



シュヴァツスマテン

Schwartzsmatten

ふたつの故郷、ひとつの道

原作 吉宗鋼紀 (アージュ)

文 内田弘樹

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カティア・ヴァルトハイム

Katia Waldheim



本書にはゲーム『シュヴァルツェスマーケン 紅血の紋章』のネタバレが含まれています。予めご了承ください。



ふたつの故郷、
ひとつの道

Schwarzesmarken

Two Homes, One Road

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Back Cover Text

At the age of 14, **Katia Waldheim**, who lost her parents-in-law in a car accident, knocked on the doors of the Pilot Academy for Young Cadets. In order to fight the BETA, a species of alien origin that is hostile to humanity, Katia goes through rigorous training with the aim of becoming a Tactical Surface Fighter pilot. While clashing with her female peers, she believes in herself and moves forward one step at a time. In her heart, she has hidden feelings for her two divided homelands.

This book contains spoilers for the game
"Schwarzesmarken: Crest of the Red Blood"

Please be forewarned

It was snowing the day they left.

The square in front of the Paderborn [\(1\)](#) base gate was covered in snow. There were thick grey clouds overhead, and powdery snowflakes swayed in the light wind.

It was a common sight in West Germany in December, but the thick winter air reminded Katia Waldheim of how the dust from the massive use of tactical nuclear weapons had weakened the sunlight.

Katia was one of the forty TSF pilots lined up in front of the gate. She was wearing a thermal jacket over her BDU [\(2\)](#) and a military bag was at her feet. None of the pilots had umbrellas, and all of their heads were fogged with snow.

In spite of that, the cold felt nostalgic. Katia looked around at the forms of her fellow comrades. Almost all of the pilots were older than her, and she felt out of place as a woman with a small stature.

"We, the 101st Tactical Armored Battalion, are now under the command of the United Nations Forces, heading for the German Democratic Republic - East Germany."

A pilot wearing a major's collar began to reaffirm the order in a hard voice.

"At present, East Germany has the Oder-Neisse River [\(3\)](#) as an absolute defence line against waves of BETA attacks. However, the damage caused by years of fighting is so great that the front line could collapse at any moment. And needless to say, the collapse of East Germany will lead to a crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany. We must rescue East Germany in order to maintain peace and security in our homeland and throughout Western Europe."

Homeland — she coughed in an inarticulate voice and felt complicated. The homeland the Major speaks of and hers are different – very similar, but something else.

"There will be a tough fight ahead in East Germany, but as representatives of West Germany, I hope you will behave without shame."

The battalion commander, a major, looked at the pilots and continued.

"East Germany is under the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), or more frankly, the Communist Party. We once used to be compatriots in the same homeland, but now we have parted company. Therefore, in order to avoid trouble, please pay adequate close attention in your contacts with East Germans."

She spoke as if he was explaining something about aliens.

"That's all I have to say. I wish you all the best."

The battalion staff officer then began to explain the future plans.

"From Paderborn station, we will take a military train to the east. With the consent of the East German government, we will pass through the border to the Reichenwalde base near the front line — there is a discarded city called Eisenhüttenstadt near the base, I was told. A city of iron factories is an ostentatious name for a socialist state." the staff officer added in a pretentious voice. The pilots around him laughed, but Katia couldn't. Katia remembered that a year and a half ago, a large number of civilians had been killed by the BETA in Eisenhuettenstadt.

The order to move was given and Katia started walking towards the parking lot where the transport vehicle was waiting. As soon as she did, someone caught her by the leg. The incident was so unexpected that before she could scream, her head was plunged first into the snow.

"..... No!"

She heard guffaws from the pilots around her. She hurriedly tried to stand up, but didn't grasp that someone had put their foot on her. The female pilot behind her spoke to her in a disparaging manner.

"You must be so excited to get to the other side of the wall. That's why you fell down inadvertently, Communist-san."

The mausoleum laughter of the pilots grew even louder.

"I'm not a communist."

Katia coughed back as she brushed the snow off her knees. The female pilot who had gotten involved looked annoyed.... but she said nothing more, so Katia did not pursue the matter any further.

Walking in silence, she looked back at the Paderborn base as it moved away. She knew that this might be her eternal farewell to West Germany.

If she died in battle, that would be the end, and before that, if her plan was carried out in the best possible way, it would be impossible for her to return to the West. That's why she had to keep this scene in her mind's eye. To tell the truth, She was still in doubt, but she had no intention of doubting the rightness of the feelings she had in her heart.

Looking up at the northern sky covered with grey clouds, Katia let out a small sigh and looked forward again.

Come to think of it, thought Katia. A feeling passed by her that the first time she met Zofi and the others was on a cold, rainy day like this.

