

48 Hours 71

Chapter 71: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XIII

Though Zhang Heng spent most of his time brushing up his shooting, he made sure that he would not neglect snowboarding as well. Unfortunately, training on the snowboard didn't go as smoothly as the shooting practice. Simone's snowboarding skill was decent, but it didn't come close to her shooting skills. Besides, as she was still recovering from her injuries, it was a terrible idea for her to do such vigorous exercise. Hence, she sat it out most of the time and watched Zhang Heng practice instead.

Maji stayed with them for only two days. After that, she grew impatient and bored with the translator job. Before they even realized it, Maji had already made a quick escape, running to deal with other more pressing matters.

Luckily, Zhang Heng and Simone only needed to communicate with each other during training. Though they did not share a common language, hand signals were sufficient for Zhang Heng to understand most of her instructions. Most of the time, there was an awkward silence between them.

Simone would watch Zhang Heng from the side when he practiced shooting. It was almost always freezing, up here in the north. As a snowflake landed on her nose tip, she could not help but sneeze.

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Along with that, Zhang Heng found out that Simone had started to learn English from Maji. Ironically, the first sentence that she learned was, 'can you kiss me?'

So, the next morning, as Zhang Heng was brushing his teeth, he suddenly heard Simone's first English words.

Shocked and taken aback, he almost swallowed the toothpaste in his mouth when he heard Simone asking him to kiss her! Later on, he discovered that Simone actually intended to say 'good morning' to him. Undoubtedly, only Maji could fool around with her in such a silly way.

Zhang Heng himself wanted to learn Finnish as well. After all, it was never a bad idea to learn a new language. Besides, he could communicate with the people around him.

However, there were very few consonants in Finnish. Instead, it had long words, rich vowels, and very complicated grammar, little wonder why it was considered as one of the hardest languages to master. With all things considered, this seemed to be the wrong time to learn a new language, a very hard one at that. In order to survive the war, he first had to improve his shooting and snowboarding prowess.

Of course, it wasn't impossible for him to learn if he put his heart into it. He soon realized that there were some crucial words that had to be acquired instantly. Words like 'open fire, ceasefire, retreat, and, cover' were critical on the battlefield.

So here he was, trying to learn some words that were frequently used daily. Although such a short time would prove impossible for him to come up with full sentences, a single word would surely help a lot to express what he was trying to say. Maji naturally became the busiest person in the base camp, having to teach Simone English and Zhang Heng Finnish at the same time while being the doctor as well.

The good thing here was that Zhang Heng was very productive by nature. He transformed from a man who had never held a gun in his life to a lethal mercenary that could shoot accurately. At the same time, he snowboarded well now, swiftly sliding through the icy lands like a white phantom.

He had undoubtedly improved by leaps and bounds during this period. Though he still couldn't be compared to a full-blown Finnish guerilla, most members, including Maji, were secretly impressed by his rapid improvement.

Simone's good teaching contributed most to his improvement. As Zhang Heng had previously spent a great deal of time honing his archery skills, he had a good grasp of the basics of aiming. Regretfully, his goal of getting his shooting and snowboarding to Level 1 seemed impossible to achieve.

On his 13th day here, something that was bound to happen finally took place.

Simone had almost fully recovered from her wounds. If it was not for Zhang Heng, she would have left the base camp three days ago. In order to make sure he received the best training, she elected to stay behind for a few more days.

Today was the day that the guerilla troops received a message from the villagers nearby, informing them that a platoon of Soviet soldiers rushing somewhere had been spotted. Immediately, Ah Ji summoned all the available guerillas to discuss taking out the troops. Predictably, every single one of them concurred. Simone, too, had asked for approval to join this mission.

Zhang Heng did not attend the meeting but sensed that the guerilla members were filled with excitement. All of them were cleaning their weapons, checking their backpacks, and discussing strategies. Clearly, the atmosphere at the base camp had changed. Even lunch was a lot better than the usual.

Simone then told Zhang Heng in English that they were about to go on a mission. In turn, Zhang Heng replied to her in Finnish. Both of them looked for Oher, managing to claim four days' worth of ammunition and supplies. As a bonus, Zhang Heng was presented with a set of camouflaged attire as well. He no longer needed to wear that rather unsightly khaki-colored Soviet uniform.

It would be a lie to say that Zhang Heng was not nervous. After all, he was about to enter an active warzone.

He was different from all those guerillas, having nothing against the Soviets. Whether he wanted it or not, though, he would soon be dipping his hands into a lake filled with Soviet blood. Wars were merciless. Everyone involved in such brutal acts against each other would eventually be forced to do something they never intended to.

Zhang Heng stuffed the toiletries and a roll of bandage into his backpack. These items were separated from the dried meat and vegetables. Simone was worried about his mental state. While packing, she kept peeping at him, worried that the rookie would somehow break down and desert the for.

However, it seemed that Zhang Heng was strangely serene; his mood no different from going for a training session. Her worries slowly subsided.

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This place was no cozy study room.

This place was not a quiet library that was flooded with sunlight.

Zhang Heng wished he could comfortably sprawl on a sofa in some quiet place to prepare his mind for the rigors of war. Unless he shared the same fate with Desmond Doss, most people would only get one of two endings on a battlefield.

To kill or be killed.

This had nothing to do with moral codes. Survival was the priority here.

Zhang Heng slung his snowboard and the M28 at his back. Simone was waiting at the entrance when he opened the door. As she saw him, she hesitated before mustering enough courage to give him a one-second hug.

“Don’t worry. I will protect you,” said Simone.

A strange sensation overwhelmed Zhang Heng, this being the first time a girl had said such a thing to him. And the weirdest part was, he found it really hard to refuse her. In the end, he nodded his head and replied, ‘me too.’

Both of them did not leave for the mission when the other guerillas did. This was only because Simone was used to acting alone. In her younger days, she was trained to hunt by herself. Even after joining the guerillas, she never wanted to partner with others as well. To ensure Zhang Heng would survive till the end of this war, she broke her lone-shooter chastity for the first time and requested him as her partner.

Still, she was not used to being with someone else. While they were on the road, Simone walked briskly and was ahead of Zhang Heng. Soon, a one-meter distance drew between the two of them.

Night had fallen, and the temperature had fallen by tens of degrees.

Before long, Zhang Heng notified Simone that it was time for dinner. After living desolated on an island for a year and a half, Zhang Heng’s cooking had improved a lot. When it came to the simple ingredients that they had, he could transform them into something delicious. Hence, he volunteered to start the fire to cook for the two of them.

As she stared at the hypnotizing flames, Simone zoned out. Suddenly, she thought of something and her face turned red. Initially, she had just sat there quietly, but right now, she found it really hard to sit still. Fumbling, she showed Zhang Heng a hand signal, indicating that she should check out their surroundings first.

Clearly, it didn’t seem like a valid excuse as they had just left the base camp not too long ago. There was still some distance between them and the Soviets. Other than trees and deer around them, there were no other living beings along a ten-mile radius. Perhaps this strange silence was the reason Simone felt so uneasy.

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The night went by peacefully.

On the afternoon of the second day, Simone found the footprints of Soviet soldiers. It seemed like they just passed here yesterday. According to the prints, there should be around 100 to 200 people. There were also tracks all over the ground left behind by wheels of some kind. It was a high possibility that they dragged along heavy machine guns with them..

After snowboarding for the entire afternoon, they finally got close to their targets just before sundown. It seemed that the Soviets moved at a snail's pace. Considering that the snow on the ground was half a meter thick, it was extremely hard for soldiers and horses to move around as they pleased.

