

## 48 Hours 61

### Chapter 61: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You III

Many a time, one's plans could never catch to the constant changes life would throw at them. Zhang Heng had to wait for the gunshots to stop before returning to where the first gunshot was fired. Doing that lowered his risk of getting killed significantly.

Unfortunately, something unexpected happened. The first batch of Soviet conscripts had returned, a lot earlier than he initially expected!

It was pointless to complain and wallow in regret right now, and all he could do was to crouch as low as possible and run for his life. There was no time to wait. He bolted!

At the sign of the slightest movement, the soldiers quickly spotted him! It was in times like these that one had to appreciate the perks of the Soviet army. Considering they had all been given bright khaki uniforms, hence, standing out like golden scarecrows on the snow-covered land. Having large targets painted on their bodies by default, it was hard for enemies not to notice them. Hence, the fatality rate of the Soviets was alarmingly high.

With his back turned, Zhang Heng somehow knew that the troops had their guns loaded. Luckily, the rigorous marathon training finally paid off, where he managed to keep a good distance between him and the soldiers while he ran. There were also tall trees all around him. Though he could hear guns being fired at him, the shots missed him, mostly going astray and landing far away.

Still, Zhang Heng would not dare to let his guard down. He kept running until his stamina was almost depleted. Having to lean on a tree to catch some breath, he knew that by now, he should be safe. The soldiers wouldn't have any stamina left after the long fights they had been through before this. If they wanted to see another day before dying of fatigue, they would be smart not to pursue him for this period.

Immediately, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to check out the canvas backpack that he just acquired. There were personal hygiene items, a spare foot wrap, utensils, and a few packs of MRE. Foot wraps were unique to the Soviet army, regularly used to keep the soldier warm and reduce friction on the feet. As for the MRE, it seemed like their staple was black bread. Thankfully for him, dehydrated sausage and a packet of red tea came inserted as well.

He then came across two cans of beef, and a lighter, a delightful discovery as these items were a rarity in the USSR. Their industry infamously prowess lagged far behind other more developed nations. When Zhang Heng thought of the two dead bodies that he saw earlier, he remembered that they both wore different attire.

One of the dead Soviets lacked the distinct five red stars on his sleeve, which could mean this canvas backpack should have belonged to an officer. Unfortunately, bullets discriminated against no soul on the battlefield. Even more so, the high-ranking officers, usually becoming the primary target of enemies. There were at least three to four bullet holes riddling the officer's face. It seemed that someone wanted to make damn sure that he was truly dead. As Zhang Heng frisked him, he tried his best not to stare directly at the officer's bloody face.

Despite his close brush with death, he was rather pleased with his yield today. At least, he could now protect himself from the brutal cold of the Siberian tundra and keep his stomach filled.

His attention soon turned to the pistol in his hand. China's notoriously draconian gun control laws had enabled only a few from elite professions to set their hands on a real firearm. Most of the regular public only got their ideas of guns from the movies. Zhang Heng was no exception, having no idea what model of gun he was holding. All he knew was this gun was a revolver, and there were seven chambers in a revolving barrel. It had been shot two times, still containing five bullets.

It was at that time that Zhang Heng realized that he left too quickly earlier. He had taken the gun but had wholly forgotten the extra ammo. However, having five bullets was definitely better than none. The movies clearly showed the actors pulling triggers and coolly reloading their rounds, but never once their inner workings. Of course, the real deal here was way more complicated than a prop pea-shooter. After fumbling with it for a while, he still could not figure out how to remove the two spent shells from the chamber. He had to put it away for now.

After taking in a few sips of water, his stamina recovered, and he was refreshed. Having regained some strength, he quickly left the place, worried that the spirits of the dead soldiers would come back to haunt him.

He continued walking into the deeper parts of the forest, only stopping after the sky had turned dark. At the very least, he knew that he was no longer in danger.

Vision at night was a challenge; it was almost impossible to make anything out clearly. Since the forest was unfamiliar to the Soviets, it was almost certain now that they wouldn't continue their pursuit of him. Besides, they risked getting ambushed by Finnish guerillas who had overrun the surrounding borders. With his mind put at ease, Zhang Heng finally stopped moving forward and decided that it was time to fix his hunger.

He opened up his backpack, and out came the black bread. Having its origins in Germany, the recipe was then spread on to Eastern Europe and subsequently to Russia. For name's sake only, the bread itself was actually not black, it's color caused by the overbaking process unique to it.

Never underestimate the prowess of such basic food. During the height of the Second World War, German and Soviet troops primarily relied on it for survival. According to war records, this humble meal saved at least 4 million people from starvation in the USSR and had kept the war going for at least 10 million German troops. As for its taste, it had a unique touch to it.

Zhang Heng used his knife to cut a slice, trying it out. Immediately, a light saltiness with a tinge of sour hit his tongue. It came with a rough texture, much like burnt toast making it really hard for Zhang Heng to swallow. Thankfully, Zhang Heng had experienced extreme hunger before while he was venturing on the lone island. With war taken out of the equation, his current circumstance was actually a lot better than last time.

Only one thing troubled him, though. He was unable to build a campfire to warm himself up. Not that he did not know how to do it, for even without the lighter in his backpack, he had the capability of building a campfire with only the things around him. His concern mainly focussed on attracting any enemies,

knowing that the fire would burn far and bright into the dark of night. Unfamiliar with his surroundings, he knew nothing of where the Soviet and Finnish troops were placed and wanted to take no chances.

Zhang Heng had no idea where his enemies might come from. He also didn't know where the skirmishes constantly broke out between those troops, only hanging on the hope that he wouldn't end up in the crossfire. It was at that moment that he realized how cruel reality could be. Struggling to stay alive, all alone in the forest and in a time of war, was no easy feat.

Luckily, he still had his trump card, and that was his Shadow Moment. Turning into shadow-form for three minutes could save his life during a life-threatening moment. Unfortunately, he could only use it two times, which was why he was sparing in its usage.

Unable to bear the cold, he attempted to look for a spot that could shield him from the freezing winds. Covered by the military jacket, he tried to sleep. Throughout the entire night, he was rudely awakened by the chill at least three times. The winter of 1939 in Finland was brutal, ranked among the top 10 harshest winters the entire human history had seen. Without fire, saying that it would be a challenge to stay alive was an understatement.

If it were not for the Soviet goatskin military jacket, Zhang Heng knew that the extreme blizzard would eventually freeze him to death. After a long, frigid night, Zhang Heng finally saw the sun rising. With his frostbitten hands trembling, he picked a few twigs and used the lighter, fumbling around a few times before he got a flame. His hands were stiff and unresponsive. He had left half a kettle of water in front of him before he slept. Now, the water was completely frozen.

Zhang Heng had no choice but to place the kettle as close as possible, the fire to melt the ice. In the meantime, he took the sausage from his backpack and roasted it over the flames. Ten minutes later, everything that he set out to do had been done. He then stood up and used the ice around him to extinguish the flames, making sure to stub out all the cinders.

Putting a fire out in these places was surely more straightforward than starting it up. At the same time, he ate the sausage that was just ready. It didn't taste as bad as he initially expected, probably because he paired it with the black bread. Who knew what it was made of. One thing for sure, it was meat but wasn't pork, beef, or lamb. Still, it was edible.

As he ate, Zhang Heng wasted no time and planned his next move though, after long and hard deliberation, he was still unable to come up with anything to make his current circumstance better.

## **Chapter 62: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You IV**

Breakfast. That was it. Putting on the backpack, Zhang Heng randomly chose a direction and headed towards it. From where he lived, numerous war enthusiasts were extremely knowledgeable about World War II. They had an in-depth understanding of various war and deployment tactics and regularly debated the multiple strategies of famed generals.

As for Zhang Heng, he had zero knowledge about warfare. Unless the spirit of Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim or Kliment Voroshilov himself possessed him, there wasn't much he could do to improve his current predicament.

There are eventually no heroes in war, said an inconvenient truth. Whether it was a person who achieved great feats or a soldier with masterful shooting skills, a stray could take away their lives within a matter of seconds. To increase his chances of survival, Zhang Heng set a principle for himself, and that was to stay as far away as possible from any crossfire. Places like Vyborg, Summa Village, and Kael were a no-no, and he had to refrain from going there. As for the replica Ouvrage Schoenenbourg – Mannerheim, that would be the last place on earth that Zhang Heng would go.

