

A detailed illustration of a man with a bloody, scarred face and a menacing expression. He has a beard and is wearing a dark t-shirt. He is holding a large, blood-stained knife. The background is a deep red with some darker, textured areas. The overall style is reminiscent of comic book art or horror movie posters.

HACKTORIA

THE MIDNIGHT
SLAYER

Chapter 1: Shadows in Baltimore

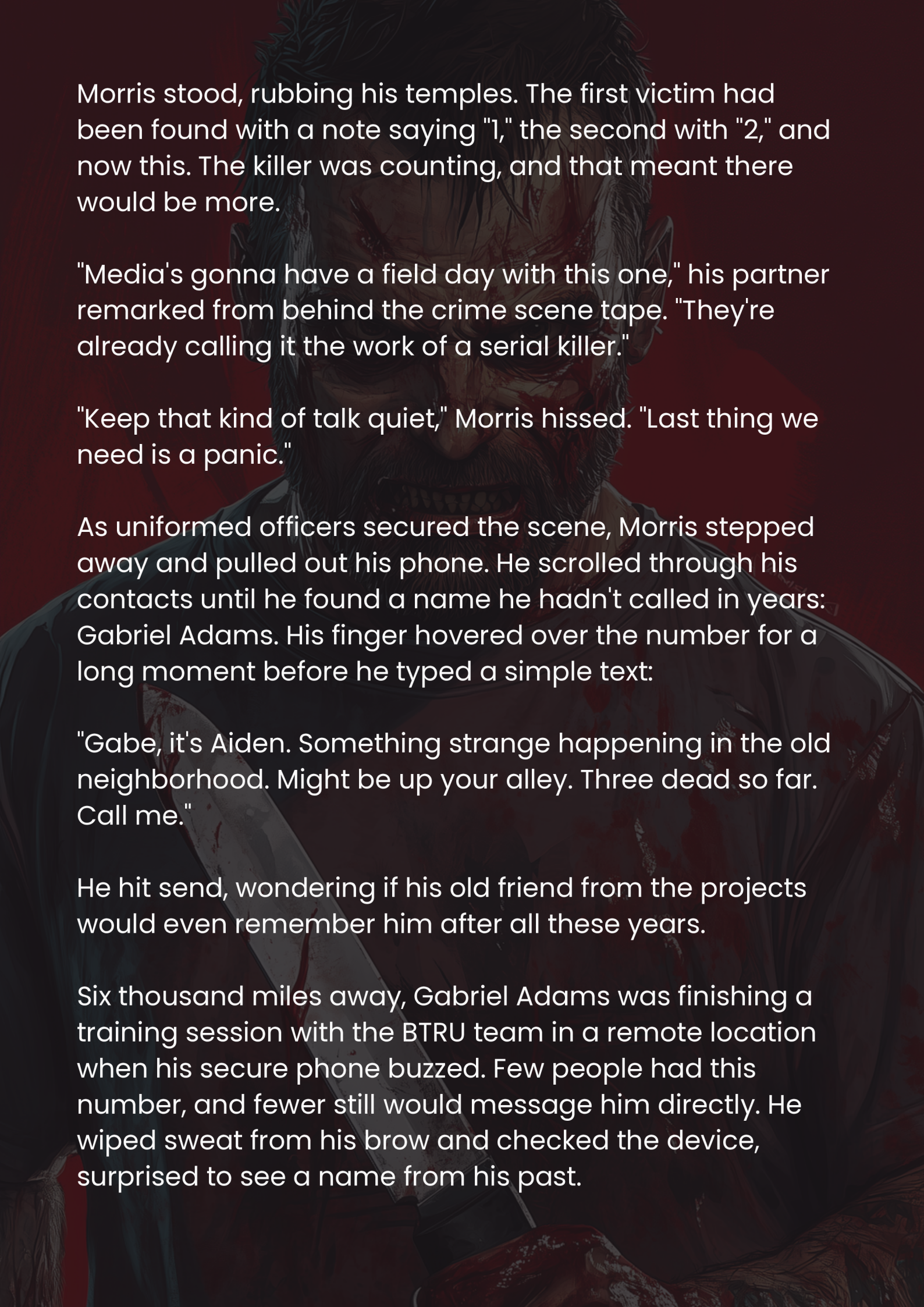
Detective Aiden Morris had been on the Baltimore City Police Department for fifteen years, but he'd never seen anything quite like this. The rain-slicked alleyway gleamed under the harsh police lights, washing out the brick walls of the surrounding buildings in an unnatural blue-white glow. His breath formed small clouds in the chilly night air as he crouched beside the body.

"Third one this month," said the medical examiner, her voice clinically detached. "Same MO as the others."

Morris nodded grimly. The victim lay sprawled against the wall, eyes open and unseeing. Unlike most Baltimore homicides, there was almost no blood—just precise incisions and an unnaturally peaceful expression. And like the others, there was a small piece of paper clutched in the victim's hand.

"What's it say?" Morris asked, though he already suspected the answer.

The ME carefully extracted the note with gloved fingers and unfolded it. "Same as before. Just a number. This one says '3'."



Morris stood, rubbing his temples. The first victim had been found with a note saying "1," the second with "2," and now this. The killer was counting, and that meant there would be more.

"Media's gonna have a field day with this one," his partner remarked from behind the crime scene tape. "They're already calling it the work of a serial killer."

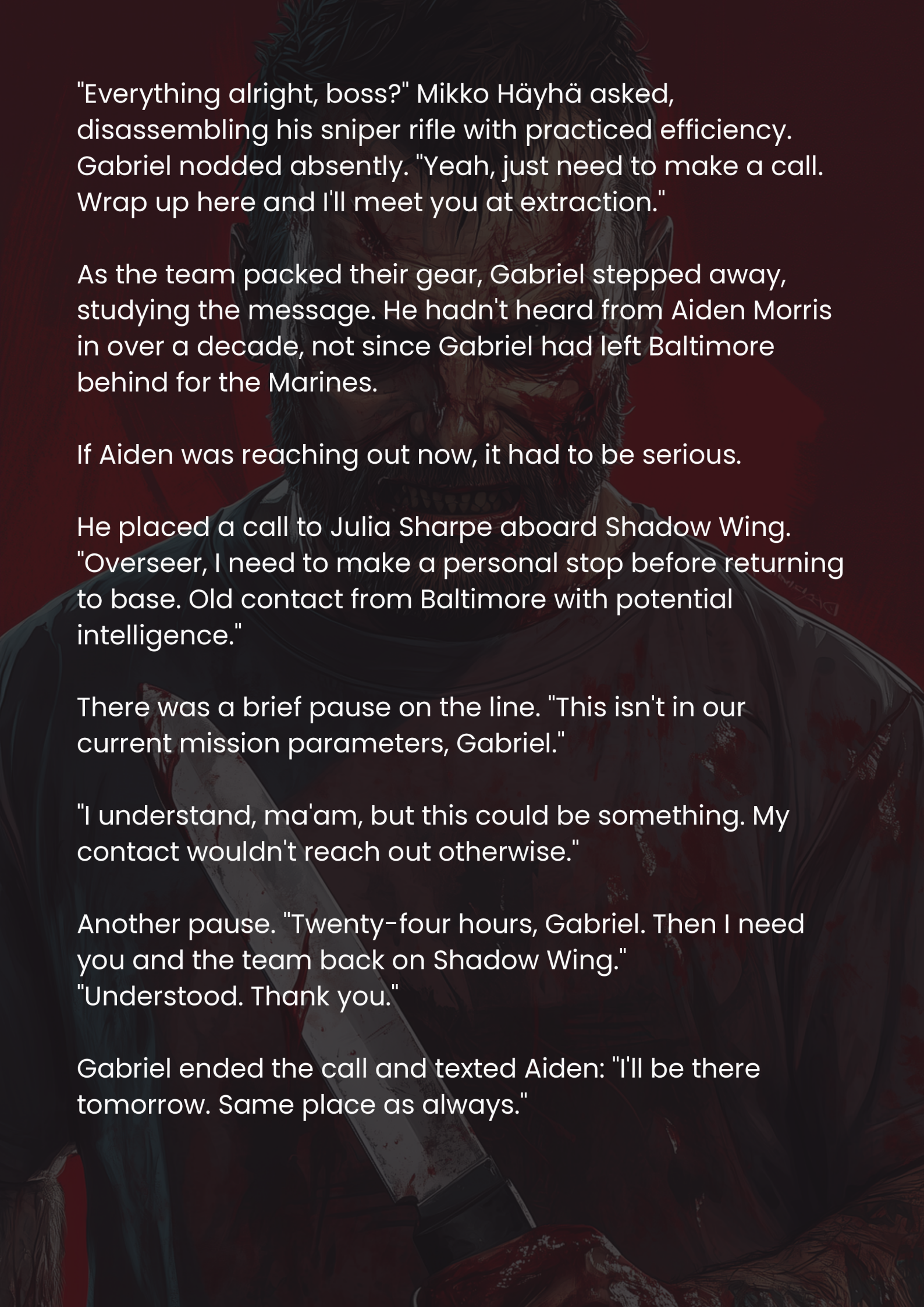
"Keep that kind of talk quiet," Morris hissed. "Last thing we need is a panic."