When the terrain got too tough, the soldiers would be forced to free the stuck carts, heaving and pushing with whatever little strength they had left. The combination of poor weather and bad news from the frontlines took a big hit on the soldiers' morale. They were supposed to carry out the attack in 16 days, but had failed miserably in doing so. If Zhang Heng remembered correctly, most of the Soviet troops would be eventually eliminated by the Finnish guerillas.

Every single frontline soldier sent to Finland by the Soviets had been overwhelmed by fear. Typically, soldiers that left their homeland to fight a war abroad would be left with very low morale . Despite the Soviets' best attempts to boost their spirits, the results turned out a lot worse than expected. After the purge, some experienced mid and high-ranking officers were either executed on the spot or sent to Siberian gulags.

Most of the young officers that were promoted had just graduated from military college. Their loyalty toward their homeland was unquestionable. Like brainwashed zombies, they had only one purpose, and that was to follow orders. These were perfect for battles that required cannon fodder, or ones that required little thinking but rather, a mass horde of killing machines. Right now, they were facing problems from all directions, with their young officers not knowing how to handle their dejected subordinates.

After checking the soldiers out with a pair of binoculars, Simone passed it to Zhang Heng. What she saw was a classic Soviet military formation. There were around 150 people in total, where the frontline was made up of three rows of foot soldiers equipped with 12 light machine guns, two heavy machine guns, and then, some grenade dischargers that looked like spades. Most were using the M1891 Mosin-Nagant. For a long time, this rifle was a signature weapon of the Soviets.

In terms of firepower, it was rather potent, especially the Maxim heavy machine gun. In theory, it could shoot up to 600 rounds per minute, powerful enough to shoot down flying airplanes.

Zhang Heng was worried that the reflection of the binoculars might give away their location, only taking short glances in between. Both him and the sniper decided it was best to retreat for now, only returning later that night. Simone had already started to bury herself with the snow around her. She then signaled him with her hand asking him to retreat first.

For the past week, they had been training together, and he thought that he knew how excellent her shooting skills were. He could not help but take a deep breath when he found out about her intentions. Seven hundred meters lay between them and the targets. If one used the sight bead to aim at a target three hundred meters away, the red dot in the scope would be larger than the target. Five hundred meters was considered the maximum distance a shooter could accurately discern it. It was practically

impossible to take out a person that was 700 meters away! Zhang Heng had no idea what kind of sniper could achieve such a great feat.

The one thing he knew was that he had to trust his partner with everything he had, come what may. As he mulled over those thoughts in amazement, Zhang Heng carried both of their snowboards one mile from where Simone hid.

He heard a gunshot the moment he lay down. Right after that, loud chaos broke out among the Soviets! Although he could not see what had happened from his distance, he could imagine how terrifying a situation they must be in.

The first thing they would do was to lie flat on the ground and attempt to locate the sniper. Unfortunately, no one would have expected that shot actually came from 700 meters away! After a short back and forth of crossfire, the Soviets had enough. They loaded their Maxim heavy machine guns and grenade launchers at the same time. As the powerful cannon started its assault, the sound of the M28 was utterly drowned out. They would never be able to locate where Simone was.

This kind of battle had a significant impact on a soldier's morale. Simone could only kill one person each time she fired, and the overpowered Soviets were enough to destroy the entire Milky Way. Despite having the big guns, despair eventually subjugated them. Their firepower was deemed useless when they faced an invisible sniper that was a good 700 meters away from them.

Like a rampant plague, fear had started to spread among the ranks of the Soviets.

The shooting finally came to a stop five minutes later. Some soldiers were still holding up their rifles, cautiously scanning their surroundings. The fear of dying at any moment began to fester in them. From the beginning till the end, they had not located the lone sniper. However, some stray bullets still landed at Simone's hideout. Zhang Heng was incredibly worried that she might have been shot.

Thankfully, he soon saw Simone approaching him and was filled with relief.

Nothing had changed on Simone, except for her rapid breathing. She then spat out some snow from her mouth and drew the number '12' in the air with her finger. In total, Simone used 30 bullets, and she managed to kill one with every three shots. The kill count might not be impressive, but if one considered the fact that she killed enemies that were 700 meters away from her, it was nothing less than a miraculous feat. Her main target were the ones on the heavy machine guns, killing almost 7 out of the 14 gunners. She even managed to kill an officer right before he threw a grenade at her!

While the Soviets were blinded by chaos, Zhang Heng and Simone managed to increase the distance between them. And this was how Zhang Heng's shootout ended. Throughout the entire stint, he did not fire a single bullet. He was just an observer, witnessing his partner killing their enemies. Simone, on the other hand, did not look too excited about her recent achievement.

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There was still half an hour left before the sky turned dark. Simone had no plans to waste any second, so they quickly switched to another spot. She then carried on with the unfinished business, ticking off the rest of the enemies one after another. There was nothing the Soviets could do about her. They had the numbers, but if they deployed all 100 soldiers to search the forest, it would only be easier for Simone to

pick them off one by one. Only a sniper could kill a sniper. A heavy machine gun was basically useless right now.

This was the problem that the Soviet commanders could never solve throughout the duration of the winter war. Unfortunately, they did not realize how valuable a sniper would be during that period. Thus, they paid the hefty price of hundreds of thousands of souls before they established their own sniper brigade.

Many years later, though, the Soviet Union would eventually become the country with the most snipers. In the battle with the Nazis, they had snipers deployed at every single crevasse, rooftop, and ruin in the city.

Chapter 73: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XV

The surprise attack threw the entire Soviet troops into a disorganized chaos. However, this was not the end of it. Their nightmare was officially set to begin that night. During the nighttime, visibility had significantly reduced, making it a lot harder for the troops to spot the guerilla members hiding in the forest. Without a visible target, they would not know where to fire.

After an entire day of traveling on foot, most of the soldiers were famished and fatigued. Usually, during this hour, they would start to prepare and cook their dinner. Nothing was usual about this time as there was a sharp-shooting reaper hiding in the dark – getting ready to harvest their souls, one bullet at a time. There were many dead bodies lying beside them, courtesy of the sniper, discouraging them from starting a fire to cook.

Moments like these displayed the weakness of the young and inexperienced commanding officer. He did not know if he should fortify the place in anticipation of backup, or simply take off and never look back. Sadly for them, another force of guerillas soon arrived, surrounding them. Then, with a merciless blow, launched the second wave of attacks on this unlucky Soviet brigade.

The guerillas with their submachine guns snowboarded their way in the dark forest right to the heart of the enemy base camp. The moment they saw the Soviets, they started to open fire! Though there were only 20 of them, their courage and blitz attack had caught the Soviets off-guard. Besides, Simone had taken care of two teams of their machine gunners. It was soon apparent that the reaction of the rest of the soldiers was a lot slower. In their mess and confusion, the guerillas had already finished shooting. By that time, the guerillas had left with their snowboards and turned to other locations to strike other brigades.

Still, two guerillas got hit, where one of them was shot in the head, falling off from his snowboard. Another one was shot in the shoulder, but he managed to escape in the end. As for Simone, she had her rifle locked and loaded. Usually, she would start opening fire at single targets when the other guerillas launched their attacks. Once the surprise attack was over, she had killed another eight enemies. The combination of an invisible super-shooter and the Baltic ferociousness of the Finnish had managed to completely devastate the morale among the Soviet ranks.

Within three minutes, another 20 dead bodies piled up on the ground, and 30 soldiers were severely wounded. Amongst these, seven were critical, choking, and bleeding out. It seemed they would not pull

through the night. As for the rest, there was no way they would make their way to any battlefield without receiving medical attention. However, they would best forget their intentions, considering the agonized wails and screams of the decapitated conscripts.