His biggest problem was that he didn't know where the hell he was right now. Though he wanted to make sure to stay far away from the heat of battle, he had no idea where the safe zone was either. After traveling on foot for about half a day, Zhang Heng came across a platoon of Soviet soldiers. Thankfully, he spotted them first and quickly went into hiding. It seemed like the soldiers were in a rush, huffing their way while dragging a couple of cannons behind them. Amid the confusion, none of them realized Zhang Heng's presence, although he was right under their noses. It was so close a call, a deep chill ran up his spine.

The trees in the forest were the perfect spot to conceal himself from the enemy. Protection, on the one hand, the trees also blocked him from seeing what was in front of him. Being in a situation out of his control made him extremely uncomfortable. After all, no one in this world was always lucky. It would be impossible that Zhang Heng would spot his enemies first before they spotted him every single time.

In all honesty, he was on the disadvantageous side during this quest. There were few skills he possessed that could help him to survive in the wild. Playing the piano, modifying cars, and racing was basically useless in these circumstances.

As for his Level 2 archery skills, it turned out to be more practical than the gun that he was holding right now. Sadly though, he had still not found the right bark to carve out his bowstring. Besides, using cold, passive weapons against hot firearms was definitely a bad idea.

After experiencing the frosty winter in Finland, Zhang Heng started to doubt if he might even wake from his sleep the next time. It had only been three days since his arrival, with a grueling 137 days to go.

Zhang Heng felt despair sinking in, and it hit him hard.

He knew that he wouldn't survive much longer if he kept this up. He could choose to side with Finland's troops or the Soviet Union's troops, but he had no idea what they would do to him. In the end, Zhang Heng still could not make up his mind. Until the morning of the fourth day, Zhang Heng heard gunshots once again. And this time, the thunderous sound of cannons resounded in the forest as well. Sensing imminent danger, Zhang Heng decided that he would head in a different direction.

It seemed as if he had used up the last bits of his luck this time. After paying so much attention to the sound of gunfire, he completely forgot to notice what was in front of him. This time, he encountered a scout team! There were only 11 well-equipped soldiers in the group and should be returning to the base since they heard the gunfire. The encounter with Zhang Heng was totally a coincidence to them. Clearly, nobody expected this to happen.

Unfortunately, Zhang Heng did not have his Shadow Moment at hand, as he wanted to avoid triggering it while he traveled. He also did not expect to encounter enemies from such a close distance. He initially thought he would have a little time to search for the statue that was located in the pocket of his coat.

The scout team stood by with their guns loaded. If they wanted to, they could open fire at Zhang Heng anytime now.

In the end, Zhang Heng owed his life to the military coat. Obviously, they would never shoot somebody wearing their own colors. However, they soon realized that Zhang Heng's attire was way different as compared to what they were wearing. They also noticed that he was of Asian descent.

The soldier that stood in front was swinging his machine gun as he shouted at the same time. Unfortunately, Zhang Heng was not familiar with Russian, thus, unable to understand what they were talking about. For now, he had to give up the idea of getting Shadow Moment out of his pocket. Left with no other options, Zhang Heng was forced to put both hands up.

Seemingly, his continued silence had annoyed the soldier. The Soviet soldier's looked more and more ferocious by the second as he repeated the same words to Zhang Heng with his finger placed on the trigger, each time with greater intensity.

This was probably the most perilous moment Zhang Heng had ever encountered. In a situation like this, he did not know what he could do anymore. This was war. Killing and being killed were extremely common in an era like this. With every passing second, multitudes of civilians, enemies, and even allies died on the battlefield. The war had put everyone on edge most of the time, and no one would have qualms killing an unknown foreigner. Even Zhang Heng himself expected that the soldier would surely pull the trigger on him.

Suddenly, the soldier that was pointing his gun fell to the ground with a loud thud!

A bullet that came from nowhere penetrated his cranium. Blood splattered everywhere; his ferocious looks now plastered on his face forever.

Sniper!!!

Immediately, the scout team realized they were being ambushed by the Finnish guerillas. In a panic, they ignored Zhang Heng, pointed their machine guns at the direction the bullet came from, and shouted frantically to take cover. This one soldier put his life on the line to pick up a machine gun on the road. Unfortunately, the shell traveled faster than him. The moment his hands landed on the machine gun, he too was shot dead. He collapsed and joined his dead ally.

The second shot allowed the others to have a more unobstructed view of where the bullet came from. Without thinking twice, they started opening fire with full force at the sniper! Zhang Heng wasted no time and took the opportunity to run to a fallen tree that had been struck by lightning.

The sniper who had hidden in the dark managed to kill another two soldiers that failed to look for a safe spot to hide. After that, the gunshots abruptly stopped.

Was the sniper hit?

The Soviets were extraordinarily jumpy and nervous, pulling the trigger and firing another barrage of bullets into the dark!

Half a minute later, someone cautiously lifted his head to check his surroundings. There were no more gunshots. The remaining soldiers arched backward, bearing the weight of their machine guns while slowly approaching the sniper's location. At the same time, two soldiers walked towards Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng was already holding his Shadow Moment in his hand.

### **Chapter 63: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You V**

Zhang Heng readied himself to enter his Shadow Moment form. Then, as luck would have it, something unexpected happened again. The deafening bang of the sniper rifle firing could be heard loud and clear. The first soldier that walked towards sniper was hit, subsequently dropping to the ground, dead.

Seconds later, the second soldier was also greeted with the same fate. Immediately, the remaining five soldiers lay on the ground and started blindly shooting in all directions! The two soldiers who had walked towards Zhang Heng quickly turned around and joined their allies in support.

Unfortunately, their retaliation did not stop death from harvesting their lives. The sniper hiding in the dark had already switched his nest. In other words, the Soviets were shooting at a ghost! Subsequently, another three soldiers were hit. The remaining two soldiers could not handle the pressure of suspense any longer, throwing their weapons to the ground and ran into the forest for their lives while the sniper was reloading his gun.

One of them ran for a bit when a deafening gunshot rang through the air. Apparently, 150 meters was not nearly enough to save his life from a long-range rifle. The soldier slipped on his tracks and fell down, very dead indeed. Blood gushed from the back of his head, painting the white snow around him in an ominous pool of red.

In about four minutes, a total of 11 Soviet soldiers were killed mercilessly in this cold, alien land. The sniper that hid in the dark did not even waste a single bullet. For the shooter, it was all about the one shot-one skill thing.

Immediately, Zhang Fan poured out everything from his backpack and picked up a tree branch beside him. He attempted to raise the twig with the bag to signal the sniper that he was willing to surrender. Just as he was about to wave the white flag, the backpack was hit by the bullet! This was a clear sign that the sniper had no intention to let anyone leave the forest alive.

Zhang Heng presumed the coat he had put on caused the sniper to mistake him for a Soviet soldier. Unfortunately, Zhang Heng did not speak their language, making it impossible to explain himself. It became evident that the sniper didn't shoot the Soviets to save him. As the soldiers were focussed on Zhang Heng, it made them easy targets for the sniper!

This particular sniper was brazenly confident and scary at the same time. From the way he eliminated his enemies, he had made sure to first kill the soldier that posed the biggest threat. After that, he shot the one attempting to pick up the machine gun on the ground. His success in the killings had managed to instill great fear in the remaining soldiers, confusing them and lowering morale.

After that, all he needed to do was to change his shooting spot and kill the rest of the Soviets.

Though the remaining two soldiers had lost their will to fight, the sniper was no less determined that he was going to kill each and every enemy that appeared through his scope. Instead of choosing the

nearest target, he chose to kill the target furthest away from him. Then, it was all textbook, as the shooter just needed to tackle the poor sod that was running at the back.

As for Zhang Heng, the sniper decided that he posed no threat. Hence, he had decided to kill him last. While he was shooting down his enemies, he had presented with deadly accuracy, his accomplished shooting skills and how he stayed calm while being meticulous all at once.

It was at that moment that Zhang Heng realized his situation was no better than before. He was still being pushed to the edge of a cliff. The only thing that had changed was the enemy. It changed not for the better but from the Soviet soldiers to Finnish guerilla fighters. The 11 dead bodies on the ground had proven that Finland was way better at their craft than good ol' Soviet Union.