As uniformed officers secured the scene, Morris stepped away and pulled out his phone. He scrolled through his contacts until he found a name he hadn't called in years: Gabriel Adams. His finger hovered over the number for a long moment before he typed a simple text:

"Gabe, it's Aiden. Something strange happening in the old neighborhood. Might be up your alley. Three dead so far. Call me."

He hit send, wondering if his old friend from the projects would even remember him after all these years.

Six thousand miles away, Gabriel Adams was finishing a training session with the BTRU team in a remote location when his secure phone buzzed. Few people had this number, and fewer still would message him directly. He wiped sweat from his brow and checked the device, surprised to see a name from his past.



"Everything alright, boss?" Mikko Häyhä asked, disassembling his sniper rifle with practiced efficiency. Gabriel nodded absently. "Yeah, just need to make a call. Wrap up here and I'll meet you at extraction."

As the team packed their gear, Gabriel stepped away, studying the message. He hadn't heard from Aiden Morris in over a decade, not since Gabriel had left Baltimore behind for the Marines.

If Aiden was reaching out now, it had to be serious.

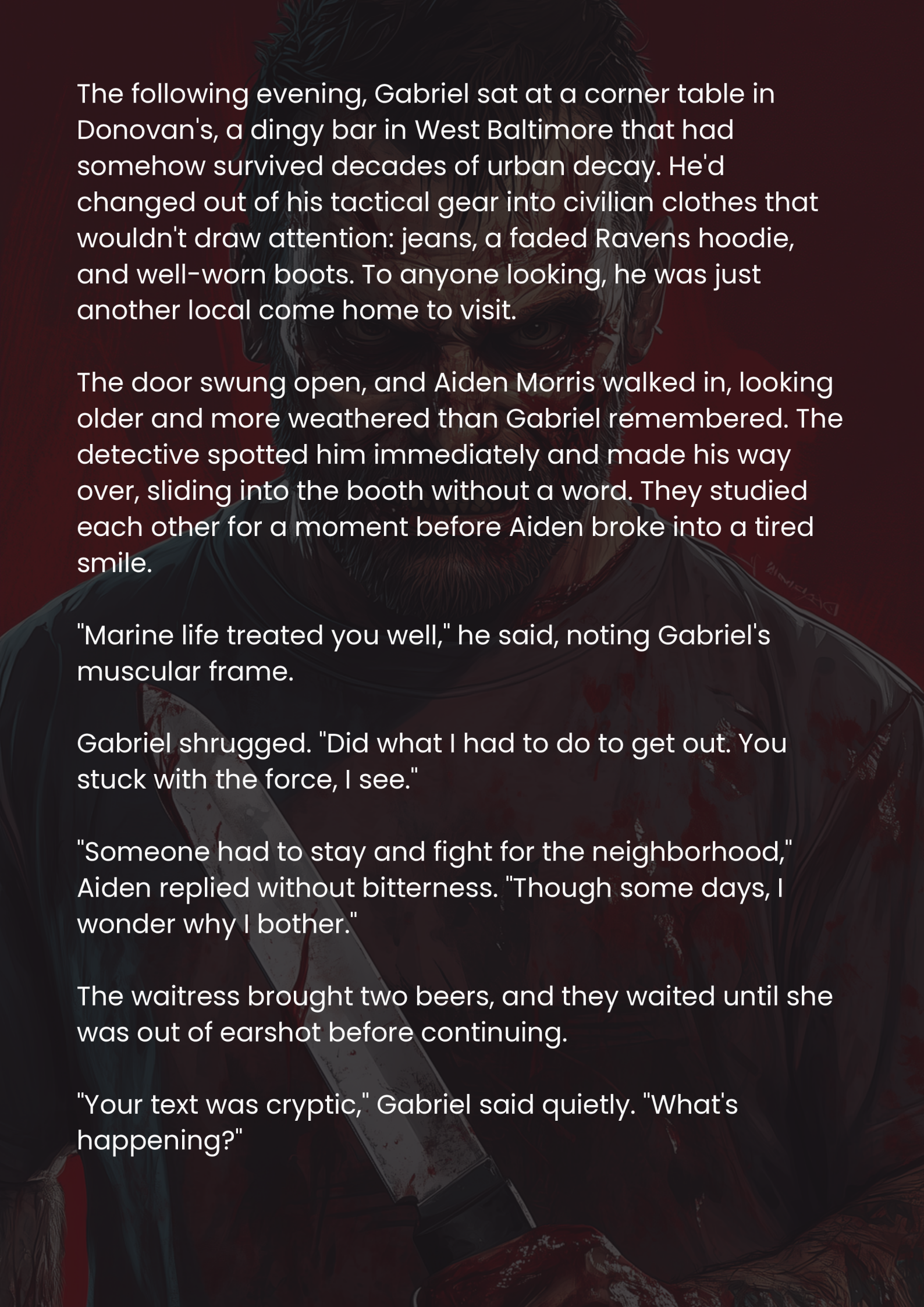
He placed a call to Julia Sharpe aboard Shadow Wing. "Overseer, I need to make a personal stop before returning to base. Old contact from Baltimore with potential intelligence."

There was a brief pause on the line. "This isn't in our current mission parameters, Gabriel."

"I understand, ma'am, but this could be something. My contact wouldn't reach out otherwise."

Another pause. "Twenty-four hours, Gabriel. Then I need you and the team back on Shadow Wing."
"Understood. Thank you."

Gabriel ended the call and texted Aiden: "I'll be there tomorrow. Same place as always."



The following evening, Gabriel sat at a corner table in Donovan's, a dingy bar in West Baltimore that had somehow survived decades of urban decay. He'd changed out of his tactical gear into civilian clothes that wouldn't draw attention: jeans, a faded Ravens hoodie, and well-worn boots. To anyone looking, he was just another local come home to visit.

The door swung open, and Aiden Morris walked in, looking older and more weathered than Gabriel remembered. The detective spotted him immediately and made his way over, sliding into the booth without a word. They studied each other for a moment before Aiden broke into a tired smile.