June in West Germany changes like a cat's eyes — when it's sunny, it's as cheerful as midsummer, and when it's raining, it's as cold as midwinter.

On that particular morning, the Landsberg am Lech [\(4\)](#) base in the vicinity of Penzing, Bavaria, in southern West Germany, where they were placed, was hit by unseasonably cold air.

In the drill hall of the Pilot Junior Cadet School set up in the same base, Katia was wearing a BDU that had just been issued to her, and was standing in line with boys and girls her age. The nervousness caused her face to stiffen. She had a feeling that the shivers down her spine were not just caused by the coldness from the drizzle.

"I welcome you all to our school. The battle against the BETA is becoming more and more fierce, and the training of TSF pilots is an urgent matter for our country, so I want you to train with pride as pilots."

After the principal's remarks, the students were divided into groups A through F, with 12 students per group. Perhaps out of consideration for West German public sentiment, where gender distinction is still strong for religious reasons, groups A through C were made up of males, and groups D through F were made up of females. Katia was assigned to group D.

Katia wondered what it would be like to be the only girl in the group — she was aware that she was the type of person who stood out from the crowd, and she has had this tendency for the past five years, no, maybe even before that.

She was trying to be careful not to stand out from everyone else, but she didn't know exactly what to do. She can't say anything clever, and she can't lie to fit in. It wasn't that she didn't like communal living, but she couldn't make fun of anyone or enjoy tormenting them.

People like her are often excluded from the group. This is especially true in a group of girls, which made her feel uneasy because she has already experienced it.

Katia squeezed her right hand. Then, a woman in her mid-twenties appeared in front of Team D, her long chestnut-coloured hair tied up in a single bun. The woman coughed lightly and then announced herself.

"My name is Captain Wouter Frolov, and I am the instructor of D Squad. I have been asked to send you out into the field. Therefore, I will use any means to accomplish my mission, to the extent permitted by law."

Katia's spine stiffened at the disturbing details spoken in a gentle tone.

She wondered what the means would be — would she be beaten up like in the war movies she had seen before? Even though she had prepared herself for this, she was still afraid.

"Remember the faces of your team members, did you commit them to memory? Then, let me continue. After graduating from the training school, I took part in the retreat after Operation Palaiologos ⁽⁵⁾. Out of my 12 classmates, I was the only one who was able to step on the soil of my country alive. I believe it is my noble duty to reduce the number of pilots who suffer such a fate. Are there any questions at this point?"

No one raised a hand. Everyone was aghast at the gap between Frolov's caustic words and her calm demeanor. Perhaps satisfied with the effect of her words — Frolov smiled a fake smile and continued speaking.

"Understand that my orders are absolute, and that from this point forward, no matter what the circumstances, the twelve of you will share the responsibility jointly and severally. First, self-introductions will be carried out. Please state your name, date of birth, and place of birth in that order."

The students, who had been hit by the eerie presence Frolov gave off, introduced themselves nonchalantly.

"Katia Waldheim, born on January 7, 1968, in Hamburg."

Her voice rose. Katia was still not used to saying where she was from in West Germany.

"Fourteen years and five months old? That's young."

For the most part, Katia wondered if she was concerned about her petiteness. She was just under the height and weight limit, and she could only hope that her growth spurt would continue.

The conscription system in West Germany is basically for men and women over the age of 18. Although this military academy is open to men and women over the age of 14, there are probably only a few people like herself who left the Gymnasium ⁽⁶⁾ midway before taking the entrance exam. If you consider employment after your military retirement, it's common to apply after you have piled up a bit more of an academic background.

"Why did you apply instead of waiting to graduate from Gymnasium?"

"Because my parents died. It was a car accident."

"So you enlisted to make a living?"

"Yes."

"Work hard for the sake of your late parents."

Katia was a little surprised. She had planned to answer honestly from the beginning, but she thought she might be reprimanded for not giving a reason like "for humanity" or "for the fatherland".

"Now, next—"

At Frolov's urging, the girl sitting next to Katia stood up. She had reddish-brown hair and a beautiful face with excellent eyebrows. A small hair ornament suited her well, and you could sense her good upbringing at a glance. However, the girl had a swarthy expression on her face, as if she was challenging something.

"Zofi Veternik, born on January 8, 1968, in Essen."

Katia rolled her eyes. This girl was just as old as she was, and her birthday was only a day apart!

"So, shall we ask you why you volunteered as well?"

"I don't want to answer."

The unexpected answer froze the air in the room. Just a few moments ago, Frolov had said that her orders were absolute. The students' gazes were drawn to Zofi, though silently.

"What is your reason for not wanting to reply to your instructor?"

"I don't want to say the reason, sir."