The Soviets were already in extreme distress when the guerilla attacked earlier. In order to save ammo and avoid friendly fire, they retreated, for now, halting the attack and hiding out in the forest to wait for the perfect moment to strike again.

They were like predators stalking their prey from afar. Though the Soviets greatly outnumbered and had a lot more firepower than the guerillas, it did little to affect them. To them, the Soviets were simply dead meat on the chopping board. Since Finland was located far up north near the Arctic, they had very long nights and only a few hours of daylight. They were accustomed to the dark, having honed their skills in the nights. This proved a great advantage to them when overpowering the uninitiated Slavs.

Zhang Heng and Simone too retreated to a safe place. They even found a little time to have dinner. Of course, in order to stay hidden, there was no fire. Perhaps the food was undercooked, hence its rather unsavory nature. After a short while, they saw someone gliding towards them on a snowboard. The man passed, creating a cloud trail of snow and frost behind him.

Zhang Heng recognized the man. He was the same one who had brought him back to base camp with a submachine gun pointed at him. After spending some time at the base camp, Zhang Heng got to know his name as well. He was called Weller and was the one most hostile towards Zhang Heng.

He must have followed the signs Simone had left on the path when she moved here. Zhang Heng could roughly guess that he was here to discuss the time for the next round of attacks. The splash of snow and ice was an attempt to show off his skills to Zhang Heng, raising his eyebrows in intimidation, as if courting a challenge. He even cocked his machine gun, swung it around, and tauntingly glared at Zhang Heng.

Just as Zhang Heng was about to react to that, Simone quickly stood up with her M28. She seemed akin to a lioness protecting her cub, which was Zhang Heng. Naturally, Zhang Heng was not pleased by her response. He muttered a few words and left with his snowboard.

“.....”

Zhang Heng felt that there was something terribly wrong about all this. The longer he stayed with Simone, the stronger this bad feeling got. Actually, it was not that hard to deal with a simple-minded brute like Weller. He was the same kind as Cheng Cheng – a man-child.

Though Weller had a strong dislike towards Zhang Heng, he had not done anything overboard so far. At most, he would laugh at him with his friends when Zhang Heng passed him by. Sometimes, he would even wear Zhang Heng's undercoat and deliberately walk in front of him. He had repeatedly done this, hoping to encourage a response. From time to time, he would glare at Zhang Heng with hatred, even spitting on the ground as a sign of disgust. With Zhang Heng looking away, he would often chuckle in satisfaction.

After that, Zhang Heng got to know that Weller was married with two kids. His affection for Simone was more of admiration, an infatuation. He was green with jealousy when his crush hung out with Zhang

Heng all the time. The best way to deal with these types was to do nothing at all about it. As time passed, he would have to accept that this was something that he could not change.

The way Simone glared at him just now would definitely trigger his rebellious personality.

Of course, Zhang Heng did not blame her for that. After all, nobody forced her, and she did it all out of good intentions. As long as she could remember, she had been staying with her great grandfather. Undoubtedly, more straightforward than Weller. As for a woman like Maji, Zhang Heng could never know what went through her mind. She had a natural flair for stage plays. Sometimes, she even acted so well that Zhang Heng could not help but believe whatever she said. She was a true femme fatale, and that was why Zhang Heng still did not trust her wholeheartedly.

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40 minutes later, the guerillas launched their third wave of attacks.

This time, they employed different tactics, not striking at them directly. Instead, they had two snipers picking them off from afar. This allowed them to draw fire away from the rest of the guerillas. While the Soviets were busy shooting at the sniper, the other guerilla members would appear out of nowhere and strike the distracted soldiers.

Simone had her priority on the heavy machine gunners. At the same time, Zhang Heng had also let off a couple of shots as well. These targets were a lot further away than the ones in his training sessions. He did not know if he had made any kills before suddenly...

A notification!

[Successfully killed an enemy. Game Points: +5. For more information, please check your character panel]

Was that a lucky shot, or did he really kill the one he aimed for?

Chapter 74: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XVI

After killing over 20 people and a commander, the Soviets had completely lost the will to fight. Some of them surrendered their weapons and begged for their lives, and some tried to run away. The guerillas left a couple of fighters around to keep an eye on the deserters, while some others went into the forest to look for the runaways.

Zhang Heng was not interested in these things that spilled blood. However, he knew that his first fight was the only time to prove his loyalty to the guerilla force. The way he acted upon the Soviets today would determine how the Finnish would treat him tomorrow. So, Zhang Heng followed right behind them and shot those who were on the run. It looked like good target practice as well, trying to strike moving runners and all.

A gun-powdery half an hour later, the fight was finally over. All in all, a total of seven soldiers managed to escape. As for the rest of them, they were either captured or killed. This meant that an entire Soviet brigade had been eliminated. As for the guerillas, there were a total of two dead. One suffered substantial injuries, and four had flesh wounds, but nothing too serious.

As for the fallen Finnish, one got shot directly in the head during the first wave of attack, and the second was killed while in pursuit of the enemy. Though the guerillas eventually killed their killers in revenge, it was impossible to bring their dead allies back to life.

After that, Weller led a few of his people to scout the battlefield and make an inventory of the spoils they had looted from the Soviets. A few of the guerillas even looked excited, as if kids on a demented treasure hunt, looking ever excited at their new possessions. To the captured Soviets, each second that passed was hell, growing more anxious and panic-stricken. They had no idea what was going to happen to them.

The Geneva Convention saw a way to treat prisoners of war with humanity. Unsurprisingly, the Soviets wanted no part of it in World War II. With that being said, Zhang Heng had never seen prisoners of war back at the base camp. It was simply not economically viable for guerillas to keep them alive, not to mention not having the numbers to control a riot if a huge fight broke out.

This time, they captured a total of 40 prisoners, and at least four to five guerillas would be needed to escort them back to the base. Considering that they needed to deal with those that were injured, the possibility of crossing paths with other Soviets, and the possibility of the prisoners escaping, it still seemed unwise to bring them home.

In an attempt to exert superiority, some of the guerillas had brought over two Maxim Heavy Machine Guns and pointed them at the prisoners, leaving them writhing and trembling. Some even wet their pants and started to cry in fear. All their weapons had been confiscated, and it seemed all but too late for these unfortunate souls.

Zhang Heng had no intention to witness all the killing, not forgetting to leave the confiscated guns and valuable items as well. All he did was pick up ammunition. After filling his backpack, he left the place with Simone.

As they were leaving, the loud rattle of heavy machine guns filled the air. Horrible screams of men doomed to their fate echoed painfully, leaving the forests engulfed in a veil of death and blood. It didn't last too long, though, as before long, silence embraced the dark woods once again.

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Before meeting Simone, Zhang Heng had experienced two fights. Hence, this was not his first time seeing bodies and parts scattered all around the floor. His calm reaction had left many befuddled. Throughout the entire battle, Zhang Heng did not drag anyone's feet and made no mistakes as well.

This had caused many guerillas to change the way they looked at him, their impressions greatly improving. They no longer treated him like he was invisible. A lot of them remembered that they, too, performed poorly in their early days of battle. Except for Weller and gang of best friends, the rest of the guerilla members had gradually accepted Zhang Heng as one of their own.

With only two casualties, the guerillas had managed to decimate an entire brigade of Soviets. It was to be considered a stunning victory. At the same time, the spoils of battle this time was a lot better than expected. In total, they had raked in a dozen light machine guns, two heavy machine guns, significant numbers of rifles, and together with them, the all-too-precious bullets.