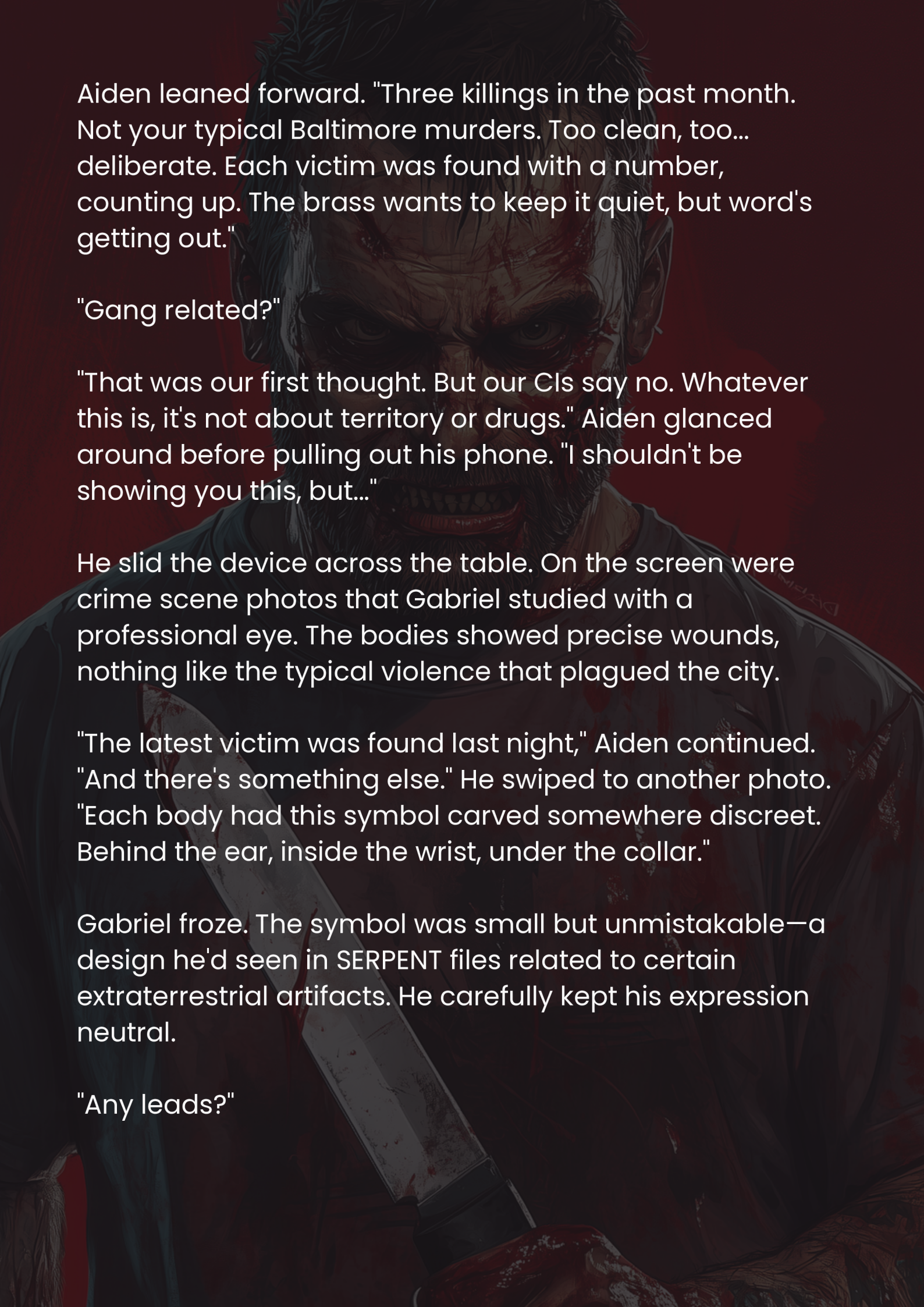
"Marine life treated you well," he said, noting Gabriel's muscular frame.

Gabriel shrugged. "Did what I had to do to get out. You stuck with the force, I see."

"Someone had to stay and fight for the neighborhood," Aiden replied without bitterness. "Though some days, I wonder why I bother."

The waitress brought two beers, and they waited until she was out of earshot before continuing.

"Your text was cryptic," Gabriel said quietly. "What's happening?"



Aiden leaned forward. "Three killings in the past month. Not your typical Baltimore murders. Too clean, too... deliberate. Each victim was found with a number, counting up. The brass wants to keep it quiet, but word's getting out."

"Gang related?"

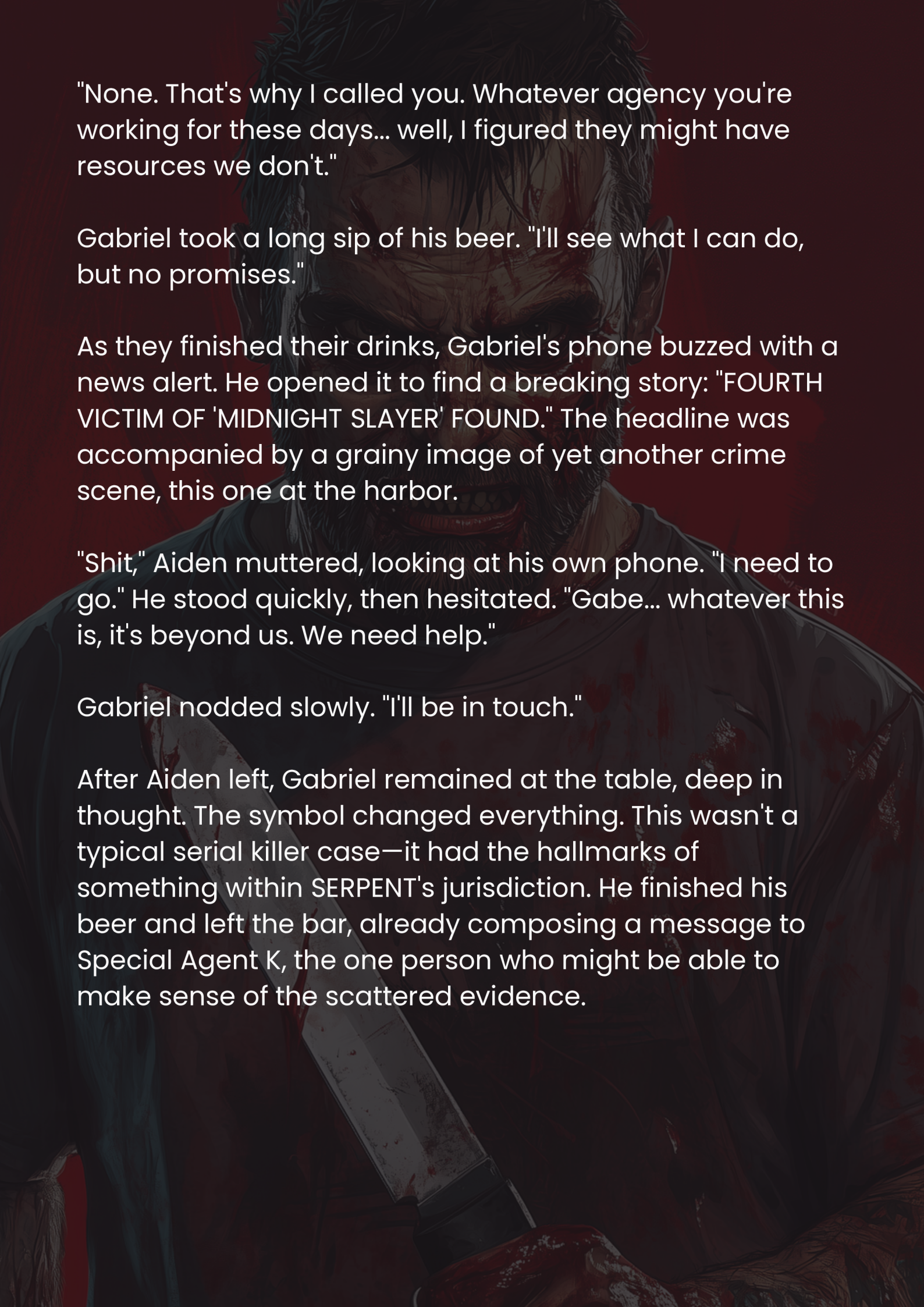
"That was our first thought. But our CIs say no. Whatever this is, it's not about territory or drugs." Aiden glanced around before pulling out his phone. "I shouldn't be showing you this, but..."

He slid the device across the table. On the screen were crime scene photos that Gabriel studied with a professional eye. The bodies showed precise wounds, nothing like the typical violence that plagued the city.

"The latest victim was found last night," Aiden continued. "And there's something else." He swiped to another photo. "Each body had this symbol carved somewhere discreet. Behind the ear, inside the wrist, under the collar."

Gabriel froze. The symbol was small but unmistakable—a design he'd seen in SERPENT files related to certain extraterrestrial artifacts. He carefully kept his expression neutral.

"Any leads?"



"None. That's why I called you. Whatever agency you're working for these days... well, I figured they might have resources we don't."

Gabriel took a long sip of his beer. "I'll see what I can do, but no promises."

As they finished their drinks, Gabriel's phone buzzed with a news alert. He opened it to find a breaking story: "FOURTH VICTIM OF 'MIDNIGHT SLAYER' FOUND." The headline was accompanied by a grainy image of yet another crime scene, this one at the harbor.

"Shit," Aiden muttered, looking at his own phone. "I need to go." He stood quickly, then hesitated. "Gabe... whatever this is, it's beyond us. We need help."

Gabriel nodded slowly. "I'll be in touch."

After Aiden left, Gabriel remained at the table, deep in thought. The symbol changed everything. This wasn't a typical serial killer case—it had the hallmarks of something within SERPENT's jurisdiction. He finished his beer and left the bar, already composing a message to Special Agent K, the one person who might be able to make sense of the scattered evidence.

