously cleaned his sniper rifle.

"How exactly are we approaching this?" Amir Hussaini asked, checking the contents of his gear bag. "We don't even know the location yet."

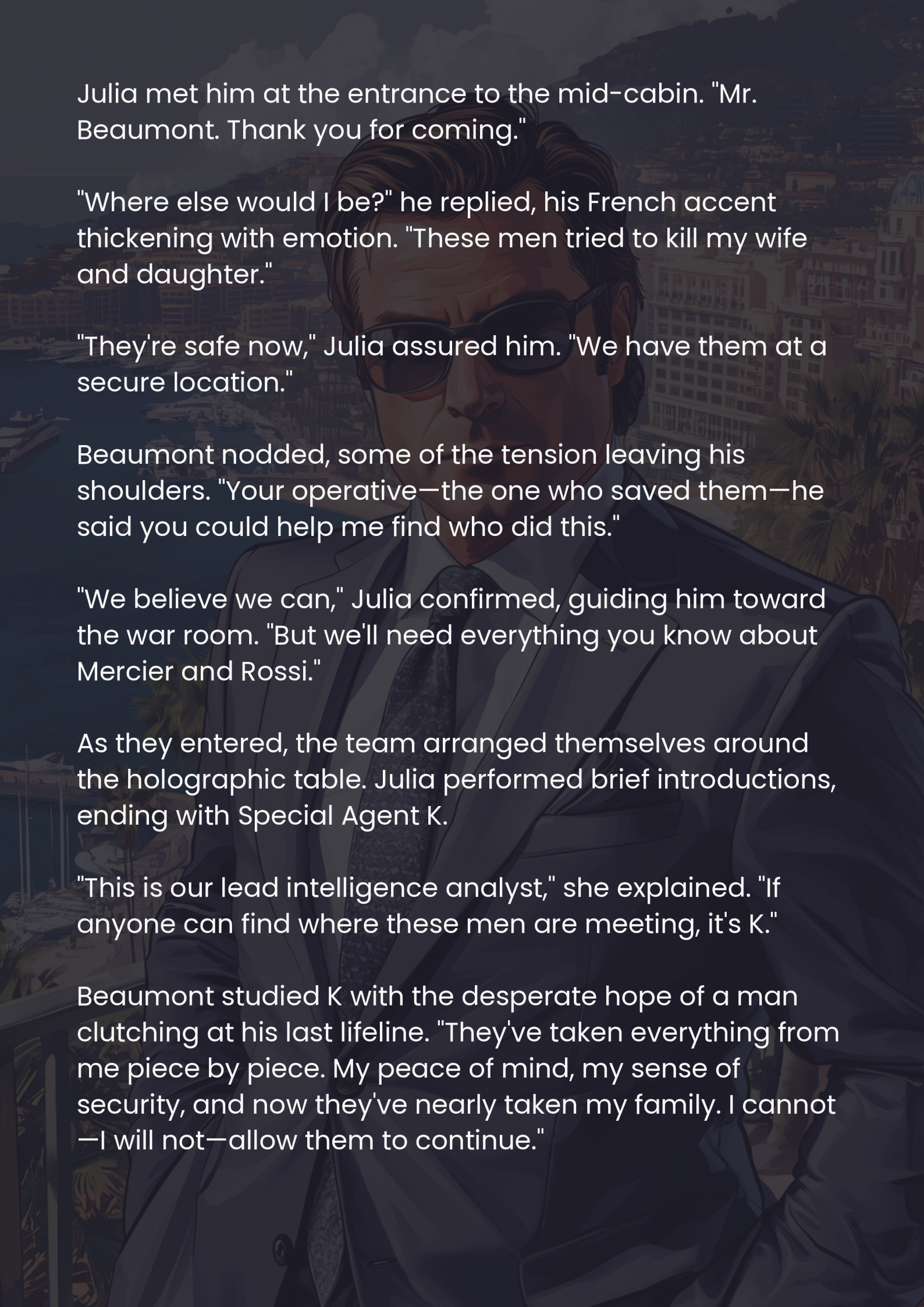
"That's why we plan for multiple contingencies," Gabriel replied without looking up. "Urban, rural, populated, isolated—we need to be ready for any scenario."