Frolov's blue eyes narrowed.

"Did you not hear my explanation?"

"I've heard it. But the military is supposed to recognize the right of insubordination."

Right of insubordination — They were words Katia never heard of before.

"You are well informed, aren't you? Oh, this is a good opportunity. Let me explain the right of insubordination to all of you here. One of the principles of the German Bundeswehr [\[2\]](#) is that soldiers are also citizens and have basic human rights. This is a reflection of the fact that in World War II, soldiers were forced to obey their superiors and could not reject 'crimes against humanity'."

With a wry smile, Frolov began to explain, and all doubts were cleared up. That is the reason why Katia was not reprimanded.

"Based on the idea of being a citizen before being a soldier, choosing the military as a profession to lead a stable life is also an excellent reason. This is still the case today. Public opinion in our country is still very anti-war because of our history."

Katia doesn't have a deep knowledge of history and the military, but she could understand what Frolov was saying. At the Gymnasium in Hamburg, she was thoroughly taught about Germany's war crimes in modern times.

Germany is the country that caused World War I and II.

On top of that, it lost the war and caused great losses to its people. Especially in World War II, it committed the worst crime in the history of mankind, the policy of Jewish neglect (Holocaust) ⁽¹⁸⁾. It was the Nazis who committed this crime, not the German people, but as Germans, they cannot afford to repeat that mistake.

Perhaps because that is how they are educated — Katia felt that the general public in West Germany did not have a strong trust in the military. Her adoptive parents told her that this was the same reason why the draft age in West Germany had not yet been lowered, although it was difficult for her to explain, having had a military father.

It's natural to feel remorse, but at the same time, it feels as if blame is being laid in its entirety on people from the past. Katia could not decide if this was right or wrong.

"There is one more reason. The BETA are not human. They are the common enemy of mankind. Therefore, ethics on the battlefield must be held to a higher standard."

What does it mean that the common enemy of humanity requires high ethical standards?

"The war situation in Europe is worsening. Nations are losing their land, and there are large numbers of refugees. In this situation, some soldiers abandon civilians, some order civilians to be shielded, and some use refugees for human trafficking. Such actions will lead to the discrediting of the military. We cannot afford to make the same mistake as the Nazis. Of course, there are those who believe that this noble idea is not adapted to the reality of the war against BETA. But at the same time..."

Frolov looked at Zofi with a cold stare. Then —

"The right of insubordination is only granted when a superior officer orders an action that is against the law or humanity. — Well, was my question against the law or humanity? You can stand by your opinion, but if you lose in court, you will be accused of violating the order. As I said before, this case will be the joint responsibility of all the members of the team, so at worst, you will all be thrown out of the army."

The air froze again. Some of the trainees looked at Zofi with obvious disgust. Why is she being obtrusive, their gazes appealed in wonder

Zofi continued to stare at Frolov for a few more seconds, and then announced in an almost angry voice.

"My father is dead! I volunteered to make a living!"

"Speaking of Veternik, there is a coal mining company of the same name in Essen. I heard that the president committed suicide due to deteriorating business conditions.

Frolov said, as if she knew what Zofi would reply.

"..... That's my father."

Zofi replied. She didn't drop her gaze, nor did she duck back — she kept her eyes on the front. Zofi continued.

"I have no intention of becoming a weak human like my father."

They were words that lingered at the bottom of Katia's heart.

"Fu....."

With a sigh, Katia collapsed under the bunk bed. She knew it was bad manners, but her body was begging for it. It was 8:30 p.m. — her free time after dinner.

There were six bunk beds lined up in the room, evenly spaced. In this room, all the members of group D were supposed to live. Some of them were already lying down on the beds that had been assigned to them as well.

It was tough, but easier than I thought it would be — Katia thought absentmindedly as she laid on her back and stared at the ceiling of the bunk bed.

After the introductions, Katia and the other students were led around the base by Frolov. Then, after lunch, they received their supplies, were briefed on the schedule, learned how to organize their lockers and make their beds, learned the rules of roll call, and finished dinner.

Katia had a preconceived notion that it was natural to be abused in an educational program, but instead, she felt that she was treated with more care than expected.

"At this rate, I might be able to make it"

Her anxiety diminished, if only slightly, but the dinner wasn't good — it made her nostalgic for the meals with her adoptive parents. Hamburg, where Katia lived, was a port city, and fresh seafood was on the table every day.

The food at the training school resembled East German cooking — nutritious but unsophisticated. However, the simple menu reminded her of the modest dinners she had with her own father. Katia's cheeks naturally relaxed. Although the menu was inexpensive, eating with her father was the most enjoyable thing for her as a child. Every time he came back from a business trip, he would tell her tales of his travels to foreign countries. Those memories are nothing but treasures for her.