CHAPTER 2: Analysis and Deduction

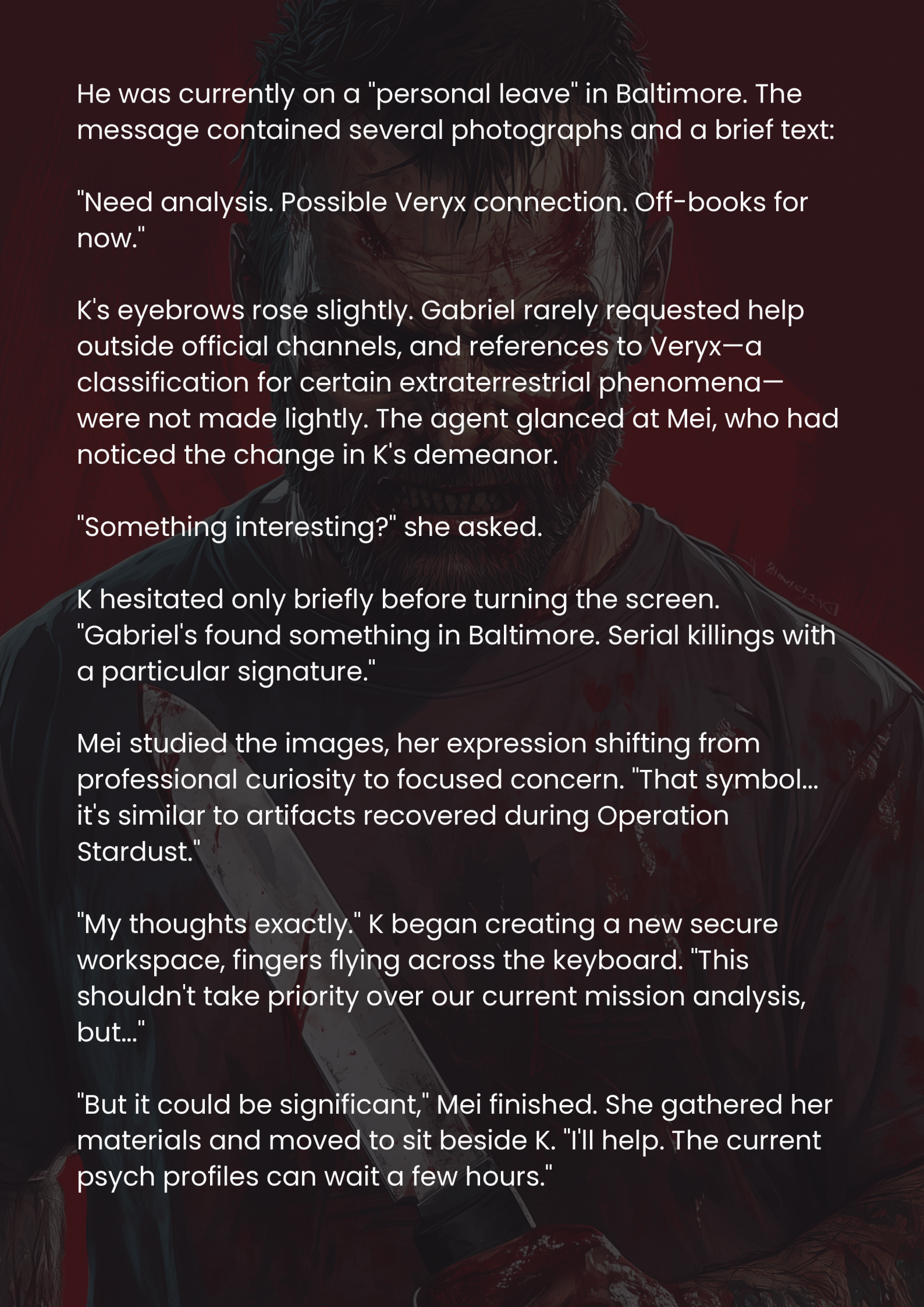
Shadow Wing cruised at 40,000 feet somewhere over the Atlantic, its sleek form cutting through the night sky like a phantom. Within its modified cabin, most of the SERPENT team was resting after their latest mission—a complicated extraction in Eastern Europe that had gone smoothly due to meticulous planning.

In the analyst's war room, however, two figures remained awake, illuminated by the glow of multiple screens. Special Agent K sat at the central workstation, fingers dancing across keyboards as data scrolled by. Across from them, Mei Huang studied a psychological profile with intense concentration, occasionally making notations in elegant handwriting.

"The subject's psychological patterns suggest military training," Mei observed, breaking the comfortable silence. "But the cultural indicators are inconsistent with our initial assessment."

Special Agent K nodded. "That aligns with what I'm seeing in the digital footprint. The encrypted communications use protocol patterns from three different intelligence agencies. Our target is either very sophisticated or deliberately mixing methodologies to confuse analysis."

Their work was interrupted by the soft chime of a secure message arriving on K's terminal. Opening it revealed an encrypted transmission from Gabriel Adams.



He was currently on a "personal leave" in Baltimore. The message contained several photographs and a brief text:

"Need analysis. Possible Veryx connection. Off-books for now."

K's eyebrows rose slightly. Gabriel rarely requested help outside official channels, and references to Veryx—a classification for certain extraterrestrial phenomena—were not made lightly. The agent glanced at Mei, who had noticed the change in K's demeanor.

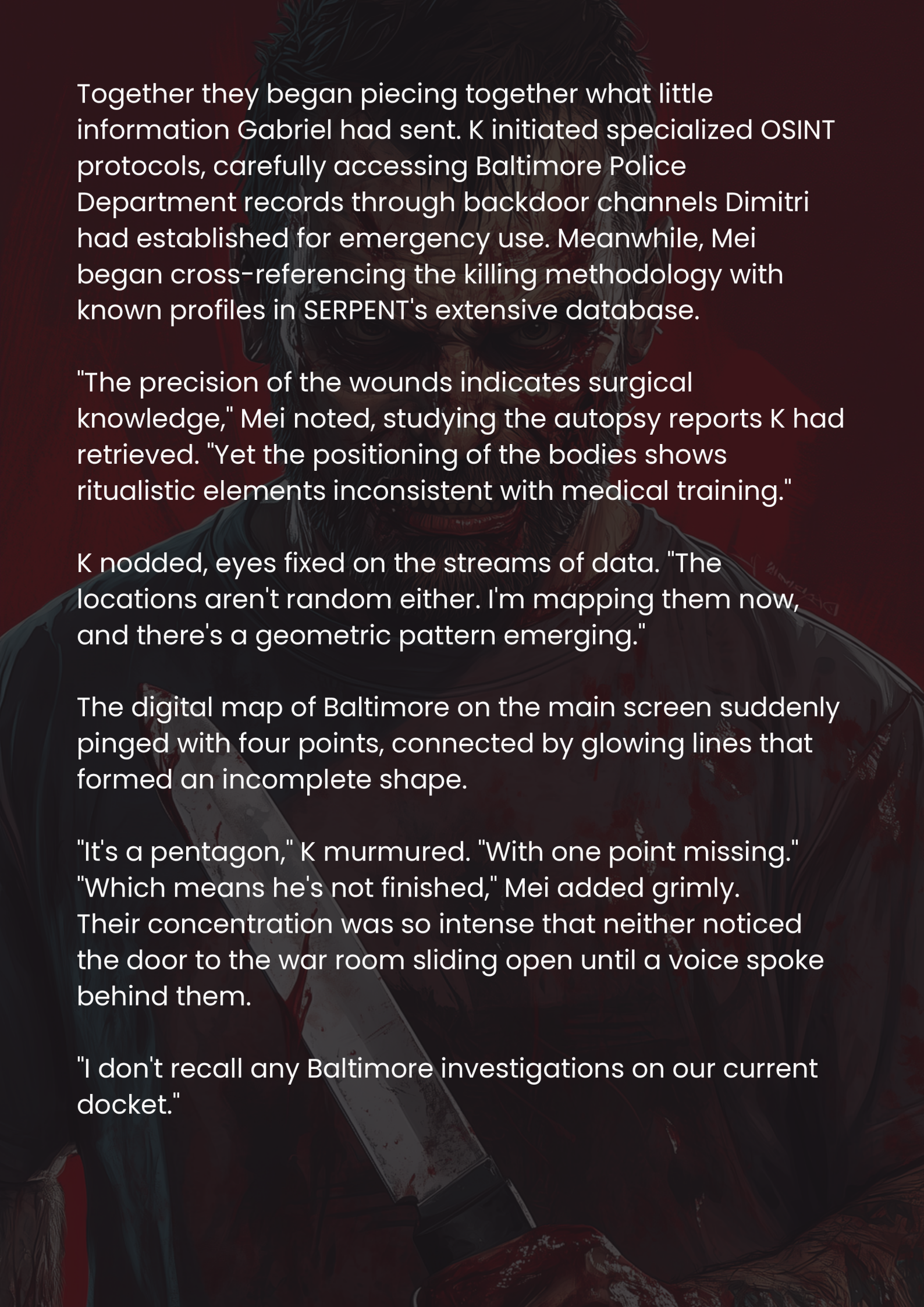
"Something interesting?" she asked.