The longer he waited, the more dangerous the situation would become. It became apparent that the sniper was extremely familiar with this forest. That would mean he could walk up and shoot Zhang Heng right behind him before he realized it. Hence, Zhang Heng made a quick resolve to do something about it. He held the wooden statue in one hand and held the revolver in the other. In his mind's eye, he was thinking about the crow.

Seconds later, the crow in the dark slowly opened its eyes, and Zhang Heng stared right into them. He could feel his soul gradually being absorbed into an endless dark vortex, free-falling in a black void that was formless. The magical part about it was his body getting lighter, almost like a feather floating in the wind. When he landed, he opened his eyes, and he saw the white birch and snow above him. Though he had experienced all of this before, he would never get used to this strange, out of body experience. He became disorientated and unhinged as he entered Shadow Moment form.

Zhang Heng's body was now completely disappeared. All that was left was his shadow on the ground. In this form, he would not be able to use his senses, neither would he be able to talk or listen to sounds around him. His vision was limited to a patch of sky above him. He had, however, discovered a solution to overcome this problem. All he needed to do was attach his shadow to a tree, and he would be able to scan his surroundings.

His speed was greatly reduced when he entered shadow form, but he felt more energetic than ever. Fatigue was a thing of the past. The good thing here was that he did not need to worry about the barrier that blocked his way. With all things considered, his movement speed was not bad at all.

He took 50 seconds to travel to the location where the last gunshot came from and used another 20 seconds to look for the shooting point. The ground had a slight elevation to it and had two giant rocks to protect the sniper. Clear marks on the ground signified that someone lay there only a moment ago.

Clearly, the sniper had abandoned the hideout and shifted to another location. This time, a series of footprints marked the ground. Zhang Heng was now the hunter instead of the hunted. Half a minute went by, and Zhang Heng saw a being shuffling slowly on the snow-covered ground. It was near impossible to spot it if one did not pay attention.

The sniper was wearing a white ghillie suit with a mask on him. His entire body was fully covered except for his eyes, a perfect blend with the whited-out forest. One of his hands clutched the sniper, and another held a snowboard.

It was just as Zhang Heng had guessed! The sniper was planning to sneak him up and kill him from behind. He would never have guessed that his target was the one actually standing right behind him.

All these guerilla techniques had given the Soviets an endless nightmare, continually messing around with the worn-out Slavs. They relied heavily on their effective camouflage and the knowledge of the area to choose a perfect spot to take out their enemies. This time, their expertise was about to be challenged by Zhang Heng.

In shadow form, Zhang Heng could tail the sniper without making any noise. Long, overbearing shadows of the huge trees around him also added an extra layer of cover. Zhang Heng lifted up the revolver and aimed at the sniper's head.

There were only ten seconds left before the shadow form expired. Once the time was up, he would be able to pull the trigger and kill the sniper. As this was his first time killing a person, he naturally hesitated for a bit. Unfortunately, there was no other way around it if he wanted to live to see another day. The sniper's shooting prowess and innate knowledge of the terrain would make it impossible for Zhang Heng to get away even if he had a three-minute head start!

#### **Chapter 64: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You VI**

Zhang Heng and the sniper were patient, both adamant at waiting for the other to first make his move. Of course, the sniper which lay on the ground waiting for his victim to pop his head was definitely a cut above Zhang Heng. He had read before that most of the guerillas in Finland were once hunter-gatherers. They knew these grounds they stepped on with their very souls, spending their entire childhood in a forest like this to hunt down small animals. Even though their targets had since changed from animals to humans, it was no doubt that the same methods still applied. This made them very, very good at what they did.

Unfortunately, this was no fair game. When the crow appeared in the dark again, everything would come to an end. Zhang Heng had his finger placed steadily on the trigger as he prepared himself mentally to vanquish the target in front of him.

Suddenly, the sniper rolled to his side! Zhang Heng was taken aback in a jump-scare, knowing there was no noise from his surroundings. Finish! His worst fears had come to pass! Alas, his shadow form had been found out by the sniper.

It was then that he saw the bullet landing on the snow-caked ground. With his lightning-fast reflexes, the sniper managed to dodge the first round of attack!

Immediately, he pointed his weapon in a different direction and pulled the trigger. Zhang Heng then realized another weakness of the shadow form. The sunlight shining from a particular side would mean Zhang Heng's shadow was also fixed in a certain direction. Though he could attach his shadow on a tree to observe his surroundings, he could only look to the right, left, and front. There was, however, no way that he could look at his back. Even if he turned around, he would only see the tree bark.

The only thing he knew right now was that the deafening gunshot would have undoubtedly drawn the attention of Soviet soldiers nearby. However, he had no idea what their strength was and how far they were. The thing that troubled him the most was that his shadow form was about to expire. He had around ten seconds left before he would be ultimately revealed!



Right now, Zhang Heng wasn't bothered to kill the sniper anymore. The only thing on his mind was making sure that he wouldn't be caught between the impending exchange of fire. Without wasting any time, he swiftly left the trees and bolted away from the sniper as fast as possible! Then, he attached his shadow to another tree.

Zhang Heng wished that he could run further away from the sniper, but his time was running out. He knew for a fact that if the Soviets won the fight, he would still be spared the chance to get away safely. However, if the sniper won the fight, this would be the last day he breathed on this earth.

Rather than be killed like helpless prey, Zhang Heng resolved that he would fight for his life. The place that he chose to hide was only a meter away from the sniper. At such close proximity, it would be hard for the sharp-shooter to kill effectively. Besides, there was a high chance that Zhang Heng would not miss his target when shooting at point-blank even though he was still new to guns.

In about four seconds, he would reappear again. Nevertheless, the battle on the other side heated up pretty fast. A hailstorm of bullets landed on the tree that Zhang Heng was attached to, and he clearly saw shards of wood flying all over! Clearly, the soldiers that had just arrived were more ferocious than the scout team, which seemed docile at this point.

Having seen what the sniper was capable of doing, Zhang Heng believed that he wouldn't allow the soldiers shooting so wildly at him to live too long. Judging by the sound of continuous gunfire from the machine gun, the number of soldiers that came to kill the sniper was hell lot more than he expected. Once the soldiers on the frontline were killed by the sniper, they would simply send another batch of conscripts to attack him.

However, it seemed like the sniper had found a perfect nest to return fire. He waited for a short while before firing. The miraculous part about all of it was that he was about to kill an enemy each time he fired his gun.

In the meantime, Zhang Heng had to control his breathing, not making a single move to avoid being detected. After a round of violent shooting, the Soviet side seemed weakened—the constant staccato of guns firing reduced to intermittent bursts. In contrast, the sniper still had the upper hand. From the start to the end, he was like a killing machine, mauling every living being in front of him without any mercy.

Suddenly, the 'killing machine' fell silent. Zhang Heng knew that he was running out of bullets. This sniper had just been through two fierce battles and had probably been assigned a different target before he got here. Logically, he should be running out of ammunition by now.

This had complicated the whole situation. Of course, he had never hoped for such a terrifying sniper to roam the forests, looking for someone to kill. Initially, he thought that there were only two outcomes from this standoff. If the sniper was killed by the Soviets, he would run as fast as possible to get away from them. If the sniper managed to kill all those soldiers, then he would sneak behind the sniper and pull the trigger on him.

The only outcome that he did not think of was the depletion of ammunition. Since the sniper had run out of bullets, the soldiers would know this and attempt to approach the sniper.

The place that Zhang Heng was hiding at was really close to the sniper. When they shot at each other, they would definitely not notice his presence. However, once the fight was over, either the soldiers or the sniper would definitely see something escaping.

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The sniper leaned on a large rock. He must have realized how improbable it would be to get out of this alive. He took out the dagger strapped to his waist and prepared to fight for his life. Suddenly, a stone rolled by his feet! In an instant, he spotted a Soviet soldier creeping up from behind the tree prompting the sniper to pick up his weapon unconsciously!

To his surprise, the soldier signaled him to stay quiet. Half a minute ago, Zhang Heng assumed that this could be a golden opportunity for him to save himself. After spending four days all alone in the forest, he quickly realized it would be impossible for him to live here for hundreds of days. Be it the Finnish or the Soviets, Zhang Heng had no quarrel with them, really.

