

ARC OF FIRE

Chapter 1: Script Murder? No, It's Time Travel!

When Wang Zhong saw the silvery-haired girl in military uniform before him, his first reaction was to think it was a COSPLAY from some hardcore military-themed anime game that wasn't pandering to otakus.

Usually, he'd take a second look at such a sight, but the vibrations of the floor and walls interrupted his appreciation.

"What the hell is that?" he asked loudly, only for the dust falling from the ceiling to float into his mouth.

The beautiful girl in front of him shushed him and whispered, "Tank!"

Wang Zhong was stunned, "Tank?"

He scratched his head, trying to figure out what was going on. He first tried to recall the events leading up to now, but couldn't remember anything besides getting drunk—ah, it was almost Chinese New Year, and he'd had a drink with some friends.

Could it be that his friends had dragged him to a murder mystery role-play café while he was drunk?

And then he just happened to run into this beautiful girl and they started a game together? Wow, what luck, better add her on WeChat first.

Wang Zhong reached into his pocket for his phone, but instead of finding it, he pulled out a document.

The document cover felt very sturdy, like it was made of leather. Wang Zhong was impressed; the shop was pretty good, with realistic settings and props. Then he opened the document and was stunned by the photo inside.

What's going on? That's not me in the photo!

It was only then that Wang Zhong belatedly realized something all the people around him had in common: they were all fair-haired, blue-eyed foreigners.

Where are my friends?

Did they leave me behind to play a murder mystery game with strangers?

Could it be...it's not a murder mystery game, but... but that I've traveled through time?

Wang Zhong just briefly considered this possibility, but immediately dismissed it. One must believe in science; this was definitely a prank by his mischievous buddies, damn it, playing me for a fool.

The resentment that had just begun to build dissipated after another glance at the beautiful girl before him; damn, this was even better, he definitely had to connect with the foreign beauty on WeChat.

His prankster buddies were probably hiding somewhere, watching the joke unfold. Well, I'll add the beautiful girl on WeChat, and that'll wipe the smiles off their faces!

Just then, the rumbling sound grew closer, and the vibrations in the walls and floor became more pronounced.

Wang Zhong noticed two small windows by the wall he was leaning against. They were placed high up, with sunlight slanting through them.

They seemed like basement light wells; Wang Zhong had a classmate who moved to Beijing after graduation and always lived in such basements, often

sharing photos on his moments, occasionally playing with various prison cell jokes.

He tiptoed a little, drew closer to one of the windows, and peered out.

He saw a pair of military boots near the window.

For a murder mystery game, isn't this a bit too realistic?

He was puzzled when suddenly more pairs of boots appeared. It felt like there was a platoon passing by outside.

What in the world?

The next moment, Wang Zhong saw the source of the trembling and rumbling – tank tracks.

The murder mystery café not only had a platoon's worth of actors but also got hold of a tractor? That's not right, is it?

Wang Zhong's breath quickened; he vaguely felt that he truly might have traveled through time.

So, that relaxed, carefree, unconcerned mood vanished instantly.

He retreated and took another look around the basement room.

Aside from him and the beautiful girl, there were four males, all with Northern European faces.

Everyone was wearing the same style of military uniform, mainly khaki with a somewhat drab green collar section.

Three of the men were holding rifles, which Wang Zhong thought looked a lot like the Mosin–Nagant.

The rifles had bayonets fixed, and one of the bayonets was stained red.

Wang Zhong looked several times at that red stain, thinking that it couldn't have already been used to kill someone, could it?

The remaining man held a weapon that looked a lot like the Finnish Suomi submachine gun, his uniform slightly different from the others, with two V-shaped marks on the sleeve.

"Sergeant?" Wang Zhong tentatively asked.

The submachine gun man looked at Wang Zhong, "What, do you need a diaper?"

The men all laughed but quickly subdued their voices.

The girl turned her face away, embarrassed.

Wang Zhong: "Diaper?"

The sergeant glanced at Wang Zhong's crotch.

Wang Zhong looked down and discovered he too was wearing a khaki uniform, and the color of his crotch was noticeably darker, spreading out radiantly.

He felt it, and sure enough, it was wet!

"This isn't my pee!"

Truly, it wasn't! I'm freaking out here!

Wang Zhong, though he'd never been on a battlefield, did not think he was the type to wet himself at the first sign of combat—probably.

No, definitely!

The pee also felt mostly dry, it definitely wasn't fresh, so who's was it?

Wang Zhong suddenly remembered the document in his hand and hurriedly flipped it open.

The photo in the document was of a young and handsome guy with a frivolous smile, obviously also with a European face, next to which was all in a script that Wang Zhong had never seen before, somewhat resembling Cyrillic. Astonishingly, Wang Zhong understood their meaning.

It was then that Wang Zhong realized that from the beginning, everyone had been speaking a foreign language, but he understood it as if it were Chinese.

Wang Zhong found his name next to the photo: "Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky," and there was a prefix before the name, which translated into Chinese might mean something like sir or excellency?

By now, the rumble of the tank had moved away, and gunfire could still be heard in the distance.

At that moment, the sergeant with the submachine gun spoke up, "The gunfire is about one or two kilometers away from us, definitely the forces of Duke Vladimir still resisting. We should cross through enemy territory and join up with the duke."