K hesitated only briefly before turning the screen. "Gabriel's found something in Baltimore. Serial killings with a particular signature."

Mei studied the images, her expression shifting from professional curiosity to focused concern. "That symbol... it's similar to artifacts recovered during Operation Stardust."

"My thoughts exactly." K began creating a new secure workspace, fingers flying across the keyboard. "This shouldn't take priority over our current mission analysis, but..."

"But it could be significant," Mei finished. She gathered her materials and moved to sit beside K. "I'll help. The current psych profiles can wait a few hours."



Together they began piecing together what little information Gabriel had sent. K initiated specialized OSINT protocols, carefully accessing Baltimore Police Department records through backdoor channels Dimitri had established for emergency use. Meanwhile, Mei began cross-referencing the killing methodology with known profiles in SERPENT's extensive database.

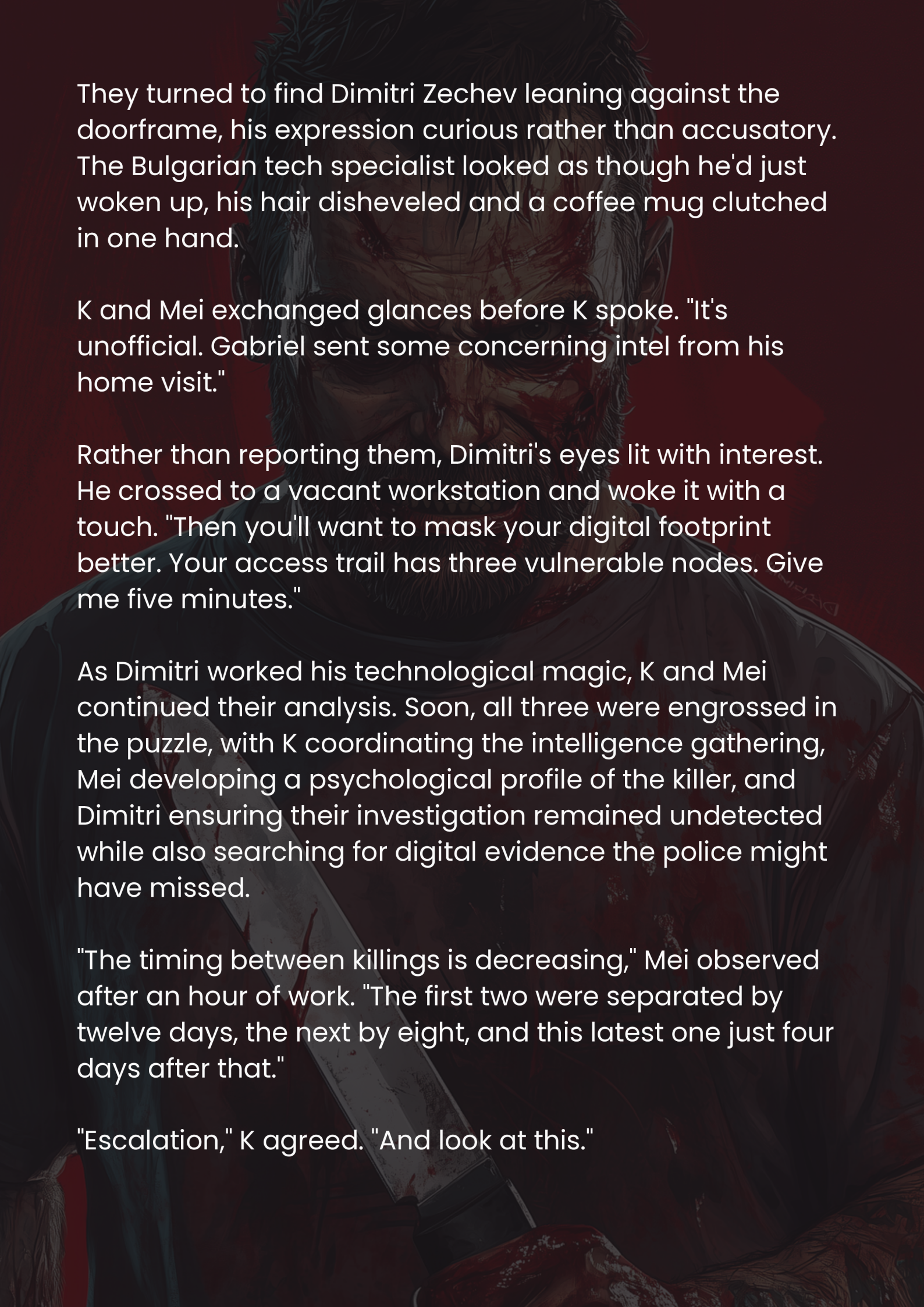
"The precision of the wounds indicates surgical knowledge," Mei noted, studying the autopsy reports K had retrieved. "Yet the positioning of the bodies shows ritualistic elements inconsistent with medical training."

K nodded, eyes fixed on the streams of data. "The locations aren't random either. I'm mapping them now, and there's a geometric pattern emerging."

The digital map of Baltimore on the main screen suddenly pinged with four points, connected by glowing lines that formed an incomplete shape.

"It's a pentagon," K murmured. "With one point missing."
"Which means he's not finished," Mei added grimly. Their concentration was so intense that neither noticed the door to the war room sliding open until a voice spoke behind them.

"I don't recall any Baltimore investigations on our current docket."



They turned to find Dimitri Zechev leaning against the doorframe, his expression curious rather than accusatory. The Bulgarian tech specialist looked as though he'd just woken up, his hair disheveled and a coffee mug clutched in one hand.