Based on experience, these people would never give him the chance to explain himself. They would usually point their guns at him before he could say anything. And the worst part was, Zhang Heng did not know how to speak their language. Now that the sniper had run out of ammunition, Zhang Heng felt that this was the perfect moment to make a move!

He first pointed at the red stars on his coat, then at himself, then waved his hands. He was trying to tell the sniper that he had nothing to do with the Soviets. Unfortunately, the gestures did not prompt a response from the sniper. Zhang Heng then took off the coat to show him his black turtleneck and jeans. In the end, the sniper's attention was caught by the revolver that Zhang Heng had with him.

Zhang Heng knew that there was no time for this kind of back and forth with the shooter. He could hear that the boots of the Soviets approaching them. Clearly, there was more than one of them. He couldn't possibly deal with them alone. In a critical moment such as this, a leap of faith was a necessity.

Once again, Zhang Heng clutched the wooden statue in his hand to prepare for any unforeseen circumstances. He then drew the revolver and tossed it to the sniper. This time, the shooter actually responded by picking the weapon! He pointed at Zhang Heng aggressively, threatening to let out a shot.

After a second, he lowered the pistol.

Zhang Heng let out a massive sigh of relief. It seemed that his leap of faith had finally borne fruit! He removed his phone from his pocket. For the past few days, he had tried his best to conserve battery, only using it sparingly to get his bearings. Otherwise, he would turn it off. Right now, it was the best time for him to use it to distract his enemies. He set a quick alarm and tossed it far away from him.

Like a grenade, three seconds later, the cellphone blared on the snowy ground, instantly drawing the soldiers' attention! The sniper then popped half of his head out, aiming for the Soviets!

The first shot was a blank. Zhang Heng had to prioritize his own safety. He had to consider the possibility of the sniper killing him when he gave him his gun. That was why he swapped the first bullet with a blank. Not about to take any more chances, he would instantly change into shadow form if the sniper did pull the trigger on him.

Shocked by the blank shot, he immediately fired the second shot, bursting a soldier's head open with a splatter of bright blood!

### **Chapter 65: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You VII**

Zhang Heng had done everything that could be done, knowing he won't be much help in the battle. So, he squatted behind a tree and waited for it to be all over. The skirmish ended faster than expected. Once the skilled sniper had a gun in his hand, he killed three Soviet soldiers within a swift 40 seconds.

Once the barrage of gunshots were over, Zhang Heng stealthily emerged from his hiding spot. The sniper still clutched the revolver in his hand tightly, albeit, seemingly a little more relaxed now as he did not aim the gun at Zhang Heng.

When Zhang Heng walked towards the sniper, he noticed that there was blood on his shirt. It was apparent now that in the heat of the shootout, he didn't manage to dodge all the bullets. Zhang Heng came to realize that indeed, it was not easy for him to meet someone without hostile intentions. He had to figure out a way to bring him back to his base, no matter what. All his effort would have gone to waste if he let him die here.

Zhang Heng picked up his cellphone and turned off the alarm, noticing a sea of empty shells strewn all over the ground. Remarkably, and thankfully so, his cellphone was perfectly fine. He then proceeded to collect the backpacks of the dead soldiers. As his current supplies were almost depleted, he had to stock up well to stay alive in this inhospitable land. He had his eyes fixed on the sniper, who nodded his head at him. He was staring at the bullet case that was strapped to the dead soldier's waist.

Immediately, Zhang Heng grabbed two magazines and passed it to him. Without a second thought, he reloaded his machine gun. Putting pressure on his wound with one hand, he mustered all his strength to stand up with the other. Two fierce battles had just taken place here, and the sound of continuous gunshots had probably attracted more enemies. They had to leave this place as soon as possible, or this time, they would surely die.

Zhang Heng picked a backpack and brought it with him. He, too didn't let up on the chance to pick up a machine gun. Seeing that the sniper was having a hard time walking, Zhang Heng instinctively walked over in an attempt to assist him. However, it seemed like he wanted no help, shaking his head and pushing away Zhang Heng's hand.

Zhang Heng was displeased by the response, knowing well enough it wasn't the best time to play Rambo. Zhang Heng needed him to point him in the right direction if they wanted to survive this forest. Also, without Zhang Heng's help, it would be tough for the severely wounded sniper to walk out of the woods alive. Both of them were in a tight spot now and had no choice but to rely on each other to get through this.

After a while, the sniper started to understand Zhang Heng's intention. This time, he allowed Zhang Heng to prop him up. With an arm supporting his body, they both took the slow walk towards the direction that the sniper pointed to.

On the way, Zhang Heng saw countless bodies of Soviet troops. An armored personnel carrier lay in pieces beside the road, still burning with fury. There were also bodies of a few Finnish guerillas with their winter camouflage thrown all over on the ground as well. One could only see how much hatred the

Soviets must have harbored toward the Finnish guerillas. Zhang Heng needed a change of coat, but sadly, most of the ones on the bodies were riddled with bullet holes. Some even had powder burns on them, leaving huge, smoldering holes.

Anybody passing them now would have found it extremely peculiar to see a duo made up of an Asian and a Finnish. To make matters worse, they looked completely out of place, like they didn't belong to his forest.

For the forthcoming days, they would constantly see dead bodies on the ground and incessant gunfire from afar. This time the gunfire did not last long. Again, it didn't look too safe anymore. The gunfire could have been a signal for the Soviets to help their allies. Then, in turn, the Finnish guerilla snipers would use the opportunity to clear all their enemies.

Their snowboards had allowed them to move effectively in the forest, and they were not about to stop unless absolutely necessary. As they cruised through the snow-caked forest, they saw large numbers of Soviet soldiers killed in many different ways. However realistic an award-winning film would shamefully fade in comparison to the unimaginable horrors that lay before them.

Zhang Heng had mentally prepared himself to witness all the dead. Despite that, he felt awfully unwell after witnessing so much death in one go. The horrifying scene was a violent assault on one's senses, where war represented the worst of humanity. It also represented what would become of the frail-minded human after civilization had been so carelessly tossed away. Soldiers had regressed to their carnal instincts, to kill and protect in its most basic of forms. Looking at the sniper beside him, Zhang Heng instantly knew that the purgatory around them had almost no effect on him. He was simply used to it.

As they traveled on, they came across two Soviet troops. They managed to evade them, only lucky that they were not spotted first. They even encountered a Soviet soldier that moved alone. His allies were most likely killed in action and he was lucky to flee the battlefield alive. His spirit seemed broken, his face emotionless, lifeless even from all he had gone through. Having no weapons and trudging barefooted, there was a high chance he would end up dead in this forest if his allies failed to find him.

Zhang Heng saw that he was getting further and further away from him, hence deciding to just let him be. Seconds later, he heard a gunshot! The sniper's hand was on the trigger of the machine gun and was no longer covering the wound! He had shot the soldier in cold blood.

When the sound of gunfire reverberating in the air, the Soviet soldier slowly stopped moving and collapsed beside a pine tree. Zhang Heng then looked the sniper in the eyes, searching for answers. He did the same as well, not batting an eyelid. His eyes were dead, with not an ounce of emotion left in them.

"....."

Zhang Heng was left speechless. If he was a soldier during the invasion of Japan, he would have shot any Japanese soldier if he ever encountered one. All these Finnish guerillas only had one goal in mind,, and that was to protect their people and country. For these reasons, Zhang Heng felt he had no right to criticize him.

The gunshot, however, would have again attracted more enemies to them, the last thing Zhang Heng wanted. It wasn't time to play the blame game here. Besides, the sniper wouldn't understand a word even if he scolded him. It would be more beneficial for them to figure out a way to get out of this sticky situation.

Zhang Heng landed his eyes on the snowboard behind the sniper's back. Voila!

Five minutes later, they tied all their goods on the snowboard, and Zhang Heng tied a rope at the end of it for the sniper to pull on it later. He then squatted down in front of him. Strangely, it seemed as if the sniper understood what he was trying to do. Immediately, he jumped on Zhang Heng's back and let him carry him.

When Zhang Heng stood up, he was surprised that the sniper was a lot lighter than he'd expected, probably weighing a tiny 100 pounds. They could finally move faster now. The only downside about this idea was that Zhang Heng's stamina, and strength depleted a lot more quickly than he hoped it would. He could only do this for around 20 minutes.