With all the new injection of weapons, Oher's problem was partially solved.

Morale in the base camp ran high. Weller was locked in a noisy arm-wrestling battle with a few young men, no surprise there for the brutish Finn. There was a carnival atmosphere of sorts, with many drinking heartily and wagering bets on card games at the same time.

When Zhang Heng entered the storeroom, he saw a new wooden bed, with a handsome pile of daily supplies beside it.

"Aren't you going to join them?"

Maji suddenly materialized at the door like a specter. She leaned her curvy hips on the wooden door as she lit up a cigarette. She had just stitched up a 5-inch gash in the leg of a wounded guerilla, leaving her collar with the cliché bloodstains of a war doctor.

"No," answered Zhang Heng politely.

"Do you think that they will all die on the battlefield soon?" she asked, looking at him with soulful but emotionless eyes.

"..."

Zhang Heng did not know how to answer her. He knew he had to be cautious when she talked to the crafty Maji. She could read him like an open children's book.

"What is it that you're afraid of? Doesn't the entire Europe think the same bloody way? Even an idiot will know who the winner of this war will be. But that's all in the future anyway. Right now, enjoy each day as if it's your last!"

Zhang Heng did not say anything else after that, probably because he was the only one that knew that ending of this war. Having the knowledge of how a movie ended was like a spoiler, and this one didn't have the best of endings. He knew how this one ended. After all, a man out of time like him didn't share those deep-set goals, which defined the cause of the guerillas. He just wanted to survive in this cruel environment.

"Anyway, Ah Ji wants to tell you something. He said you did a good job. We treat our own well, and since you are part of us now, we will not allow you to suffer. Initially, we wanted to house you with the others, but it seems you prefer to be alone."

"This place is good enough. No need for any changes."

For him, it was pointless staying with the others as he could not speak in Finnish. Silence would suit him better for now. Besides, as a rookie, he needed to wake up early to catch up with what the others knew. Shooting near a horde of sleeping Finns didn't sound like the brightest idea.

Sighing, Maji nodded her head, encouraged him, and left after that.

Zhang Heng placed his snowboard at the corner of the wall before opening up his backpack. The loot of bullets fell to the ground as he unzipped the bag. In total, he had received 513 rounds from the fight, enough for many many sessions of shooting practice. After witnessing Simone's incredible aiming,

Zhang Heng was filled with a strong desire to improve himself. To a sniper, distance meant safety.

Chapter 75: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XVII

Zhang Heng lay on the snow-covered ground for half an hour. He was holding his M28 and had its stock resting on his shoulder. The weather today was so cold that his fingers were frozen. Though he managed to stay calm, throughout most of the bad days here, he started to doubt if he could complete today's training.

This was his 79th day in this world. The mission's dateline had passed, but the extra 24 hours he had each day graciously extended his mission to a total of 140 days. The good news was that the war was about to end soon.

Basically, the winter war between the Soviet Union and Finland had two different phases. The first phase began on the 30th of November, 1939. The Soviets were divided into four teams and attacked Finland from all four directions. Undeniably, the attack ended badly for the Soviet Union, for after a long and hard battle, they only managed to conquer the northern tip of Finland. As for the other three directions, they suffered high losses. In the end, they were forced to retreat, returning to their homeland to conscript new soldiers.

It was during that time that Finland had managed to devastate the great Soviet Union. This was notably evident at the battle at Karelian Isthmus, where the Soviets failed to break through the Mannerheim Line that Finland had maintained for a couple of decades. No matter how hard they tried, the Soviets were unable to figure out the foxy defense of Finnish. After paying the terrible price of thousands of lives, they only managed to penetrate 20km into their defensive line.

That January, things started to get a lot worse. The Red Army came up with the Northwestern Front, a Soviet military formation at Karelian Isthmus, assigning a Marshall called Semyon Timoshenko as the commander. In total, there were field armies made up of the 21st infantry division and six tank brigades. The entire force was ordered to focus their fire on the Mannerheim Line. During that time, Finland's military was sorely lacking, having shortages of personnel, heavy weapons, and ammunition. Soon, these problems were exposed.

Recently, the frontline sent a large number of emergency reports to the guerilla base camp. For now, they had nothing to do with Zhang Heng. He had been through around 20 battles throughout his time here. Every single day, he had to put his life on the line.

The battles gradually got harder as compared to his first mission. There were a few times he almost got himself killed even though trying his best to be extra cautious of his surroundings. The closest call he had was when a grenade landed right in front of him! One wouldn't doubt the luck a Rabbit Foot could grant, as, in the end, the grenade did not explode, and Zhang Heng got to live to see another day.

Many surprises and unforeseen circumstances occurred on a battlefield. Being extra careful did not guarantee that you got to keep your life. The tremendous stress that he was put under recently had driven him to improve his snowboarding and shooting skills faster than he could have before this.

This was especially true for the latter. Within a month, Zhang Heng's shooting skill had climbed, and he was now at LV 1. If he kept going at this rate, he might just be able to scrape LV 2 next month. Right now, he had an 80% chance to land a critical shot at a target 200 meters away from him. And shooting distance was not his only improvement.

All the while, Simone had been trying to help Zhang Heng improve the quality of his snipership on the whole and a heightened warzone awareness that he had to have. Indeed, he was getting a lot better with each passing day, thanks to her dedication and perseverance.

At the moment, Simone was attempting to sharpen Zhang Heng's observation skills. Earlier, she had deployed traps and managed to capture five weasels. After that, Simone made a mark on them before releasing them back to the wild. Zhang Heng was supposed to capture three out of five to complete the task.

Sporting white fur, they were extremely difficult to spot on the snow-covered ground. To make things worse, the rodents were usually cautious of their surroundings. After searching for a continuous half an hour, Zhang Heng finally found one and put a bullet in it! There were still four to go, with Zhang Heng having a hunch that they had probably escaped by now.

Ten minutes later, he spotted another weasel on a ridge. However, Zhang Heng was quite some distance away from his target, but he knew that if he waited any longer, he would surely lose the elusive animal. Immediately, he pulled the trigger! Unfortunately, the freezing cold had diminished his accuracy. Instead of hitting it, he simply scared it away.

Zhang Heng shook his head and put away his rifle in frustration, feeling like giving up. He then saw Simone sitting beside the fire, deep in thought. For the entire week, the guerillas were all on a sabbatical, having no war to fight. They had to wait until the Karelian Isthmus war ended before they resumed what they usually did. To be precise, Finland had to wait it out until other nations came to their rescue.

England and France had promised that they would send their forces to help Finland defend against the Soviets. As for Switzerland and Norway, they had made it clear that they wouldn't be involved. Germany, too, mentioned that they had no intention to get involved in this war. Judging the current circumstances, they wouldn't be able to hold on until help arrived.

At the same time, Finnish foreign affairs had been engaging with the Soviets. Unfortunately, Soviet demands were often unreasonable and outrageous, often making small ransoms for an even lower request.

February soon arrived. The longer the war dragged, the worse the weather became. As Zhang Heng wasn't involved in the war, and as an outsider, he had no concern about the outcome. To Simone, however, her country was about to be conquered. He could feel how down she must have gotten, knowing that a foreign force was about to colonize the homeland she knew all her life. Things would never be the same again.

Sadly, even if he became as good a sniper as Simone, there was no way Zhang Heng could change the results of the war.

The only thing that he could do right now was to cheer her up, perhaps offer a shoulder or two. It was the best he could offer.

SPLAT!

A snowball suddenly landed on Simone's back. Immediately, she turned around to see what was going on. At the same time, the second snowball landed on her arm! Playfully, she rolled up her snowball in retaliation!