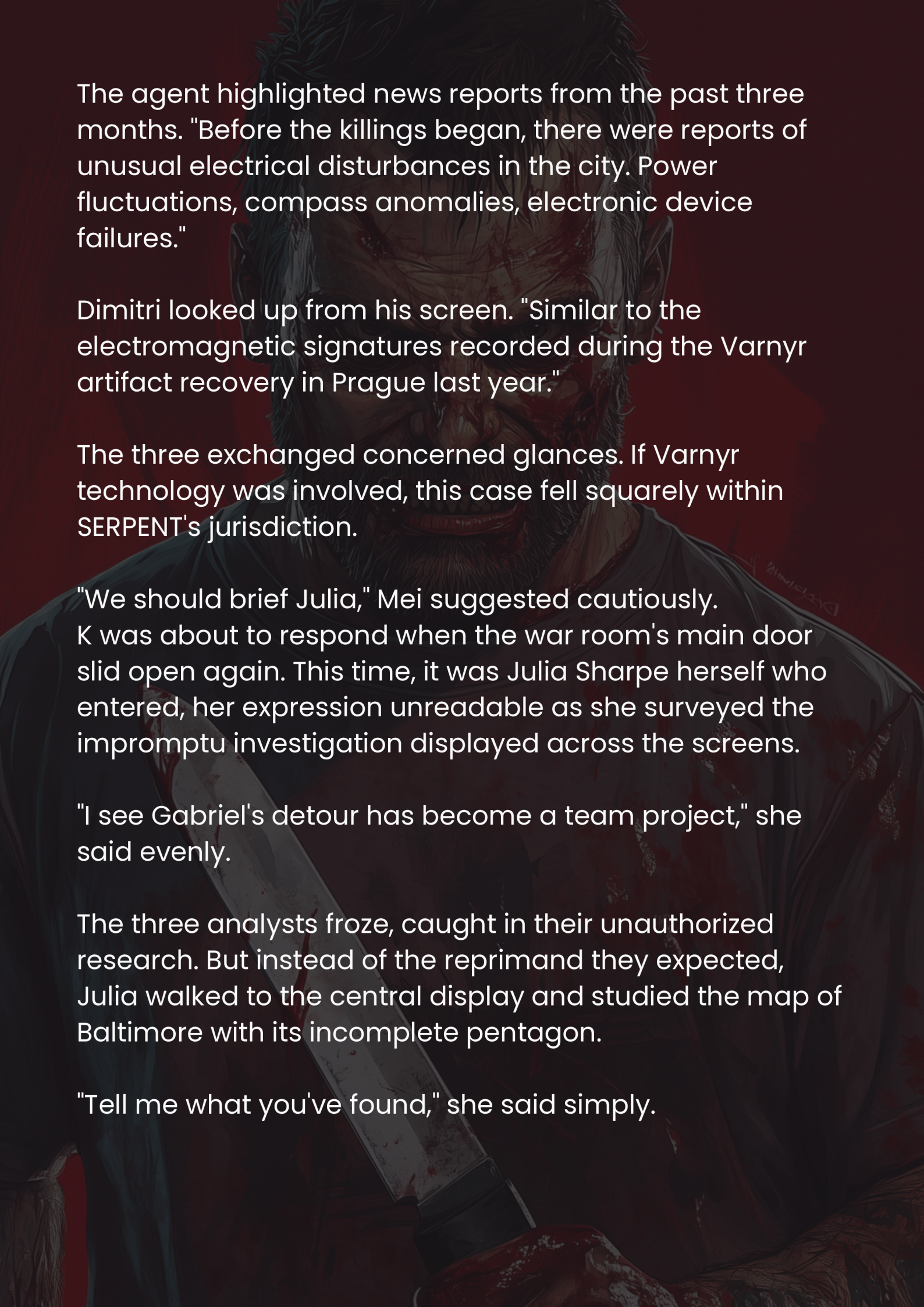
K and Mei exchanged glances before K spoke. "It's unofficial. Gabriel sent some concerning intel from his home visit."

Rather than reporting them, Dimitri's eyes lit with interest. He crossed to a vacant workstation and woke it with a touch. "Then you'll want to mask your digital footprint better. Your access trail has three vulnerable nodes. Give me five minutes."

As Dimitri worked his technological magic, K and Mei continued their analysis. Soon, all three were engrossed in the puzzle, with K coordinating the intelligence gathering, Mei developing a psychological profile of the killer, and Dimitri ensuring their investigation remained undetected while also searching for digital evidence the police might have missed.

"The timing between killings is decreasing," Mei observed after an hour of work. "The first two were separated by twelve days, the next by eight, and this latest one just four days after that."

"Escalation," K agreed. "And look at this."



The agent highlighted news reports from the past three months. "Before the killings began, there were reports of unusual electrical disturbances in the city. Power fluctuations, compass anomalies, electronic device failures."

Dimitri looked up from his screen. "Similar to the electromagnetic signatures recorded during the Varnyr artifact recovery in Prague last year."

The three exchanged concerned glances. If Varnyr technology was involved, this case fell squarely within SERPENT's jurisdiction.

"We should brief Julia," Mei suggested cautiously. K was about to respond when the war room's main door slid open again. This time, it was Julia Sharpe herself who entered, her expression unreadable as she surveyed the impromptu investigation displayed across the screens.

"I see Gabriel's detour has become a team project," she said evenly.

The three analysts froze, caught in their unauthorized research. But instead of the reprimand they expected, Julia walked to the central display and studied the map of Baltimore with its incomplete pentagon.

"Tell me what you've found," she said simply.

CHAPTER 3: Decision Point

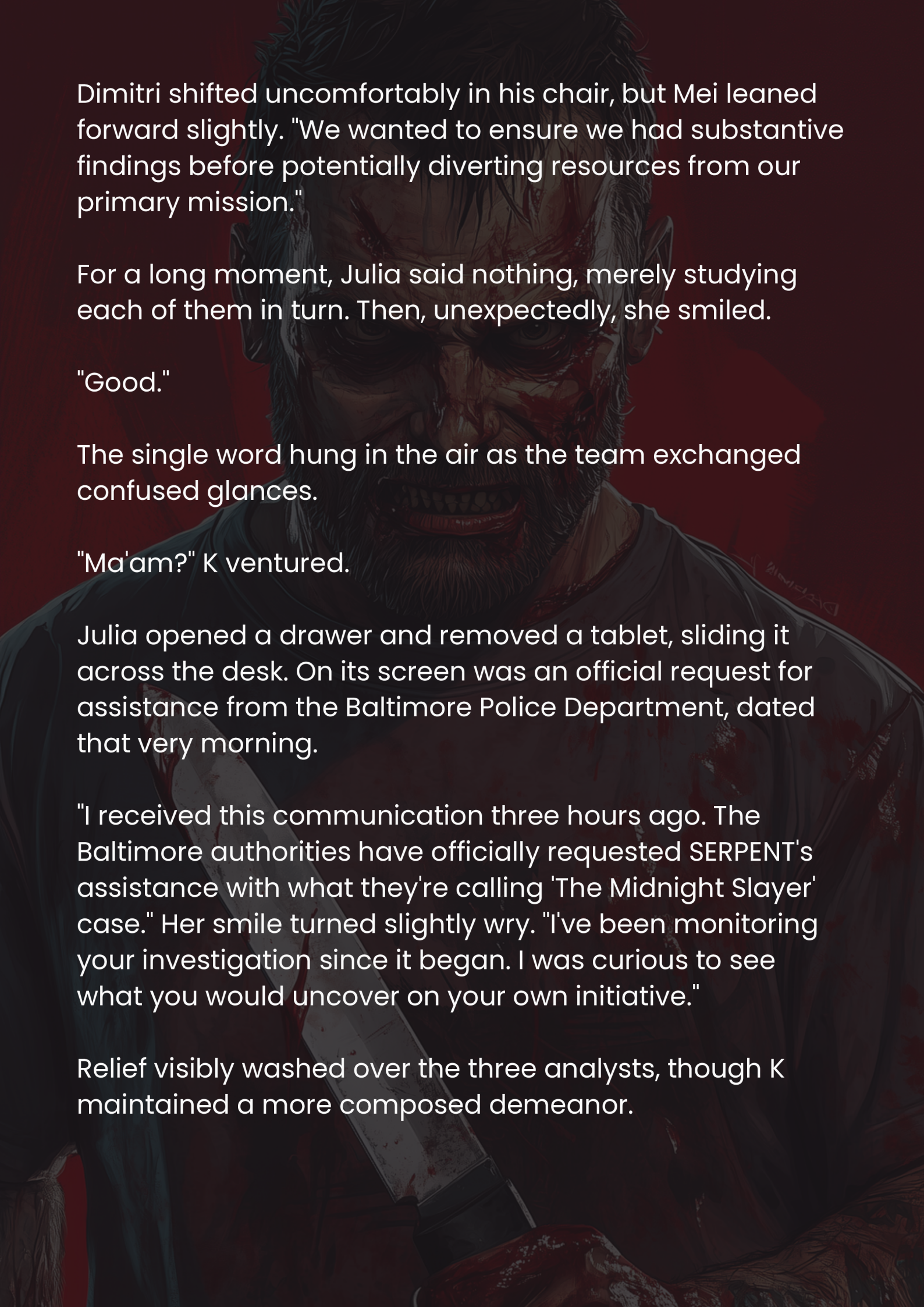
Julia Sharpe's private office aboard Shadow Wing was a study in elegant efficiency. Unlike the technology-dominated war room, here warm wood paneling and tasteful art created an atmosphere more reminiscent of an Oxford professor's study than a command center for clandestine operations. It was a space designed for clear thinking and difficult decisions.

Seated behind her desk, Julia studied the four team members who had been summoned to this impromptu meeting: Special Agent K, Mei Huang, Dimitri Zechev, and Isabella Moreno, who had been brought in for her historical expertise after the others had made their initial report.

"So," Julia began, her crisp British accent cutting through the tension, "we have an unauthorized investigation into a potential serial killer in Baltimore, initiated by Gabriel Adams based on personal connections, and continued by the three of you without official sanction." She looked pointedly at K, Mei, and Dimitri.

K met her gaze directly. "Yes, Overseer. The evidence suggested potential extraterrestrial involvement that warranted immediate attention."