Thank goodness they were out of the danger zone.

### **Chapter 66: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You VIII**

Zhang Heng still couldn't figure out where he was, only knowing that he was heading towards a northeasterly direction. He was well-rested, having caught quite a few naps throughout the entire journey. The good news was he did not encounter any Soviets while they traveled. It seemed he had finally escaped the warzone.

After some time, the sniper tapped his shoulder, signifying him to stop. So, he stopped walking, looked for a clean stone, and carefully set the wounded man down. Though he could not see his face, Zhang Heng knew that he was in great pain just by looking at his saddened eyes. The patch of blood on his stomach was getting bigger by the minute. Although he had no problems moving around when Zhang Heng carried him earlier, the bumpy ride had aggravated his condition. And here he was, again, choosing to say nothing about it.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng had a bad feeling!

Immediately, he took a look at his surroundings and realized that they were still in the middle of nowhere. Initially, he thought the sniper would lead them back to his base. They should have at least come across one of his allies, but judging by his current condition, he could die bleeding out any second now if he did not get any medical help.

If he died here right now, it would be useless for Zhang Heng to locate the guerilla base. They would definitely shoot him on sight if they saw him alone. This wasn't the time to worry about what might happen next. Right now, he needed to make sure the sniper was kept alive.

Realizing the gravity of the situation the sniper was in, he wasted no time and looked for fallen branches hoping to start a campfire. It would help ensure the cold wouldn't get to the wounded man. Luckily, twigs were aplenty, and the fire was started, much to the relief of the freezing men. Zhang Heng melted some snow in a canteen, quenching their badly scorched throats.

They soon settled down, under the warmth of the flames. The sniper groaned in pain but looked slightly more comfortable. Phew! After a short moment of doubt, the sniper had finally decided that it was safe to take off his white face mask, which he had worn all the while.

What Zhang Heng saw left him startled in shock. The sniper was actually a girl with a golden lock of hair. Judging by her appearance, it seemed she had only just reached adulthood! It was mind-boggling for Zhang Heng to imagine such a young-looking girl was capable of so efficiently harvesting the lives of battle-hardened soldiers, reaping away every soul she wished dead!

Suddenly, he remembered that during the winter war, Finland had conscripted three million of their people to fight off the Soviet Union. The number of soldiers that were willing to fight and protect their country was more than that of Japan and Germany combined, ready to do whatever it took to chase out the invaders from their country.

Of the many definitions of bravery one could find in a book, this, in my opinion, was its highest form. Zhang Heng stared at the sniper as she slowly sipped the warm water in her hands. Without saying a word, he then took out two sausages from his bag and placed it over the fire. However, the sniper simply shook her head, indicating that she d. It was an awkward moment for them.

Right now, Zhang Heng was left in a dilemma. It was now virtually impossible for the sniper to continue the journey. This was no action movie, but rather cruel reality. In the movies, soldiers would usually extract the bullet from their wounds after they were shot. On a real battlefield, on the other hand, no one would attempt such a dangerous feat. Festering wounds and infections were a major concern. The biggest problem that one could encounter while attempting a bullet extraction from an open wound was the bleeding problem. Seeing that she had lost a huge amount of blood on the way here, it was definitely not the brightest idea to extract the bullet out of her right now.

Zhang Heng had to re-assess the current situation. Should he stay here to take care of her or leave her alone? Right now, was both of them were like different species, unable to communicate with each other. All they could do was use simple sign language to tell each other their intentions. Right now, he had no idea how far still the guerilla base camp was, not even knowing whether they were heading in the right direction.

Despite her grave wounds, the female sniper looked really calm. Zhang Heng guessed that she must have come up with a solution to overcome this problem or she was prepared to die here. Of course, he secretly hoped that she had an idea to get them out of this sticky situation. However, judging by the way things were turning out, it was more likely that she was ready to die here.

.....

The night was arriving, as the sun shone its last light. Zhang Heng chose not to leave her side in the end. After dinner, he went picking more tree branches to keep the campfire burning through the night. He then poured out half of his backpack out and placed it under the female sniper's head to act as a pillow.

After all that was done, Zhang Heng took out his machine gun, attempting to study it. He tried to reload it and aim for a couple of inanimate objects lying around.

To be honest, Zhang Heng was never a fan of killing. Unfortunately, he needed to learn how to protect himself in such an environment. Although he knew he would probably be unable to pull the trigger even fo he encountered the Soviets, this wasn't enough of an excuse to simply just give up.

At the same time, the female sniper eyed him intently. At times, Zhang Heng felt that this could not have been a person but a log. This was because only a log could forever keep its calm. She had been through a whole lot but had never once unveiled a single ounce of emotion.

Under the twinkling night sky, the flames of the campfire danced with the wind. After playing with his machine gun for a bit, he suddenly noticed something amiss about the sniper. Her skin had grown much paler, and all her lips were white, devoid of color. Her forehead was wet with beads of cold sweat, and her body was shaking nonstop. Zhang Heng instantly felt her feet and hands, discovering that they were like pieces of frozen meat. Her body was losing temperature, descending into hypothermia.

Bloodloss had caused most of the heat in her body to slip away, especially her red blood cells. Hemoglobin's main function was the vehicle transferring oxygen to the entire body. Once their count had dropped drastically, one's body would fail to function normally. If such a situation were to occur, no amount of warm clothes could keep her alive.

Surely, she could be saved if she was admitted to a hospital right now, getting a crucial blood transfusion. Unfortunately, they were now in the depths of a forest. There was nothing Zhang Heng could do to save her. Left with no other options, Zhang Heng removed his clothes and hugged her, hoping to share body heat and revitalize the dying girl.

The female sniper simply looked at him, not knowing what to think or how to react. She didn't push him away, though. Perhaps she knew her time was near and was the verge of dying. As for Zhang Heng, he did not harbor any sexual desires towards her. After all, the both of them had not showered for several days. The body odor and the stench of blood were enough to put off the strongest of libidinous innuendo. Besides, a piece of cloth wrapped around her chest.

Their skin rubbed on each other, sharing no distance and seemingly more intimate than certain rambunctious lovers. Despite all that, they did now know each other's names. Due to the language barrier, the two of them could still not communicate with each other using words. All they could do was to remain silent.

.....

Zhang Heng had managed to maintain her body temperature but could not give her back the lost blood. As time passed, the female sniper's condition worsened. Her shallow breathing became rapid, and her pulse was erratic. Zhang Heng knew deep down that she might not be able to survive the night.

Then, all of a sudden, he heard a crunch!

Bell had taught Zhang Heng to scatter some dried tree branches around him as an alarm when it was night time. It seemed like someone had stepped on the loose twigs. He instantly jumped up and wanted to grab his machine gun. To his surprise, the person was already squatting down beside the campfire, pointing a machine gun at him.

**Chapter 67: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You IX**

[Found a Finnish guerilla base. Game points: +5. For more information, check out the character panel...]

Zhang Heng had only heard the sound of the notification when he spotted the little wooden cottages in the forest. Before he could take a good look at it, someone had already pointed a gun at his back!

Zhang Heng was pretty sure that whoever it was, the trigger would be inevitably pulled this time. Just before he could, however, the sniper shouted at him! Startled, the shooter flinched, preventing the killing from happening. However, he did not take his sights off Zhang Heng.

The calvary finally had finally arrived!

It was the Finnish, allies of the sniper! Soon after that, a few more came over to help her. One of them stayed back to look after her while the rest proceeded to chop some wood to make a simple stretcher to carry her back to the base.

The man with the machine gun picked up the Soviet clothes on the floor and tossed them to Zhang Heng. However, the soldier had taken away the inner coat, only leaving him the outer jacket made out of goatskin. Zhang Heng said nothing and simply put it on.

He could see that the members of the guerilla resistance did not trust him at all. If it were not for the female sniper, they would have killed him without even thinking twice. Fortunately for Zhang Heng, they took care of their own first, realizing the sniper needed immediate medical attention. Knowing that there was no time to waste, they carried her back to their camp right away, even with Zhang Heng, the stranger, following behind.

After walking through thick snow and ice for an hour and a half, they finally arrived at base camp. Two fighters carried the stretcher and entered the small wooden house on the left. As for Zhang Heng, he was being locked inside another cottage. As Zhang Heng's eyes adjusted to the dark confinement space, he saw the entire place filled with lumber. He realized he must be in a wood storage house.