After finishing, the sergeant turned to Wang Zhong, "Your Excellency, what do you think?"

One of the soldiers mocked, "Why ask him? Be careful he wets his pants again! From now on, his nickname will be 'Pissypants Rokossovsky'."

"Shh! Careful the count doesn't settle the score with you later and lock you up!" another soldier said, although his warning to his comrade was unequivocally delivered in a sarcastic tone.

The sergeant seriously said, "The count is our commander, of course, we need his agreement. Count, what do you think of what I just said?"

Wang Zhong thought to himself, what can I think? I've only commanded troops in a game; I'm a complete outsider. It seems like nodding is all I can do now.

Normally, this is when the cheat would activate.

Come out, Deep Blue.

The next moment, Wang Zhong's perspective shifted to an overhead view.

What the heck? Have I become some kind of satellite spirit? Is there really a cheat?

Unfortunately, most of the satellite view was dark, with only the basement they were in clearly visible.

He then realized this was the familiar overhead perspective from the real-time strategy games he knew so well. With years of experience playing real-time strategy games, he immediately recognized that the highlighted figure in the view must be himself.

This satellite view even had an interface; that thing in the top right corner of the view must be the unit tab—the symbol of the forces under his command.

Currently, inside the unit tab, there was only a solitary unit: Wang Zhong's consciousness immediately noticed a tag that read: "Lieutenant Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky."

Well, the only unit is myself? What happened to me being the commander?

Just then, Wang Zhong heard a girl's voice and hurriedly switched his view back to himself—it seemed the switch was as easy as a mere thought.

The girl said, "I think Sergeant Semyon is right, Alyosha, let's do that."

Alyosha, the nickname for the name "Aleksei" of the body he inhabited—Russians typically used nicknames only with close associates. With

acquaintances, they would use the patronymic, which in this case was the lengthy middle name “Konstantinovich.”

Wang Zhong said, “Wait a moment! The enemy just passed by; it’s not good to act rashly. Let’s wait here for a while.”

In reality, Wang Zhong wanted to buy time to understand the cheat. If they started moving, who knew what dangers lay ahead and they wouldn’t be able to properly examine the cheat.

The sergeant hesitated but eventually nodded, “Then we wait a bit. Be careful not to be discovered by the Prussians.”

The Prussians, that must be the name of the enemy.

There definitely is no country named Prussia on Earth; I must be somewhere other than Earth.

Wang Zhong once again entered the overhead perspective, and his first attempt was to focus his attention on the girl in the room with him; sure enough, her name popped up: “Ludmila Vasilyevna Malyukhova, Captain, Prayer Hand.”

Huh? What’s a Prayer Hand?

Wang Zhong had assumed the girl was a medic.

He focused on the term “Prayer Hand” for a second, but no further explanation appeared.

What the hell, this cheat is flawed.

Although he could clearly see Ludmila’s designation, she did not appear in the unit tab list.

Reluctantly, Wang Zhong shifted his attention to the other four people.

Sergeant Zakayev and then a lengthy string, Private First Class Semyon and then a lengthy string, Private Ivan and then a lengthy string, Private Yuri and then a lengthy string.

The sergeant was a submachine gunner, and the rest were riflemen.

Wang Zhong also wanted to check their ammo situation but, unfortunately, there was none.

Having determined he couldn't glean more from these people, Wang Zhong turned his attention to the house beside them.

He could see through the roof of the house they were in, and through the floors of the first and second floors to the basement. He thought whether he could switch the display to other floors, to get a better look at the ground floor situation.

But it was useless.

He then tried to view the situation of his own people who were engaged in distant fighting, but he was unable to do so.

Could it be this cheat is merely a change of perspective, and I'm actually seeing the same information that my eyes can see?

To verify this, Wang Zhong switched back to his own perspective, stood up, went to the window, and looked outside.

Maintaining this position, he switched to the overhead view, and then noticed that the landscape outside had appeared.

He saw a street, no, half a street because he could only see the buildings across from their basement.

However, this view was much clearer than with his own eyes. With his natural vision, he could only see the ground floor of the buildings, not even knowing

how many floors there were. But with this overhead view, he could see even the rooftops clearly.

This cheat still had some merits.

Just as Wang Zhong was appreciating the cheat, he heard footsteps.

Hearing footsteps from an overhead perspective was as if the sound was coming from heaven.

Wang Zhong realized it was because the footsteps were coming from above his head; his hearing hadn't switched to the overhead perspective.

No wonder the gunfire still sounded so distant.

He switched back to his natural perspective and saw that everyone in the room was looking at the ceiling.

Wang Zhong also looked up to see that the ceiling was made of wood, and someone was currently stepping on it with heavy boots, producing a loud thumping sound.

Then someone spoke in a foreign language he couldn't understand.

If he had to say, it had a bit of a German feel to it, but Wang Zhong couldn't be sure.

Ludmila murmured softly, "Prussians!"

At that moment, Wang Zhong saw a crack in the ceiling and had a bold idea.

Just now, with my own eyes, I could only see the opposite building's first floor, but after switching perspectives, I could see up to the second, third, and even the rooftops. Could it be...?

He decided to give it a try.