Julia's expression remained neutral. "And rather than bringing this directly to me, you chose to conduct this investigation in secret."

The background image is a dark, horror-themed illustration. It depicts a man with a long, dark beard and hair, his face covered in blood. He is holding a large, blood-stained knife. The overall tone is grim and menacing, with a dark red and black color palette.

Dimitri shifted uncomfortably in his chair, but Mei leaned forward slightly. "We wanted to ensure we had substantive findings before potentially diverting resources from our primary mission."

For a long moment, Julia said nothing, merely studying each of them in turn. Then, unexpectedly, she smiled.

"Good."

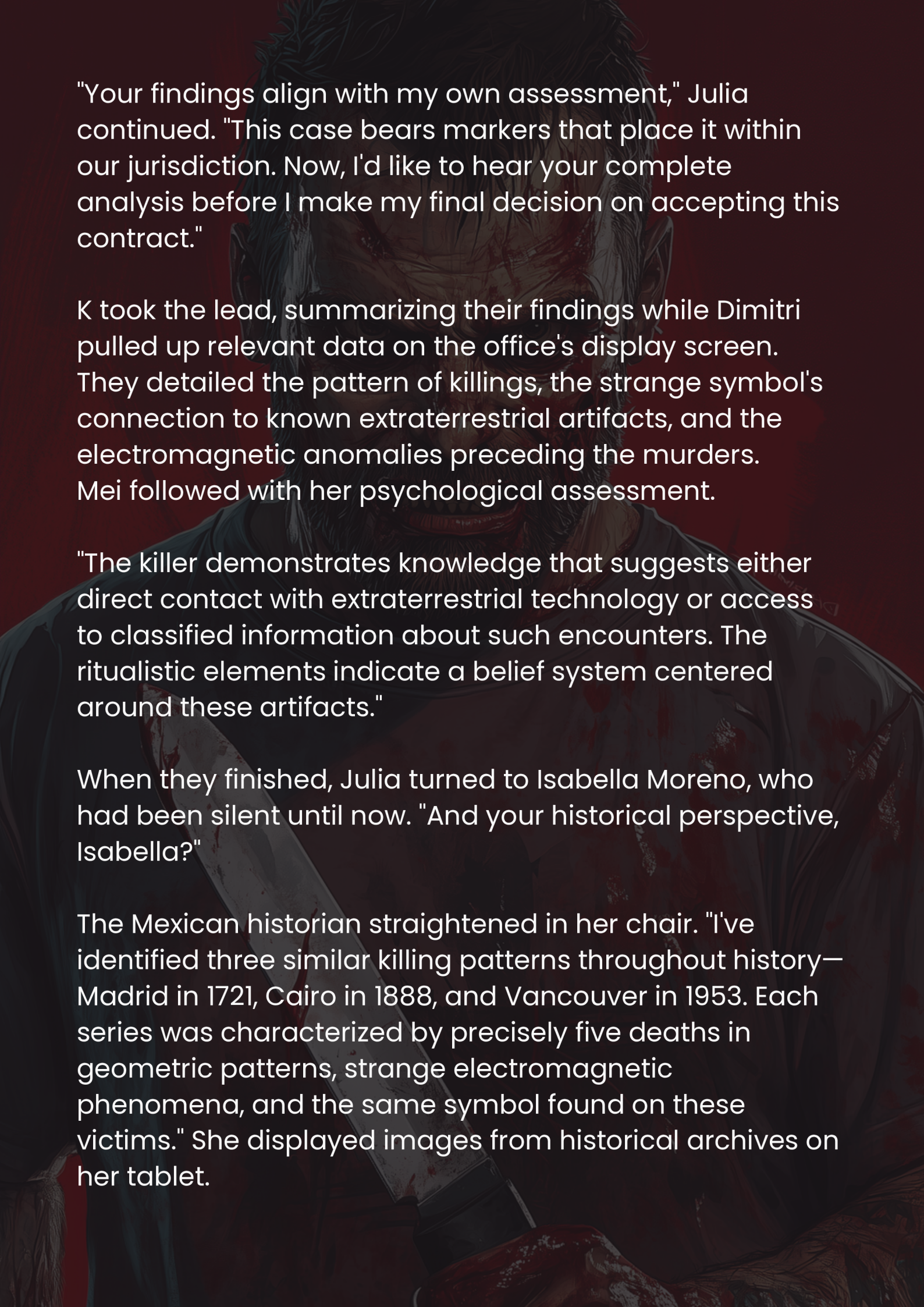
The single word hung in the air as the team exchanged confused glances.

"Ma'am?" K ventured.

Julia opened a drawer and removed a tablet, sliding it across the desk. On its screen was an official request for assistance from the Baltimore Police Department, dated that very morning.

"I received this communication three hours ago. The Baltimore authorities have officially requested SERPENT's assistance with what they're calling 'The Midnight Slayer' case." Her smile turned slightly wry. "I've been monitoring your investigation since it began. I was curious to see what you would uncover on your own initiative."

Relief visibly washed over the three analysts, though K maintained a more composed demeanor.



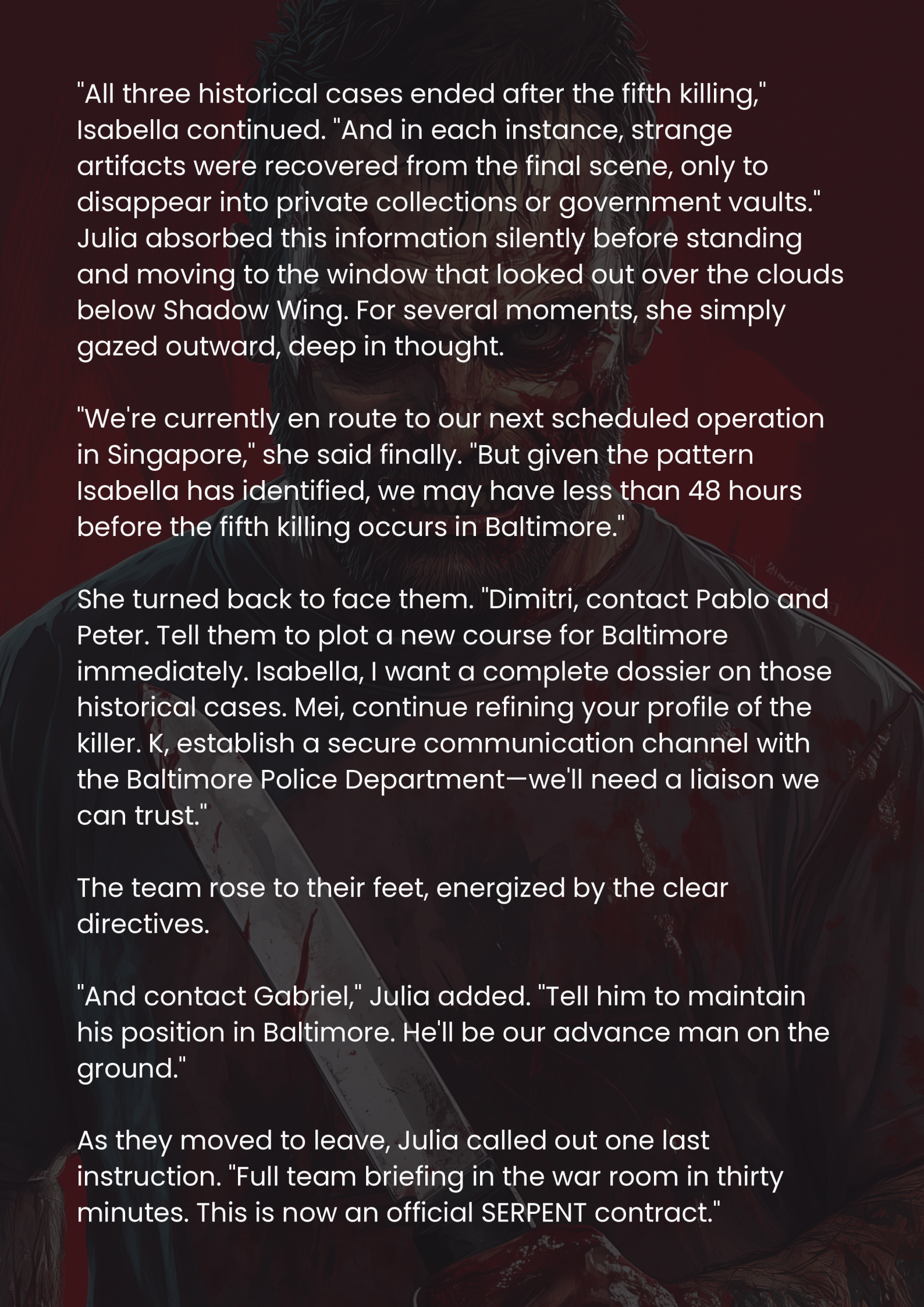
"Your findings align with my own assessment," Julia continued. "This case bears markers that place it within our jurisdiction. Now, I'd like to hear your complete analysis before I make my final decision on accepting this contract."