His captors locked the room right away after they made him go inside. They even frisked him and confiscated everything they deemed a threat. His inner coat, machine gun, backpack, cellphone, and wallet were all taken from him. Through the cracks of the wooden walls, Zhang Heng saw that few of the fighters were checking out his Huawei cellphone.

In this era, cellphones had not been invented yet. After curiously playing with it for a long time, none of them could figure out how to turn the curious device on. One of them even hit it on a tree. Compared to the somewhat unpopular cellphone, everyone wanted to own the wallet.

Even the most ordinary of wallets from the modern era would be considered a masterpiece in 1944. Besides, Zhang Heng's wallet cost a few hundred Yuan. And for the inner coat, the soldier that pointed the machine gun at Zhang Heng was already wearing it. His burly and muscular body turned the tiny garment into a skin-tight shirt.

The weirdest part was, no one laid their hands on the analog watch. Logically, watches like that should be worth quite a bit in this era. As if invisible, it seemed like none of them noticed it.

Zhang Heng soon learned that this was a rather large base camp. Originally a lumber mill, the guerillas had converted it into their base of operations. Hidden deep within the secluded forest, they became



almost undetectable by their enemies. Through the tiny gap, Zhang Heng saw that there were seven of them. It was late at night, and most of them were asleep in the other cottages.

The guerillas were infamously most active at night. They would launch surprise attacks at their Soviet counterparts while they were fast asleep. Zhang Heng once watched a documentary, where an ex-guerrilla shared his experiences. They claimed that the Soviets would lose their will to fight once the guerillas hit them in the dark. The few Soviet soldiers sitting around the campfire watched their allies being killed right before their eyes and did nothing about it.

Judging by the size of this camp, there were at least 40 to 50 souls living here. In order to prevent another gross misunderstanding, Zhang Heng decided that he should stop peeking at them. He then looked for a corner, lay on the ground, and closed his eyes.

Around 20 minutes later, two guerillas opened the door and entered the storage. This time, they weren't pointing their guns at Zhang Heng. After what seemed like an instruction to him in Finnish, they moved him to another unit. Of course, Zhang Heng would not be so dumb as to incriminate himself, so, he simply did what they asked him to do.

The wooden house that he entered this time was different than the storage unit. This cottage looked more like a real living space, equipped with a wooden bed, chairs, tables, and a cozy looking fireplace. A man with thick mustache sat behind the table.

He put away the map on the table as he saw Zhang Heng entering the room. He then used his hand as a signal for him to sit down.

Zhang Heng guessed that this man probably was the commander of the guerilla armies. There was also another person standing at the window and smoking. Zhang Heng could not clearly see who this person was since the back was turned. All he knew was that the person was a woman in her thirties or forties.

Once Zhang Heng sat down, the mustached man demanded him to talk.

"I must apologize. I don't know how to speak in your language."

For good measure, Zhang Heng repeated the sentence in Mandarin, English, and Japanese. Still, the man could not understand what he was trying to say. After some time, he grew impatient. Suddenly, the woman that was smoking broke her silence.

"Are you a spy from the Soviet Union?" asked the woman in English.

She was the first person that could communicate with him ever since he took this quest! He finally could let out a sigh of relief. The thing that worried him the most was the communication barrier he had suffered since apparating here. Without efficient communication, he would be unable to take control of his current situation. At least, he could now defend himself.

"Kliment Voroshilov might be stupid, but I don't think he is dumb enough to send us a Chinese spy that doesn't speak Finnish."

"I'm not too sure about that. After all, some people can't even differentiate between a loaf of bread and a bomb," said the woman as she stubbed out the cigarette.

This time, she turned around and looked at Zhang Feng. This woman must have been incredibly gorgeous when she was younger. Or, should I say, still rather dazzling for her age. Some simply had the power to defy the physics of the chronometer. After that, she looked at the man with the mustache. The man only smiled and left the house after.

“Ah Ji is not a bad person. This is a very critical period. He’s responsible for all those under him.”

“I can understand that,” said Zhang Heng.

“No. You can’t, and I can’t either. His country is being invaded by enemies right now. To protect his motherland, he is willing to do whatever it takes, even if it means going to hell itself. What you see is what you get, ‘guv. I’m a volunteer from England. I should inform you that I am different from these people. I don’t wish to see bloodshed. For me to help you, I will need you to tell me the truth,” said the woman while drawing another stick of Craven A.

As she bent down, Zhang Heng took a glimpse at her cleavage. He had to say; this woman was really something. If he was indeed a spy of the Soviet Union, he would have definitely spilled all the beans. Unfortunately, the truth was concealed within the most ridiculous of answers. In this war, Zhang Heng was indeed an outsider who had nothing to do with it.

#### **Chapter 68: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You X**

The woman sitting across him asked him a few other questions. Questions liked why he was here, was there someone else with him, was he a communist... Zhang Heng answered all her questions honestly. For the past few days, he did not just loiter in the forest. While traveling, he had been carefully planning how he could handle a situation like this if he ever got into one.

Hence, the woman could not fault him. Throughout the conversation, Zhang Heng managed to acquire some information about her as well. Her name was Maji, a surgeon. After the feminist movement, women’s status in society greatly improved. Despite all that, it was a rarity for a woman to become a surgeon in this era. After graduation, Maji had to leave her motherland for Switzerland, spending some time there before moving back to Finland to work in a hospital.

When the war broke out, she did not leave Finland, instead, choosing to stay behind as a volunteer. She was the only doctor for the entire base camp. And the man with the mustache, Ah Ji, was the second lieutenant in this camp. His job was to command the guerilla troops.

As she was finished with her questioning, Maji squinted and stared hard at Zhang Heng.

“I know what you want now. However, I can’t make the decision right now. Go back to where you come from. I will relay everything that you told me to Ah Ji.”

“How is she doing?” asked Zhang Heng before leaving the cottage.

“About her... real lucky she was.. brought back in the nick of time. The surgery was a huge success. I have given her a good few pints of blood. Two days ago, we received a batch of anti-inflammatories from Switzerland. She should be fine. I think she should regain consciousness by tomorrow morning,” Maji replied while staring blankly.

Zhang Heng could sense that her mind was elsewhere when she answered his question. She might have been thinking about personal business or about the guerillas. Whatever it was, he knew that this was not the right time to ask. Simply nodding his head, he headed back to the storeroom.

This time, he waited for a long time before someone knocked at his door. When dawn had broken, a guerilla fighter came into the storeroom and delivered the first meal of the day. His breakfast included a bowl of venison soup, half a loaf of bread, and blueberry jam.

The food they served here was way better than the Soviet rations he was forced to live on. This was the advantage of fighting as Finland's warriors. Though the guerillas had to continually hide deep in the mountains, they would constantly receive supplies from the villages nearby them. These villagers were unyielding, often informing them of the Soviet's positions in the forest.

For the past few days, Zhang Heng had been hiding here and there. It had been a long time since he had a proper meal. As he had done everything he was capable of, it was useless to worry about things he couldn't control. He might as well sit down and enjoy the great food in front of him.

It wasn't until the afternoon before Maji visited again.

"I'm really sorry we can't send you to the back of the battle line. This is a pivotal moment for the war right now. We don't have enough people to escort you to the back of the line."

"Just point me in the right direction and give me some supplies. I think I can travel there by myself."

Maji simply smiled.

It then dawned on Zhang Heng, as he finally knew the reason behind it.

"Your identity is suspicious and we don't even know where you come from. Though we can't fault anything that you've told us, it is basically impossible for us to verify your information as well. Besides, now you know where the guerilla base came is, there's no way that we will let you go just like that," said the doctor.

Zhang Heng was speechless.

"Ah Ji is the kind of person that dislikes trouble and it might not be fair to you. Since we have no way to rule out that you are not a Soviet spy, killing you would be the easiest solution for us. There are dead bodies everywhere around here. All we need to do is kill you and toss your body at an obscure spot on the battlefield. No one would ever know that we were the ones who killed you!"

Maji then paused her speech, seeming as if she was hoping to see fear ooze out from Zhang Heng's face. Unfortunately, the way he acted left her in disappointment. He knew that if they wanted to kill him, they would not have sent the doctor all the way here and spend all this time talking to him. It was totally pointless for a bunch of mercenaries to put on such an elaborate show.