A perfectly round snowball landed perfectly on Zhang Heng's chest. Such was the deadly accuracy of a masterful sniper. Zhang Heng then tossed two snowballs at Simone, who managed to dodge one with the other landing on her neck. She could not help but shiver as the snow fell under her clothes. This snowball fight had triggered the gods of rivalry within her!

Snowballs flew everywhere, with hints of laughter, bringing Simone a much-needed reprieve from the bitter horrors of human war. Everyone, no matter who won or lost, was a casualty.

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It wasn't before the night that the two of them returned to base camp. As Zhang Heng was about to boil some water to shower, he saw Maji when he walked towards his cottage.

"The two of you came back quite late today," she teased.

"Is there something I can help you with?"

"Things are getting really bad at Karelian Isthmus. The Soviets managed to break through the first line of defense. Rumor is that the higher authorities are about to fulfill the demands of the Soviet Union! The war will be coming to an end soon. Ah Ji wants to talk to you about it. Are you available now?"

Chapter 76: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XVIII

Zhang Heng put on his clothes and followed the doctor to where Ah Ji's residence. When he opened the door, Ah Ji was sitting on the table with a small knife while trimming the tip of a cigar.

"Welcome! Friend of Finland! Freedom fighter! My yellow-skinned friend!" he exclaimed with his arms open.

Zhang Heng was invited to sit in front of Ah Ji. He had little contact with the guerilla commander for the past two months. The last time he walked into this cottage was during his first arrival. He still remembered that the commander left after speaking a few sentences, and Maji was the one who talked to him after that. Zhang Heng had no idea why the commander would want to talk to him now.

Ah Ji put his cigar aside and produced a bottle of vodka under his table. It had been confiscated from one of the Soviet troops with only half a bottle left. Maji then took out three glasses and filled them up.

"Actually, I want to thank you for what you have done for us. Thank you for everything that you have done for the past two months. During our darkest, most harrowing moments, you have graciously

picked up arms, and fought by our side. I want you to know that you have helped us protect our country. It's just too bad you're not Finnish, or our country would have decorated you with medals."

Zhang Heng simply nodded as he bottomed up the cup of vodka, allowing the commander to finish.

"You should know that the war is coming to an end soon. What do you plan to do when the war is over?"

Zhang Heng calculated that he had about a month left before the war ended. Right until now, he had accumulated a total of 23 points. These were all the result of spotting a guerilla base camp, killing an enemy, using a Molotov cocktail to destroy a tank, successfully killing a commander, and acquiring ten bullet-shaped lighters. Indeed, some of these milestones were a bit on the weird side.

Based on his primary mission, all he needed to do was to survive Finland for 20 days. Technically speaking, he wasn't required to stay here any longer. If possible, Zhang Heng wanted to travel to England or America. These two countries were considered some of the safest countries to be in during World War II.

Although they did send throngs of troops to fight in other countries, their homelands were free from attacks. For Zhang Heng to be travel to these two countries, the guerilla commander had to first release him. Besides, the war was coming to an end. It was pointless keeping a foreigner here.

Zhang Heng had been telling everyone how much he wanted to return to his hometown but had never told anyone about his intentions of going to England or America.

The commander and Maji looked at each other, placing down their glasses at the same time.

"We pointed our guns at the same enemy. I'm going to be honest with you here. We will always believe in you no matter what happens since you are one of us. However, some of them do not think in the same way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You were spotted by the soldier that provides our ammunition. They are worried you might leak out information about us to others."

"For example?"

"For example, the way we deal with our war prisoners. You know... we do what we have to do. However, when such matters spread, I'm afraid it might affect us in a bad way. Considering that foreign affairs are negotiating with the Soviet Union, this is a very sensitive time. Such information must be top-secret, by hook or by crook," answered Maji while taking over the cigar handed by the commander.

In a surprising turn of events, the commander then drew a pistol from his pocket and pointed at Zhang Heng!

Immediately, the atmosphere in the room tensed. After a short while, the commander put down the gun on the table.

“Good news is we know what kind of person you are. For me, I know in my heart that you will not leak such intel to others. What we are about to do next is going to be very simple. We just need to figure out a way to change the minds of those who distrust you.”

“What do you guys want me to do, huh? Assassinate Semyon Timoshenko?”

Zhang Heng’s steady control of his emotions managed to impress Maji and Ah Ji. Considering that a gun had just been pointed to him point-blank, they expected him to have an outburst by now.

He had contributed a lot to the guerilla base camp with Simone, undeniably presenting impeccable performance through the trenches of war. Right now, the commander had just turned on him, and Zhang Heng could still control his anger. His character was truly impressive.

In actual fact, Zhang Heng wasn’t as calm as he looked. He just realized that he had made a huge mistake.

It was not as simple as a video game. The moment he chose to become part of the guerilla force, he knew that no one would fully trust him, mainly because of his ethnicity and their inability to check his background. The guerilla team had simply made use of him to deal with the Soviets. However, during that critical period, he was forced to join a side to survive the war. Technically speaking, both sides were taking advantage of each other.

As the circumstances changed, the relationship between him and the guerilla troops changed as well. At first, he was needed by the base camp to defeat their enemies. Now, they had turned around and made him a threat. Deep inside his heart, he knew that they would not let him off the hook so easily even though helped in eliminating tons of enemies, also spending some good, quality time with them.

It seemed like everything had reached a moot point.

“Don’t worry. We are all reasonable folks. We will not send you to do a suicide mission. What I want you to do is fairly simple. Once you complete it, all debt between us will be no more. When that time comes, you are free to go wherever you want,” said Ah Ji.

Maji blew out a smoke circle; her eyes gave out a certain hesitation in her. After some time, Maji barged in.

“Did you know that the girl wasn’t originally called Simone?”

Zhang Heng frowned, having no idea why she would bring out Simone all of a sudden.

“The country is not in a critical state, but we will need a hero to unite everyone. We can wait for the hero to appear, or we can create one!”

Maji’s expression was slightly weird. She looked like she was taunting him, but with respect.

“The real Simone came from a small town called Rautjarvi. No one cared about that place, and no one cares what he did there as well. All we know is that he’s just a farmer, and he would hunt occasionally. He is the most ordinary bloke that you will ever meet. That means you can alter his past to your liking!”

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"I don't understand the idea behind it. There's one Simone right here. Why do we need to create another one? With her shooting skills, she is more than qualified enough to become a national hero. Why do you want to turn some random hunter into a national hero?"

"Not one," replied the doctor, cigar in mouth.

"What?"

"There is more than one Simone. In total, we have four Simones. All are professional fighters. Three of them are snipers, and another one is a natural on the submachine gun. All four have their faces covered when they go on a mission, so their identities are secure. Together, they become the best sniper the entire human history has known – the legendary Simone!

Basically, Simone is everywhere. He is a phantom on the battlefield, your most reliable ally, the white death to the Soviet soldiers, and an undefeatable legend on the battlefield. The Simones have managed to boost morale for all Finnish countrymen and our soldiers greatly. To be more precise, there are only three Simones left. One was tragically killed when the Soviets started the war. We don't even have much information on him."

"How about the real Simone? Does he know about this?" Zhang Heng asked, hoping for a straight answer for once

That is not important. The real Simone joined the army last October, and during training, he protected one of his allies from an exploding grenade. If that incident did not happen, this project would not have even been born. But then again... the war is coming to an end soon, and there are two Simones left in this world," said Maji while spinning the lighter in her hand impatiently.

"The person that started this project did not expect this outcome, right?"