K took the lead, summarizing their findings while Dimitri pulled up relevant data on the office's display screen. They detailed the pattern of killings, the strange symbol's connection to known extraterrestrial artifacts, and the electromagnetic anomalies preceding the murders. Mei followed with her psychological assessment.

"The killer demonstrates knowledge that suggests either direct contact with extraterrestrial technology or access to classified information about such encounters. The ritualistic elements indicate a belief system centered around these artifacts."

When they finished, Julia turned to Isabella Moreno, who had been silent until now. "And your historical perspective, Isabella?"

The Mexican historian straightened in her chair. "I've identified three similar killing patterns throughout history—Madrid in 1721, Cairo in 1888, and Vancouver in 1953. Each series was characterized by precisely five deaths in geometric patterns, strange electromagnetic phenomena, and the same symbol found on these victims." She displayed images from historical archives on her tablet.



"All three historical cases ended after the fifth killing," Isabella continued. "And in each instance, strange artifacts were recovered from the final scene, only to disappear into private collections or government vaults." Julia absorbed this information silently before standing and moving to the window that looked out over the clouds below Shadow Wing. For several moments, she simply gazed outward, deep in thought.

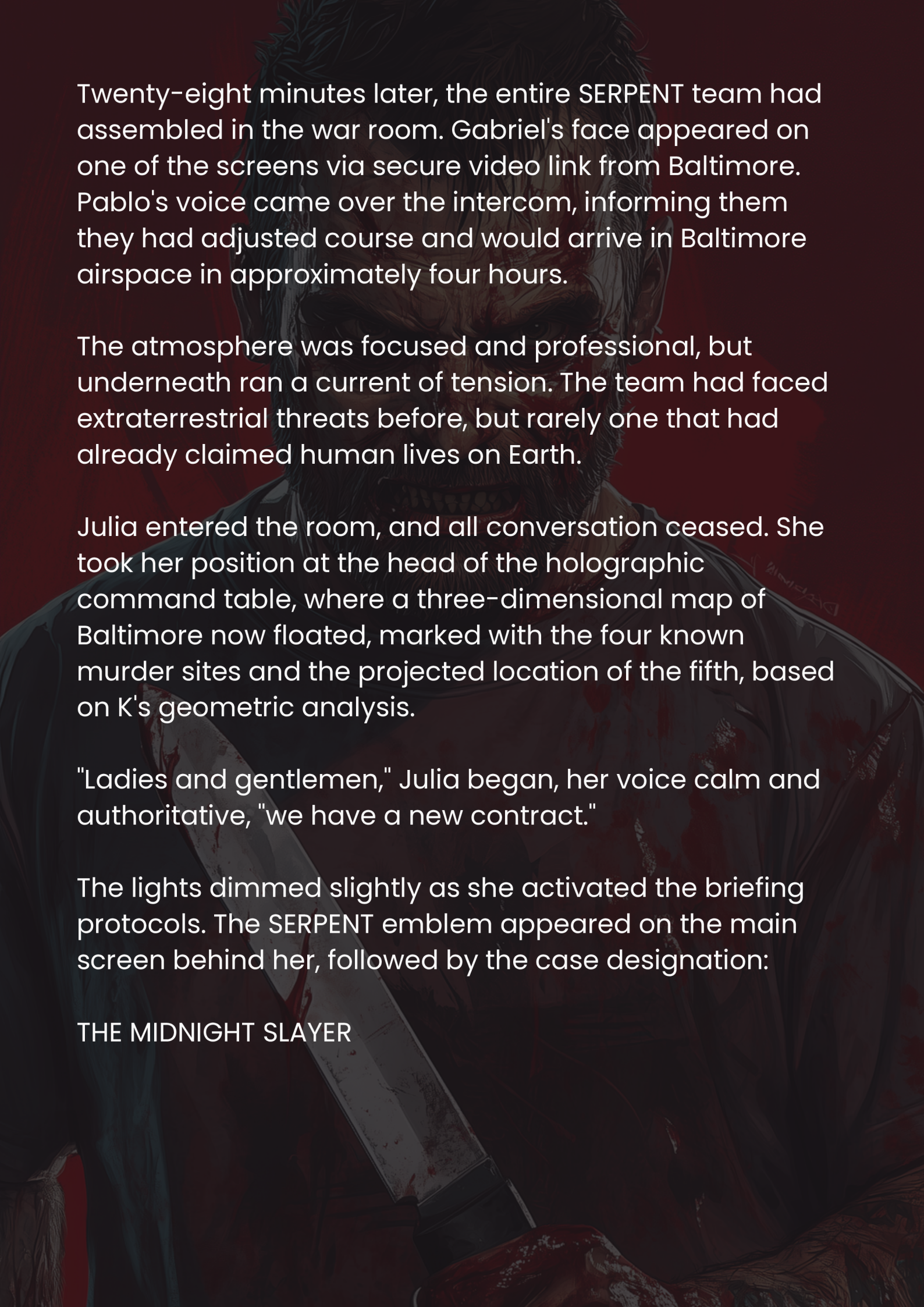
"We're currently en route to our next scheduled operation in Singapore," she said finally. "But given the pattern Isabella has identified, we may have less than 48 hours before the fifth killing occurs in Baltimore."

She turned back to face them. "Dimitri, contact Pablo and Peter. Tell them to plot a new course for Baltimore immediately. Isabella, I want a complete dossier on those historical cases. Mei, continue refining your profile of the killer. K, establish a secure communication channel with the Baltimore Police Department—we'll need a liaison we can trust."

The team rose to their feet, energized by the clear directives.

"And contact Gabriel," Julia added. "Tell him to maintain his position in Baltimore. He'll be our advance man on the ground."

As they moved to leave, Julia called out one last instruction. "Full team briefing in the war room in thirty minutes. This is now an official SERPENT contract."



Twenty-eight minutes later, the entire SERPENT team had assembled in the war room. Gabriel's face appeared on one of the screens via secure video link from Baltimore. Pablo's voice came over the intercom, informing them they had adjusted course and would arrive in Baltimore airspace in approximately four hours.

The atmosphere was focused and professional, but underneath ran a current of tension. The team had faced extraterrestrial threats before, but rarely one that had already claimed human lives on Earth.

Julia entered the room, and all conversation ceased. She took her position at the head of the holographic command table, where a three-dimensional map of Baltimore now floated, marked with the four known murder sites and the projected location of the fifth, based on K's geometric analysis.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Julia began, her voice calm and authoritative, "we have a new contract."

The lights dimmed slightly as she activated the briefing protocols. The SERPENT emblem appeared on the main screen behind her, followed by the case designation:

THE MIDNIGHT SLAYER

Briefing



Greetings, Special Agent.

There has been a recent uptick in violent killings in Baltimore. While death is nothing new to this city, they suspect a serial killer might be at work.

First inclination was gang violence. This was however dismissed by information from officers on the ground. Informants and corner dealers did not have any information about ongoing wars or retaliations. After receiving clues from the killer, all doubts of gang violence were dismissed. Unfortunately, some of the information leaked to the press. This has made citizens fearful, with the first signs of panic erupting in the streets.

Citizens of Baltimore have given the nickname "The Midnight Slayer" to the killer. Named after the newspaper headline that started the unrest. The Baltimore City Police Department reached out to SERPENT for additional support in this investigation. Their limited capabilities and already high murder rate have left them at a loss. They also want outside help to prevent any possibility of corruption.

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

Materials

body-locations-1-2.png / 3-4.png

riddle-midnight-slayer.zip

introduction.pdf

Baltimore-Murders.xlsx

missing-person-reports-midnight-slayer.zip

Answer Instruction

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

Use the what3words location of the killer's address to answer the CTF.

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.