"Good news is, the sniper that you rescued is returning the favor. From the first day I've known her until now, I have never seen her talk so much in one day! Since she can vouch for you, Ah Ji is willing to give you an opportunity to prove if you are a friend or an enemy of Finland."

"Well. What do you mean by that?"

“Congratulations! You’ve passed the test and are one of us now. That female sniper is lacking a partner. Both of you will go on a mission together once she has fully recovered!”

Zhang Heng realized that this was the best offer he could get for now. Though a lot different from what he expected, he knew that he had no right to reject the offer. Rejecting the proposal would mean certain death for him.

This could be either a good or bad change to Zhang Heng’s current situation. The good, was that he could take his mind off the supply problem since the logistics from the guerilla base camp would have that covered. He also had a powerful partner with him right now, where Zhang Heng had witnessed first hand the exceptional marksmanship of the sniper. He would never need to worry that she would miss her target.

Then there was the bad part. Zhang Heng was now forced into a war he never intended to fight. He had been switched from an observer to a soldier. Everything he would face from now on was going to be a risk to his life. He had never received any military training before and was very sure that the man with mustache knew all about it. Despite knowing the boy couldn’t fight, he had put forward such a proposal.

“I have not shot out of a firearm before. Can you at least allow me to get some training first?”

“Of course! That is a perfectly reasonable request. Before that kid recovers, you can do whatever you want as long as you don’t leave this place.”

Maji was shocked to see Zhang Heng acting so calmly, despite being thrown around and coerced into a war. She suddenly realized that she could not read this young man. His level of maturity did not match his current age at all. It was rare for a such a young man to maintain his composure in the situation he was forced into. Zhang Heng had managed to pique her interest.

“What kind of weapon do you wish to use? M28 machine gun? Suomi KP submachine gun? Hmm... that one might be hard for you to get your hands on. We also have the Degtyaryov machine gun that we confiscated from the Soviets in our armory...”

“If possible, I want to train on a machine gun and a handgun first.”

Zhang Heng would prioritize protecting himself over anything else. Though machine guns and submachine guns were really powerful, they were also very, very loud. That meant the enemy would instantly pinpoint the shooter’s position. It was best for him not to attract the attention of the enemies. Kill counts were pointless to him. He already knew how this war would end.

“Shooting aside, I think you should train your snowboarding skills as well. The snow is thick here. It would be more effective for you to slide around with a snowboard rather than walking your way through the ice. It might even come in handy one day, saving your life and all that,” said Maji while lighting up a fag.

For once, a practical suggestion. The snowboard was the signature item of the Finnish guerilla forces, allowing them to move around freely at a ridiculous speed. They were the infamous ghosts of the war, whizzing their invisible way through the darkness. They were legends, never to be surrounded by their enemies.

**Chapter 69: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XI**

Maji brought Zhang Heng to meet the logistics guy responsible for the firearms. He was an old hunter with a pronounced limp. At the same time, he doubled as the resident chef for the base camp as well. The breakfast that Zhang Heng had earlier? Yeah, that was him too.

Maji gave the old man a quick hug and spoke in Finnish, telling him about the newcomer. As they talked, Maji passed him half a pack of cigarettes. The older man then stared at Zhang Heng and nodded his head, albeit somewhat unwillingly. He flipped his remuneration into his pocket, turned around, and entered the house behind him.

“Oher will show you later how to use the machine gun. He’s one of the most accomplished hunters over here. His tens of years of experience are more than good enough to teach you everything you need to know about a machine gun. Don’t worry about the language barrier. I’ll be your translator. If you have any questions, feel free to voice it out,” said Maji.

Zhang Heng was surprised at how Maji was so helpful all of a sudden. She did not seem like the kind of person to stick her nose in the business of others.

“The girl requested me to help you. My hands are tied. She’s the reason why I can still continue to smoke. So, it’s hard for me to say no to her. I consider this favor as repaying her back.”

It was apparent that Maji was in no intention to hide the truth. She then paused and stared at Zhang Heng in a suspiciously.

“Sebor told me that you and the female sniper were...”

“.....”

Zhang Heng blushed, not knowing what to answer. During that perilous time, Zhang Heng was left with no other option if he was to keep her alive. Considering the nature of how it ‘happened’ though, it would be hard for anybody to believe him even if he was telling the truth.

Luckily, good old Oher saved the day, coming out from the house in the nick of time right after Maji asked the question. He then handed a machine gun to Zhang Heng.

“This machine gun that you are holding is an M28. It is an improved version of the M1891 Mosin-Nagant and is way more accurate when it fires. Weapons are scarce here. You better not lose it!”

Maji translated everything to Zhang Heng, and he was thankful he could finally find common ground with these people.

“Besides the gun, Oher has given you 70 rounds as well. You need to know that these bullets are not just for shooting practice. You will need them when you go on your first mission. I would advise you to use ‘em wisely.”

Maji paused for a while before continuing, “Now... you can claim 40 rounds here before you go on a mission. If you run out of ammo, you can get it from the dead Soviets that you killed. Alternatively, you can exchange something valuable for bullets. I’ll give you an example. Guns and medicines are precious at the base camp. Bring home some if you can. And if you manage to get your hands on a T26 tank and drive it back to the base camp, you will have my heartiest congratulations. That is because it will grant you full access to your arsenal!”

While Maji was talking, a few guerrillas brought over a Maxim Heavy Machine Gun, looking like they had just got back to the base camp not too long ago. And they had won the battle. Some of them were even bold enough to whistle at Maji when they saw her. Seeing the colossal cannon-like weapon rolling by, Zhang Heng jumped aside and let them move the lumbering gun into the armory. Then, Oher jotted something down on his notebook.

Only after did the excited guerrillas leave the armory did Oher finally started explaining how a machine gun was used. Zhang Heng made sure as well to pay proper attention to every single word he said. After all, Maji would not be there every single time to translate for him. Not like she would be in such an elegant mood every single day anyway.

The next day, Maji brought Zhang Heng to visit a guerrilla that was really good at snowboarding. The small favor she asked had cost her half a pack of cigarettes, buying Zhang Heng one snowboarding lesson for half a day. Zhang Heng had gone snowboarding a couple of times back home. With the added guidance, he managed to perform a lot better than yesterday.

After two days, Maji finally grew impatient and left Zhang Heng to do whatever he wanted to do. Luckily, Zhang Heng had learned everything that he needed to learn to keep himself alive while he was out on a mission.

So, he searched for a secluded place and started practicing everything he learned for the past two days. Snowboarding shouldn't be too tall of an order for Zhang Heng since he had done it before. Shooting, on the other hand, was a totally different story. When it came to the theory, he knew almost everything about weapons. All he needed to do right now was to familiarize himself with it.

He needed to make sure that his fingers would become accustomed to pulling the trigger at living enemies. Right now, he had only 70 bullets with him, and though he tried to spare as many as possible, he still spent 40 bullets in two days. If he was shooting in real life, going through 40 bullets would take him a mere two minutes.

After the shooting practice, Zhang Heng was flabbergasted, realizing that his shooting skills barely scraped the level of zero. And Zhang Heng did not know what to do anymore. He now had to conserve the bullets for his next mission. To survive in his upcoming mission, he expected that he would need to have 30 rounds with him. At most, he could only afford to spend another 10 bullets. Any more than that and he would turn into a corpse on the battlefield.

Quite frankly, ten bullets wouldn't make much of a difference.

There was nothing Zhang Heng could do about it, and since he could not leave base camp to look for more ammo, he could only exchange for them with Oher. Unfortunately, his valuables had been confiscated by the other guerillas. On top of that, Zhang Heng had no intention to get it back from them because he knew that it was pointless. Those weren't the types to return something they came into possession of. Finders keepers.

With that being said, his shooting practice had come to an end.

On the third day, Zhang Heng went back to where he first practiced shooting. To his pleasant surprise, he found three boxes of bullets under the white birch, a total of 45 rounds! Now, who could it be? Zhang Heng was the one who picked the location for the shooting practice, and no one else knew about it.