"Yes. Initially, a fair chance was to be given to all Simones that survived the war. At least... they could use the gun in their hands to decide their final fate. Unfortunately, an unforeseen circumstance has emerged."

"What kind of unforeseen circumstances?"

"The two Simones that survived was the female sniper and the man with the submachine gun. The latter one was hit by a stray bullet during one of the raids a few days ago. Miraculously, he survived after surgery. Then, someone must have leaked the news to the media. Reporters from different countries rushed to him, and it was during that time that he revealed his identity. Actually, I can understand why he would do something like this. That kid with the submachine gun is the strongest Simone when compared to the other three. Considering he is now severely injured, there is no way can defeat the sniper in a gunfight."

"What now? Are you guys planning to abandon her?" asked Zhang Heng as he stared into their eyes.

"We don't have many options left. We have to play his game, and we need to make up stories for him as well."

Zhang Heng was unable to speak. He stared right into Maji's eyes for half a minute, not knowing what they were thinking.

"If you want me to believe you, you have to tell me how an English volunteer has her hands in so many top-secrets?" he continued.

"I lied. The truth is, I did grow up in England, but my father is from Finland, and he is a powerful man in the Finnish military. I'm the one who proposed the Simone plan and personally recruited all the Simones. I simply want my father to witness the birth of a legend. That is why I'm here right now. Ah Ji was sent by the military to protect me."

Maji looked very troubled. She stood in front of the window with both arms crossed in the exact same way when she and Zhang Heng first met. Suddenly, it dawned on him, as he knew what was troubling her.

She realized that it was almost impossible for her to treat all four Simones fairly since she spent most of her time with the current Simone living in this base camp. Due to that, she could not maintain objectivity when it came to picking out the best of the lot.

"After all, we are all humans, and I care about the girl a lot. Before this, I had a thought amid the war, to get an assassin to kill the rest of Simones and let her live. I had no idea if she was tough enough to survive the war. With my position, I simply couldn't risk killing all the other Simones. So, the moment I heard that the second Simone was dead, I knew that the chances she would live after the war had just increased exponentially. What's happening right now came totally unexpected."

"So, now you found out that you can't beat her, and you want me to take care of your problem? Why don't you just let her go? You know her well enough! She doesn't mind not being a national hero whatsoever!" snapped Zhang Heng while staring at the gun on the table.

"I'm the one who proposed the project, not the one in charge of executing it. I have some rights in this project, but not all of it. My job is technically over once all four Simones have been recruited.

Whatever I did after that is all my own doing. The military and higher authorities have nothing to do with them. I can't change what had happened, and I can't change the mind of the top brass as well.

That kid Simone trusts you fully, and that is why I'm telling you all this stuff. Asking you to send her to the end of the road is the kindest thing I can do. I heard that there is a beautiful lake northwest of here. Perhaps we can fish there when everything is over."

Finally, Maji was done with everything she wanted to say.

"I don't get a choice either, right?"

Looking down and without hesitation, Zhang Heng grabbed the gun on the table.

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Maji had her back facing him and did not say a single word. Zhang Heng left the wooden house as well since he had asked all that he wanted. He then walked towards Simone's cottage. For all it was worth, he made sure to thank Maji before he left.

The guerilla base camp was extra quiet tonight. Usually, Oher would lean at the door and gaze to the sky, looking for shooting stars. Not tonight, though. The entire base camp was flooded with light, with a kerosene lamp illuminating the doors of each cottage of the base camp.

Zhang Heng did not turn around to look at the jungle. He put the gun into his pocket and used another hand to knock on the door. Since Maji did not like to bring her key around, Simone was unsurprised when someone knocked on her door at this hour. However, she was startled when she saw Zhang Heng standing outside the door.

The moment he caught sight of her, he grabbed her collar and pushed her to the ground! Surprisingly, Simone did not retaliate. All she did was lie on the floor and stare at Zhang Heng. Her face was flushing. Just like what Maji told him, Simone trusted Zhang Heng with all her heart, no matter the situation.

Zhang Heng sighed. All he needed to right now was to take out the gun from his pocket and end it all. Looking into her eyes, he saw that they were heartbroken, confused, but submissive. He hesitated.

In the end, he couldn't make himself do it. Instead, he tried his best to look through the Finnish dictionary in his mind, saying, "Trust me."

After that, Zhang Heng started to look around to check out the room. With Maji's wittiness, Zhang Heng was confident that she had made preparations well before she signaled him earlier. He then looked at Maji's bed. That and the cabinet were the only places where Maji could hide her stuff.

Chapter 78: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XX

Gunshots blasting at the wooden house broke the silence of the night!

After a short while, a strange rustling sound came from the forest where few masked men with submachine guns charged at where Zhang Heng and Simone were! They wore plain winter camouflage with no insignia bearing their unit or identity.

Little did they know that Zhang Heng was about to welcome them with a Maxim Heavy Machine Gun. Good thing Maji was crazier than he expected, a trait that proved useful in time like this. With a bit of patience, Zhang Heng waited until all the unknown assailants were close to the cottage before opening fire at full force!

Shells flew out from the chamber in a continuous stream like an angry fire-spitting dragon.

Clearly, those five men had prepared to deal with surprises like this. However, they had not accounted for Zhang Heng to use a Maxim Heavy Machine Gun to go against them. The gun's destructive firepower had crushed any possibility of retaliation. Before they could do anything, their bodies were shredded into pieces, their flesh exploding into tiny bits as the bullets ravaged through without mercy. Though the gun was potent, it consumed ammo at an obscene speed as well.

In that short skirmish, Zhang Heng had consumed all the ammunition prepared by Maji. Due to the gun's weight, it was not possible for him to carry it around. After killing the first wave of enemies, he abandoned the cumbersome machine and took out his handgun to shoot the kerosene lamp that was still alit.

The moment the flames went out, the second wave of enemies arrived! In senseless insanity, thousands of bullets started spraying out of the forest toward the base camp. It was so powerful it shredded the thin wooden walls of the cottage!

Luckily, Simone had pushed over the bed, serving as a barrier. Still, she could not figure out why enemies would appear in the base camp all of a sudden. Knowing that the two of them were in a life-threatening situation, she quickly picked up Zhang Heng's M28 and loaded the weapon.

After three minutes of continuous shooting, the firing came to a stop. Bullets had wholly decimated the wooden house; plates and bowls on the table had been shattered into pieces. They were only alive thanks to the bed. Otherwise, they would have been instantly killed by the merciless rain of fire.

Zhang Heng could see that these masked men were determined to eliminate Simone. They had come well prepared.

Three people attempted to approach the cottage from the forest but were greeted in kind by three bullets. Simone had managed to kill them. Zhang Heng did fire twice as well. Unfortunately, he was not used to using a handgun and missed.

Then, the shooting started up again. Gunshots rang out from all directions, and shells began to flood the house like there was no tomorrow!

Judging by the intensity of the ambush, they should be about 20 or 30 people shooting at the same time. Sooner or later, the bed would surely give in to the onslaught. Unfortunately, there was nothing they could do right now. It seemed practically impossible to bring Simone out of the snare they were cornered into.

In a crude manner of speech, Zhang Heng had indeed been fooled by Maji. Out of kindness, Maji wasn't completely honest about Simone with him. Surrounded by continuous fire, Maji knew that it was improbable they would survive. She believed that with Zhang Heng's cunning, he would surely figure out the consequences of knowing top-secrets. Even if he chose to kill Simone, there was no way that she would let him leave the base camp alive. Zhang Heng had said earlier that he had no options when it came to this. It turned out he was right.