Liam Irwin nodded, repacking his medical kit. "Based on their profiles, these blokes will choose somewhere exclusive. Private. Probably within their own sphere of influence."

"That still leaves half of Europe's coastline," Mikko observed dryly.

"Which is why we have the analyst team," Gabriel said. "Our job is to be ready when they find it."

The aircraft's main door opened with a pneumatic hiss. Peter Jansen, the second pilot, greeted Claude Beaumont at the foot of the stairs and escorted him aboard. The businessman looked significantly older than his fifty-eight years, dark circles under his eyes and a slight tremor in his hands.



Julia met him at the entrance to the mid-cabin. "Mr. Beaumont. Thank you for coming."

"Where else would I be?" he replied, his French accent thickening with emotion. "These men tried to kill my wife and daughter."

"They're safe now," Julia assured him. "We have them at a secure location."

Beaumont nodded, some of the tension leaving his shoulders. "Your operative—the one who saved them—he said you could help me find who did this."

"We believe we can," Julia confirmed, guiding him toward the war room. "But we'll need everything you know about Mercier and Rossi."

As they entered, the team arranged themselves around the holographic table. Julia performed brief introductions, ending with Special Agent K.

"This is our lead intelligence analyst," she explained. "If anyone can find where these men are meeting, it's K."

Beaumont studied K with the desperate hope of a man clutching at his last lifeline. "They've taken everything from me piece by piece. My peace of mind, my sense of security, and now they've nearly taken my family. I cannot—I will not—allow them to continue."

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands on a balcony. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking slightly to the side. The background is a blurred view of a coastal city with buildings and a sea visible in the distance.

From his station, Dimitri suddenly straightened. "I've got it. Final decryption complete."

The holographic display flickered, and the full image materialized in the air before them—a pristine coastal building with distinctive architecture, nestled against dramatic cliffs with the sea visible in the background.

"That's where they're meeting," K said, already analyzing the visual elements. "Three days from now, according to the metadata."

Beaumont stared at the image, his face paling. "I know this rivalry well. They're planning something devastating. My final destruction."

Julia turned to K, her expression resolute. "I think this one's going to require your particular set of skills. We need to find this location, and we need to find it quickly."

K nodded, eyes still fixed on the image, mind already calculating the complex web of geographic and architectural clues that would lead to the answer.

"Consider it done," K replied, as the team gathered around the table, ready to receive their briefing for the mission that would soon be known as "The Listeners."

Briefing

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands on a balcony. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking directly at the camera. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a hillside under a cloudy sky. The image is dark and moody, with the man's face partially obscured by the sunglasses.

Greetings, Special Agent.

Glad you could make it. One of our oldest clients, a wealthy French businessman, is requesting we find a location where a conversation between two of his rivals will take place. These two have been after our clients' fortune for a long time, endlessly scheming to end his business endeavors. After their recent attempt to sink one of our clients' boats off the coast of Spain, while his wife and daughter were on board, our client has had enough.

The plan is to uncover the location of their meeting and have one of our Field Agents plant a listening device. This will record the meeting and lead to the valuable information our client is looking for. Using this information our client plans to take down the businesses of both rivals.

There is a catch to this however. We don't know where this meeting will take place. Our client was able to intercept an image of the meeting location, which will take place 3 days from now at noon. Besides this photo, we know these rivals share a common interest in luxurious lifestyles along the coastlines of Western and Southern Europe.

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

Materials

starting-image-the-listeners.png

Answer Instruction

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

Make sure Google Maps is set to English.

Answer format: country-zipcode-streetname-number

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.