This was located some distance away from the base camp. Until now, he still had no idea why the gunner that he met in the forest was still acted hostile towards him, suspecting that the others might have felt uncomfortable as well. He realized he was now stuck here for some time. In the interest of avoiding prying eyes and to stay out of trouble, he thought it best to look for a more covert spot.

He was delighted, never expecting to find so many bullets here. Admittedly, that solved the huge problem of the lack of ammunition. He wondered who had the generosity to leave him such handsome bounty.

In truth, it was not that difficult to figure out who left it here. There was only one person in the base camp fond of Zhang Heng.

As it had been left there, finders keepers, he thought and used all of it for the shooting practice.

The next day, three boxes of rounds were being left under the trees again. This time, his cellphone, wallet, wooden sculpture, and Rabbit's Foot were laid beside as well. Except for his inner coat, all of his personal belongings had returned to him!

Instead of carrying on with his shooting practice, he knocked on the Maji's door.

"What's going on?" groaned Maji with a yawn. Her sleepy voice proof that she had just woken up.

"Good morning, Ms. Maji. I'm here to look for someone."

Zhang Heng knew that the female sniper stayed together with Maji in the same wooden cottage.

"Oy! Your bloke's here to look for you! Should I tell him that you are here?"

Chilly winds were starting to close in, causing a shivering Maji to tighten the neckline of her nightgown.

"....."

Half a minute later, Maji stood aside and allowed Zhang Heng to enter. The sniper was lying on the bed and had her back facing the entrance with a blanket wrapped like a burrito around her. Zhang Heng could only make out half her head. It seemed like she was still sleeping.

Maji then walked over to her bed and pulled the blanket away. The neatly-dressed blond-haired sniper was presented before Zhang Heng.

"Simone! You can't avoid your partner forever, right?"

## **Chapter 70: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XII**

Knowing that she had been busted, she couldn't pretend to sleep anymore. So, she reluctantly got up and sat on her bed. After getting a good couple of days' rest, she definitely looked a lot better than before. However, Zhang Heng realized that she did not dare look him in the eye.

"Can you please translate for us again?" Zhang Heng politely asked Maji.

"Just say what you want to say."

Maji took out another cigarette in anticipation as she smiled at Zhang Heng.

“Thank you for much for vouching for me. I came here once to visit you before, but Dr. Maji said that you needed more rest. So, I did not get to see you.”

Simone looked at him and blinked. Despite attempting to put on her best poker face, Zhang Heng could see a pang of deep-seated guilt hidden behind those dreamy blue eyes. Not knowing if it was the wrong thing to say, Zhang Heng omitted the part about getting back his personal belongings and the extra bullets under the tree.

“My home is in a land far away. Due to some reason, I’m stranded here. Once the war is over, I will return to the place I came from,” said Zhang Heng.

Simone seemed disappointed after hearing what Zhang Heng had to say.

Zhang Heng knew that she had grown fond of him after what happened to them in the woods. From what he saw, it seemed like Simone was a high ranking guerilla in this base camp. He could have easily taken advantage of her fondness toward him and have a better life right here. If he did that, however, he would definitely bring great sorrow to Simone when the day to leave finally arrived.

Sometimes, Zhang Heng had doubts if this was really just a game. His entire experience so far had proven too realistic for him to handle. Everything was so real it became hard to consider those around him like a bunch of programmed NPC. Zhang Heng also wondered what would happen to this virtual world once he left. What would happen to the ‘people’ around here?

Would the tale soldier on without him?

Despite it all, he knew that it was hard to lie to the only girl fond of him in the entire camp. Eventually, Zhang Heng decided that he would tell her the plain old truth. It might seem unwise in the current climate, but he was willing to risk it and stick on to his principles.

Simone looked lost after the conversation. She was just sat mum on the bed, unable to utter a single word.

.....

Noticing tension in the atmosphere, Maji closed the door behind her and talked to Zhang Heng.

“I thought you looked smart for a man. You really should never say such cruel words to a girl! However, I think I kinda like you right now. Simone might be a masterful marksman, but she is extremely innocent. She has never been in a relationship in her entire life. Before the war, she lived with her great-grandfather deep in the forest, and all she did growing up was hunting. Ah Ji and I initially thought that you harbored ill intentions towards her. It seems that I have misunderstood you.

Maji then paused, lighting up another cigarette.

I have come across many men in this life. Most of the ones I know have a dick in place of their brains. Although they would instantly fall for women who showed fondness towards them, the ending is usually the same. Waking up in the morning, feeling an empty space beside you, finding out that you have been left all alone in the bedroom. Such is the nature of men, right?”

“So, you guys have finally agreed to send me to the back of the battlefield?” asked Zhang Heng as he ignored her rambling.



“About that... I must apologize. It’s simply not possible. I didn’t exactly lie about everything the last time we talked. Compared to the Soviet military, we severely lack skilled fighters. Since you are all dandy and healthy, you turn up as a perfect add-on to the force!”

“....”

“Don’t worry,” Maji assured him. “I will help you solve your gun problem. Later on, I will see who has remained at the base camp. Weller and his team just came back yesterday, so I don’t think they are heading out today. They should have plenty of time to give you a few shooting lessons later. However, I feel they don’t like you too much. How about Mike? I wonder if he’s here right now.”

Suddenly, the door was pushed open. Simone was barged in and whispered something in Finnish to Maji, leaving her startled. She then turned around, relaying to Zhang Heng what Simone just told her.

“Simone told me that she wants to be the one that teaches you how to shoot better!” Maji whispered while smiling slyly.

This amazed him. Considering how he had just let his tongue slip, her heart would have been broken, much less willing to teach him anything.

“Is she even okay?”

“Are you doubting my medical skills? This is the fifth day. She’ll be fine as long as she does not overexert herself,” grumbled Maji with one of her eyebrows twitched.

Of course, Zhang Heng would not reject the offer. He knew that it was challenging to find someone good to teach him. Earlier, all Oher did was summarize the entire course of shooting better. When he was practicing, he encountered a new problem. He did not approach Oher to ask about it, though.

And this was not the 21st century. He couldn’t just simply get on Baidu or watch a bunch of online tutorials to help to shoot better.

It was undeniably that Simone shot as good as she looked. Zhang Heng personally witnessed her exterminating two Soviet scout teams on her own, never once needing a second bullet to kill her target. It was all a one shot one kill business. It was hard to believe that she acquired such great skills, even at such a young age. Zhang Heng grew more and more curious about the girl’s origins, of how she got so bloody good at what she did.

Simone was the kind of girl that took her own sweet time. Since she happened to be dressed and he had a rifle with him, they all proceeded to his secret shooting range.

“Both of you. Spare my life, please. I haven’t even had my breakfast yet,” lamented Maji.

...

Zhang Heng was shocked to see Oher giving Simone bullets every single time she asked for it. She must have contributed a great deal to the war effort. Simone was known to continually empty the already limited armory of ammo. Poor Oher had to hide someplace whenever she came asking for more.

Unfortunately, the base camp was more like small confinement. Oher had to cook for everyone every day, so it wasn't hard for Simone to find him. In the end, due to the shortage, he had to increase its price. Right now, ammunition had turned into the most valuable loot for all the guerilla members.

This week alone, Zhang Heng had lost count of how many bullets he had fired. This was the first time he experienced the joy of unlimited rounds.

Right now, he was lying low on the snow-covered ground as he controlled his breathing. He had his rifle loaded and aimed for the target 30 meters away from him.

Without hesitation, he pulled the trigger! Seconds later, there was a loud thunk as the metal cup on the wooden block was sent flying. Zhang Heng then heard a notification.

[Acquired new skill – shooting: LV 0]

This was the very first time he managed to learn an entirely new skill set in such a short period of time. All in all, it had only taken him the better half of a week. However, it seemed like Simone was displeased with his progress. She took out her rifle, cocked it, and pulled the trigger. The bullet landed on the tiny matchbox located 120 meters away from them! The best part, it took her only two seconds to hit her target.

“....”

Zhang Heng was left tongue-tied. There was still a gaping gap between them. Without a scope, it was hard for Zhang Heng to land a shot on his target. He had no idea how Simone managed to land an accurate shot that was so far away from them.

Her dexterity and speed were simply too impressive. When a sniper went against another sniper, speed was the factor that decided who lived or died. If Simone was his enemy, Zhang Heng knew that she would have killed him before he even picked up his gun.