Still, Zhang Heng was grateful for Maji because he knew that it would be hard for him to stay away and out of it. He knew that he would never leave Simone and ran away alone. Besides, he still had his trump card with him. The wooden sculpture was lying there quietly inside his pocket. He could transform himself into a shadow and flee the demolished cottage in an instant. However, the night was moonless, meaning he was limited to only moving where the kerosene lamps were. This was a big problem, and it was going to be really difficult for him to enter the forest behind the line of heavily armed soldiers. If you like reading comics please visit Webnovel.live

Unfortunately, he knew he had to do it if the situation got any worse. Just when Zhang Heng wanted to reach into his pocket to grab the wooden sculpture, he heard there were more gunshots. This time, however, the gunshots did not come from the forest but from the base camp!

Zhang Heng saw a single Weller shooting at the forest with his light machine gun. At the same time, the limping Oher kicked down a table, placed his rifle on top of it, and started to shoot at the forest like a madman! All hell had broken loose, and the other guerillas quickly followed suit as well.

Of course, Zhang Heng would not let this golden opportunity slip away from him. Immediately, he kicked down the tattered wall behind him and dragged Simone out of the wooden house. Suddenly, he heard someone whistling as they were running. From afar, a guerilla tossed a submachine gun to him and signaled him to join the battle!

From the beginning of the war until now, the guerillas had decreased from over 40 members to only about a dozen left. More than half had been killed in action. This reduction in number made them more united than before, and although they were ordered not to leave their rooms tonight, all of them chose to go against the order when they saw Simone's cottage being shot at. Such unexpected results surprised those on both sides of the divide.

The truth was, enemies greatly outnumbered them. However, the guerilla's strong teamwork had managed to hold back the enemies. But soon, the enemies started to reorganize and started another retaliation. Until now, the enemies had been hiding out in the forest, giving the guerillas the upper hand during the first wave of attack. On the second wave of attack, the enemies started to work together, and the guerillas were beginning to sustain injuries during the shootout.

Simone wanted to head back to help her friends but Zhang Heng knew that they were targeting her. The longer she stayed there, the more dangerous it was going to be for the others. Zhang Heng tapped on her shoulder.

Gunshots were everywhere around the base camp, and amid the confusion, nobody knew where to head to. However, this was not a problem for Zhang Heng.

Maji had actually signaled Zhang Heng secretly when they were talking in the commander's cottage. Northwest was where they should head to if they wanted to live to see tomorrow.

Chapter 79: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XXI

Zhang Heng and Simone worked together, swiftly blowing out all the kerosene lamps that were hanging around the base.

With that, the entire camp was now pitch black. It was as dark as a cave, with only the stars to light the way. All they could see was a silhouette from far. Zhang Heng and Simone were about 70 meters away from the forest that was located northwest of them. However, they were only 40 meters away from the west, and there was a storeroom along their path. That made Zhang Heng keener to first head west before running northwest to enter the forest.

The only thing that he needed to do right now was to eliminate the gunner that was hiding west. Rifle in hand, Zhang Heng tossed away the handgun that he was holding earlier. Then, they both lay on the snow-covered ground on their left and right.

Just as expected, the enemy that had remained hidden for some time could not bear the boredom anymore. He drew out his gun and started shooting at Weller! The moment he fired, he fatally exposed his current position.

Instantly, Zhang Heng and Simone took the opportunity to land a critical shot on him!

Along with the loud gunshots, one of the enemies fell to the ground lifelessly. Simone did not stop there, using her excellent photographic memory and sharp observation skills to fire at another. Unfortunately, Weller got shot. It seemed like the enemies in the forest had no intention to kill, only shooting him in the leg. Zhang Heng knew that he could not afford to wait any longer. Immediately, he dragged Simone into the storeroom. One of the enemies noticed them and quickly sprayed some bullets their way in an attempt to block them off.

At that very moment, Simone signaled to Zhang Heng that she would draw away the enemies to let Zhang Heng flee from the trapped position. Without thinking twice, Zhang Heng shook his head, rejecting her proposal. He knew that all those people were actually here to kill Simone, and there was no way he was about to leave her here to the wolves and vultures. Rather than being sitting ducks, Zhang Heng decided to return fire.

That was the last resort anyway. The chance of them winning seemed slim. Even if they could both eliminate all the enemies, most guerillas would die in vain. Seeing that the two of them were trapped, Weller mustered up his strength and courage and stood up, battling the pain in his shot leg. He did not retreat to a safe spot but instead, pulled one of the corpses on the ground and used the body to shield him from the incoming bullets. With one hand, he picked up the submachine gun and started to shoot at the enemies!

Having the covering fire, Zhang Heng and Simone ran into the forest as fast as their legs could carry them. The enemies gave chase, opening fire at the same time! Those three seconds that they experienced were like three centuries to them, as they gouged out every last bit of strength and ran without looking back.

Right before they entered the forest, something unexpected happened. They remembered there were only three people shooting at them from the west side of the forest. Nobody would have expected that the fourth enemy awaited them in the woods. A lot of had happened out there, and his mates had all scattered, but he was determined to stay hidden to wait for Zhang Heng's and Simone's arrival.

At such proximity, it was almost impossible for the enemy to miss his shot. The man in the mask lifted the submachine gun in his hand. Not to be outdone, Simone had her rifle held in her hands as well. She had no time to aim, adjust her breath, or stabilize her shooting position. All she could do was run and shoot at the same time.

The shot was fired. Seconds later, the masked man's pupils contracted. He froze, then collapsed to the ground with a sickening thud! Simone had managed to kill him without aiming. Unfortunately, there was no time to catch a breath. Soon after that, more people started coming after them.

Zhang Heng swiftly picked up the submachine gun and a few boxes of ammunition before he started to run again. If Maji was telling the truth, then northwest should be the most vulnerable spot for the enemies. That did not mean that once they were there, they would be completely safe. There could be an ambush lurking for them in the dark. After what they experienced earlier, they were much more cautious this time.

It was easy for one to hide in the forest, but at the same time, it was also easy to be ambushed. Until now, Simone had no idea what was going on. She was left stunned when she saw that the man who ambushed them was actually one of the guerillas.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng felt that it wasn't too bad a thing they had this language barrier. He was unable to tell Simone that her own country had betrayed her even if he wanted to do so. The two of them did not stay at the same place for too long, and after collecting some weapons and picked most of the ammunition, they continued to run towards the forest.

While they were running, they encountered a few enemies. Fortunately, these were either alone or walked in pairs. Simone's had superior hearing ability and vision when compared to most of her counterparts. In most cases, she was able to spot enemies first before they spotted her. That was why most of her battles ended really fast.

The deeper they went, the fewer enemies they encountered. It turned out Maji wasn't lying to them. Soon, they would be able to break through the defense line.

As they walked on, they suddenly heard someone shouting in the forest. Zhang Heng couldn't understand what they were talking about but sensed that Simone's emotions had drastically changed. She just stood there frozen and had stopped moving.

Zhang Heng guessed that they were pulling some dirty tricks to draw her out. They must be telling her that their target was actually Zhang Heng and wanted her to help them to capture him. This situation was the double-cross of crosses. Her country had already betrayed her, but here, they were still lying to her, taking advantage of her loyalty. If he could ever speak in Finnish, Zhang Heng would definitely tell her the whole truth. It seemed that the enemies knew that he could not converse in Finnish.

Alright. Zhang Heng did know how to speak in Finnish if only a couple of words. He could try to squeeze out something to explain himself. However, knowing that his broken Finnish was going to make him seem more suspicious, he decided to stay mum. He had said everything that he needed to say back at the cottage. Right now, it was all up to Simone. The longer they stayed here, the more dangerous the situation was going to be. Still, Zhang Heng did not rush her.

