

ARC OF FIRE

Chapter 16: Square Shoe Nails and Round Shoe Nails

Wang Zhong once again sized up the girl who had brought the “orders,” noticing that she seemed to have some Eastern descent—which made sense. If the Ante Empire was an alternate dimension version of Tsarist Russia, it would likely have many Eastern people living within its borders.

However, the girl’s eyes weren’t black, which considerably reduced the sense of Wang Zhong finding a familiar face in a foreign land.

Upon closer inspection, the girl’s black hair also wasn’t purely black.

Moreover, as if corresponding with the Eastern features, the girl’s figure was drastically different from Ludmila’s—it was like comparing heaven and earth.

Of course, this was mainly because Ludmila was quite voluptuous—the nurse who had bandaged Wang Zhong before was also quite curvy. Perhaps the females among the Ante People tended to be fuller figured.

Wang Zhong: “Are you a Hymn Monk?”

The girl looked at Wang Zhong with confusion, but after seeing his rank, she immediately stood at attention and saluted: “Lieutenant Colonel! I am the last survivor of the Ronied Hymn Choir, Hymn Monk Sufang Batu Wendusu.”

The name Batuvindasu sounded very Mongolian; surely, this girl had Eastern heritage.

Wang Zhong: “You said you’re the last survivor?”

"Yes, the church where the headquarters was located came under heavy artillery fire. The Hymn Choir was in a building next to it—I heard that this was what happened. I survived because I had been sent out with Monk Yeca Neiko's Divine Arrow squad," she explained.

Wang Zhong: "I was at the scene when the shelling happened. His Grace was killed, and the entire staff of the headquarters and communications team were all wiped out; your colleagues from the Hymn Choir must have been inside."

A shadow fell across the girl's face; her long eyelashes drooped as she cast her gaze to the ground: "They... I hope they went to heaven without any pain."

As she spoke, the girl made a gesture in front of her chest.

Wang Zhong had not paid attention when he saw people making the gesture before, thinking it was a cross, but now he realized it was not a cross at all, but an inverted triangle.

It was a close call that he noticed; otherwise, making the sign of the cross later might have given him away.

At that moment, Bishop Stepan stepped between Wang Zhong and the girl, asserting in a loud voice: "There's no time to lose; we must depart at once! Shepetovka is far from here. If we walked, it would take days, and that's if we could even arrive!"

Wang Zhong glared furiously at this man—who had just been about to execute him—and recalled the sense of discord he had previously felt about him—about them.

During World War II, at the start of Operation Barbarossa, Germany deployed a large number of "fifth column" agents—spies—into the Soviet Union to sabotage and disrupt the actions of the Soviet military.

Could these people be doing the same?

Wang Zhong thought again about this man's wariness towards Yegorov's submachine gun.

That reaction... It almost felt like he was treating Yegorov as an enemy on alert.

At that moment, Wang Zhong had a stroke of inspiration, recalling a scene from the movie "The Brest Fortress" and decided to repeat what he saw: "I want to see the sole of your shoe! The soles of our country's shoes all have round anti-slip studs, but the Prussians' studs are square! If you're an undercover spy, the shoes you're wearing might just be from the Prosen!"

In the movie, a Soviet officer used this tactic to bluff a German spy; in reality, there was no difference between the two sides' shoe studs.

But thinking they had overlooked this detail, the German spy let his guard down and exposed a weakness, after which justice was swiftly served.

Wang Zhong simply thought to give it a try.

Bishop Stepan's face remained calm, and he said indifferently: "Alright, look if you must! Afterward, I will also want to see your shoe studs."

Then, he leaned on the table and lifted his foot for everyone to see the studs.

Square.

The bishop stiffened.

Yegorov aimed his submachine gun at the bishop and demanded, "Explain yourself, Your Excellency."

At that moment, Hymn Monk Sufang spoke up, "When you think about it, it's very strange. Bishop Stepan should be taller. But you, you do look a lot like him..." RaNôBEŹ

The other Monks also showed hesitation: "Indeed, the bishop should be taller."

Wang Zhong: "Have you been with him the entire time?"

"No, we were following the third Amur Group as ordered by you, the count, serving as guides for the field hospital and the headquarters, Your Excellency. The bishop joined us midway... But he does indeed look exactly like the bishop!"

Wang Zhong also drew his gun, "That's because the Prosen people carefully selected someone for infiltration and destruction. And I guess he's also in disguise. Someone, throw water on the bishop's face!"

Yegorov immediately untied his canteen and said, "This canteen of mine contains alcohol, which can remove waterproof makeup!"

After he finished speaking, he unscrewed the cap and took a swig, with the scent of alcohol wafting out the moment he opened it.

Then Yegorov poured all the water from the canteen over Bishop Stepan's head.

The first to dissolve were the eyebrows, with the black of the eyebrow pencil melting and running down "the bishop's" cheeks.

Suddenly, Bishop Stepan grabbed something from the table and hurled it at Shaposhnikov's gun!

By then, Wang Zhong's gun was already drawn, and compared to the last time he executed deserters, his hand was much steadier this time.

Two shots rang out, and "Bishop Stepan's" movements slowed; his arms spread outward as he pitched forward.

Yegorov clicked his tongue, "No wonder they picked a fight like a pair of fools just now, turns out he was a Prosen spy!"

Judge Shaposhnikov said, "We discovered a Prosen spy before the war started. We were torturing him when the war broke out. Prosen bombers dropped their bombs. If not for that, we would certainly have destroyed the Prosen spy network in the city of Ronied!"

Wang Zhong had not forgotten the scene of "the bishop" exchanging glances with these "Judges".

He spoke out loud, "Just now you also drew your gun on me, how can I trust that you are not another spy? Think about it, you don't even know that I have a close relationship with the Crown Prince. Suspicious, very suspicious."

Wang Zhong turned to ask the other Monks in the room, "Have these two Judges been with you the whole time?"

"No, they joined us together with the bishop," the Monk said, backing away to clear the line of fire, making sure not to get caught in the crossfire when Yegorov swept the area with his gun.

Only Sufang still stood at the doorway, cluelessly.

Suddenly, Shaposhnikov grabbed Sufang, using him as a human shield in front of himself.

While the act of taking a hostage captured everyone's attention, the other "Judge" drew a pistol that closely resembled a "box cannon" and aimed to shoot Wang Zhong.

Although Sufang's upper body was restrained, his legs could still move. At the critical moment, he launched a kick, hitting the wrist of the second man precisely and sending the bullet flying, brushing past Wang Zhong's hat.

"Judge Shaposhnikov" pressed the gun against Sufang's forehead, "Stay put!" Then he began to speak in Prosen.

Yegorov opened fire, taking down the fake Judge who was not holding a hostage with a short burst from his submachine gun.

The spy holding Sufang hostage started shouting something in a panicked tone.

Wang Zhong took a step forward and said, "Calm down, you won't escape. You'd better surrender!"

The spy burst into laughter, "Taking away the last Hymn Monk wouldn't be too bad, ah? We know exactly how poor your country's wireless technology is!"

It seemed like the enemy was about to "tear up the ticket"!

In a moment of quick thinking, Wang Zhong shouted, "Long live the Prosen Empire!"

The enemy, caught off guard, paused, "Huh?"

In that brief moment, the gallant Yegorov had already rushed forward, using the barrel of his submachine gun to force the gun away from Sufang's temple, then fired point-blank at the enemy's head.

The spy's head burst open, leaving a large gory hole, looking much like a watermelon that had been smashed open with a hammer for 40 cents.