Both of them just stood in the dark until someone approached them. Simone lifted up her head and looked at Zhang Heng, looking as serene as usual. Right now, Zhang Heng was at a massive disadvantage. If Simone started to fall for their lies, he would have to drag her away by force. To his surprise, she lifted up her rifle and pulled the trigger! A man standing beside the tree was hit.

Simone had just used actions to say what she had to say. Rather than trusting the words of some strangers, she chose to put her faith in those who had genuinely spent time with her.

Sometimes, women trusted their hunches more than theories. And this soon proved to be true.

Chapter 80: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You XXII

The sound of gunshots and shouting faded into the distance. Two hours later, it was all but complete silence. Zhang Heng deduced that they must have successfully broken through the enemies' defensive lines.

Both of them had now reached the lake that Maji mentioned earlier, finding a boat tied to its banks. With that tiny rowboat, they would be able to shake off all the enemies that were chasing them, no longer having to worry about their scent being tracked down by hounds.

Just as Zhang Heng was about to get on the boat, Simone collapsed suddenly! A muzzle flash came from the darkness followed by a speeding bullet whizzing by. The round lodged itself in her shoulder and was embedded deep in her flesh.

There was an active shooter nearby!

Simone didn't wait and reacted with lightning-fast reflexes. After going through several battles with Zhang Heng, both of them knew what to do by now. Instinctively, she rolled over to the side, quickly looking for a nearby tree nearby and took cover behind it. The second shot whizzed by Zhang Heng's ear. This time, it was so close it left him paralyzed in shock!

Without a doubt, they had encountered a pro this time. The earlier battles might have looked dangerous as the enemies had the upper hand since they outnumbered them. However, both of them had the advantage when it came to fighting with a small group. It seemed like these new enemies had pretty good teamwork and strict discipline. They were, however, vulnerable when they were alone.

It was safe to say that although they were as skillful as the guerillas, they could never be as good as Simone.

However, the sniper that they just encountered was on a different level altogether. Judging by the accuracy of his shots, he must at least be as good as Simone. This guy would prove a painful headache to deal with. With such skills, he could easily be the poster boy of every task force that he joined.

If this were to be a normal situation, of course, they would have figured out a solution. Unfortunately, the enemy managed to land a shot on the shoulder that she used to hold her gun. Though she trained to shoot with her left hand, its speed and accuracy could never compare to her right. Frankly, this seemed the moment the grim reaper had finally arrived. They could seriously lose their lives at any moment now.

Zhang Heng realized that they were in a life-threatening situation. The visibility in the forest was so poor that he could not use his ace in the hole – Shadow Moment. The enemy might even call for backup if they continued to linger.

To their greatest surprise, the enemy who hid in the dark did not do so. After the two gunshots, silence once again embraced the forest. It was as if nothing happened. The wind passed them by, and the wooden boat still bobbed gently on the lakeside. Zhang Heng then saw blood dripping from her fingertips. Simone frowned but did not say a single word about it. She was unable to feel it, her arm becoming paralyzed in some way by the gunshot wound.

Zhang Heng drew in a deep breath and used his hand to signal Simone to relax. Usually, she would be the one protecting him in a situation like this. This time, Zhang Heng knew he needed to be the one that protected Simone. He then took out the wooden sculpture from his pocket and extended his arm with it. Seconds later, the sniper fired squarely at it without doubts! Zhang Heng held on to it as tightly he could to avoid it from flying out of his hand.

After that, he studied the wooden sculpture. By judging how deep the bullet had penetrated the wooden statue, Zhang Heng could calculate how far the sniper was. If Simone was not wounded, she could have surely returned fire. However, even without her assistance, Zhang Heng could still estimate

where the sniper was. It would prove impossible for him to defeat the sniper if he charged out right now.

The sniper's shooting skills clearly bettered Zhang Heng's. The only way for him to win this fight was to pinpoint the sniper's exact location. So, Zhang Heng took out the bullet-shaped lighter that he acquired earlier and used the same way to check out the sniper's position. He struck the flint, and just as expected, the sniper landed a shot on the lighter. This time, the lighter was sent flying away from Zhang Heng's hand.

Calmly, he took out the third item. This time, the sniper was smart enough to know Zhang Heng's intention. No matter what Zhang Heng did, he stopped firing at the item that he saw. Two minutes later, Zhang Heng took out his cellphone. Ever since he joined the guerillas, he had stopped using it. Initially, its battery was at 50%. After putting it to sleep for two months, it was now left with a lethargic 10%. It was just enough to help him to gain the upper hand.

No one in this era had seen a cellphone before. The two items that Zhang Heng sent out were just decoys. As the third item that he sent out was his cell, he used it to record his surroundings for two minutes. Lastly, he turned on his flash function to illuminate the place a total of four times.

And that was how Zhang Heng located where the sniper was. The sniper was well prepared, wearing a ghillie suit of sorts. Not only was he equipped with camouflage, but he enhanced it with snow, mud, and branches. He was now one with his surroundings, almost invisible if one did not look hard enough.

Unfortunately, he could not escape the sharpness of a modern 12-megapixel camera. The real danger had only begun.

Zhang Heng's advantage was that he came in a pair. Therefore, it was impossible for the sniper to know who was going to attack first. In other words, he had to split his attention between two different persons, continually shifting from side to side. When Zhang Heng enlarged the photo that he took, he saw that the sniper expression, an excited, gleeful sneer across his face. He was beaming with some sort of glorious purpose in his eyes.

Was he relishing the joys of hunting?

Zhang Heng finally understood why the sniper didn't call for his allies. This was his hunting grounds and would never allow anyone to encroach his territory. Zhang Heng knew that ultimately, he wasn't the target.

His target was the girl known as the White Death – Simone.

It seemed like the reason why he fired the shot earlier was to eliminate Zhang Heng. With that, he would be able to have a head-to-head face-off with Simone.

Zhang Heng signaled Simone to relax her injured shoulder and hold the rifle in her other hand. Though he could not see what was going on, he could guess that the sniper must be really nervous right now.

The final showdown was nigh!

Seconds later, a black shadow charged from the back of a tree! The sniper cowering behind the trees had an adrenalin rush the moment he saw something flash in front of him.

Prey?!

No. It couldn't be.

It was a trap!

The astute sniper took a swift 0.01 seconds to deduce that the black shadow was simply a jacket! Though he had his rifle aimed at it, he managed to stop himself from pulling the trigger. At the same time, he got even more excited. Simone must have been ready to return fire since she pulled a trick like this.

Seconds later, his heart skipped a beat. That was because it wasn't Simone that had appeared from the tree, but instead, Zhang Heng was the one who had emerged from another direction!

It was at that moment that the sniper realized he had made a fatal mistake.

He expected that Simone would come out to take the shot. The jacket and Zhang Heng were just illusions and distractions! Hence, he did not shift his aim.

Besides, he was initially confident enough that they were unable to pinpoint the exact spot he was hiding in such a short amount of time. That was why he hesitated. At the same time, Zhang Heng lifted up his rifle as fast as possible. Utilizing the shortest amount of time, he took aim and fixed his posture for the shot.

Zhang Heng now knew exactly where he was hiding.

He knelt on the ground and prepared to pull his trigger at the sniper. However, the enemy soon realized that someone was aiming at him from another direction and immediately changed his aim. Zhang Heng heard something but in his deep concentration, he couldn't identify the sound.

Both of them then pulled the trigger at the same time.

One bullet grazed someone's face. The other had penetrated someone's skull.