Lying down, Katia pulled out a pendant that she had kept in her pocket. Inside the entwined pendant is a picture of her father. Even though Katia's heart is filled with anxiety, the mere thought of the photo's presence reassures her. She thought that she may have a bolder personality than she once imagined.

In any case, she had already started walking towards her goal. Katia struck her eyes, thinking that she could not stop now. — then she felt someone climb up the ladder by her bed to the upper bunk. The occupant of the top bunk was Zofi Veternik. It was the girl whose birthday was one day different from her own.

Katia has not yet had a conversation with Zofi. It was hard to get close to her because she seemed to avoid strangers.

But, she didn't think that's right — Those who are different in a group are ostracized and become targets of bullying. Already the mood of the group against Zofi was hardening, and Katia had a bad feeling about it.

Katia thought about it here and now — Maybe if she could be shown talking to someone, she wouldn't be so alienated. Besides, Zofi said she didn't like her father. Katia wanted to ask her what she meant by that. But for the time being, She had to be careful not to mention her father's suicide — it would still be too early in their relationship to ask that.

"Hey, you there."

Katia felt her shoulders shake. It wasn't because she had been caught off guard, but because the tone of voice she heard sounded just like her classmates at Gymnasium, with whom she had had a falling out. As she half-raised her head, she realized that three students were standing by her bed, talking to Zofi on the top bunk.

Among the three was Josephine Zelewski, who had been chosen as the leader of Team D. Josephine was waiting for Zofi's reply with a frown on her face. Katia's stomach grew heavy as she anticipated what would happen next. The expression on Josephine's face was familiar to Katia.

From the ceiling, The sound of Zofi getting up was heard.

"Please come down. I'd like to have a word with you."

Josephine urged in a stiff voice.

"I'm tired. Let's talk later."

The sound of lying down again from the ceiling was heard. Katia had a bad feeling — Josephine gave instructions to her companions while letting out a deliberate sigh. Then, the team member who received Josephine's order climbed up the ladder vigorously and forcibly dragged Zofi's body down from the bed.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Josephine returned Zofi's protest coldly.

"That's our line. — Are you out of your mind to challenge your instructor? What were you going to do if it became the responsibility of Team D?"

"Responsibility of the Team? Aren't you the one who doesn't want the responsibility of being the group leader?"

Katia thought that was harsh. Josephine was violent, but it seemed that Zofi was also picking a fight.

"Certainly, I feel a responsibility as the one who was entrusted with the duty of squad leader. I volunteered to be a pilot as a member of the aristocracy. I can't stand to be disturbed by a halfwit like you."

"Oh yeah? If I am convinced, I will comply, if not, I will not. Unfortunately, your aspirations are none of my business."

"I'm going to make Team D's results the best among their peers. Any other result will not be tolerated by my pride."

"Aristocrats can be so vain, can't they? I'm not one of your peasants, or do you think that being born a noblewoman means that you can automatically order everyone around?"

A dry sound popped. It was Josephine's right hand on Zofi's cheek.

"Can't you cut it already? You have my sympathies for losing your parent, but please don't direct your frustration at me."

Katia thought reflexively that this had to stop. Josephine has been deliberately pinching Zofi's wounds. This is a sign that things are about to get out of hand, but can she intervene here? It was only when she mediated in her classmate's quarrel that she started to feel out of place in Gymnasium.

"Is that all you have to say? I've got an early day tomorrow and I'm tired, can I go lie down?"

While Katia was deliberating, Zofi was opening her mouth as if nothing had happened.

Josephine was at a loss for words at the unexpected provocation. The next moment, seeing Josephine's cheeks turn red with anger, Katia jumped between them on the spur of the moment.

"No, you can't! You have to stop fighting!"

Katia spread both of her arms and became Zofi's shield. She harboured fear and regret — but there was no way she was going to back down now. Josephine seemed to be taken aback for a moment, but she was soon able to take off Katia hatefully.

"Katia Waldheim.....! Are you taking the side of Zofi Veternik?"

"No! I stopped the violence because I thought it was wrong!"

"It's not violence, it's correction! It's my job as a team leader!"

"Violence is violence, no matter how you put it! Let's talk first! We can't win against the BETA unless we work together! We have to get along! We all need to work together...!"

"Work together and get along You're telling me to get along with that dispirited person?"

Josephine's gaze sent a chill down Katia's spine.

"..... We are members of the same team, so I think we should discuss and negotiate properly."

It felt like a declaration, but, more than that, Katia didn't want to see strife between others anymore.

"..... As you may know, if they pay lazy people and hardworking people the same salary, it will turn into a country of slothful people."

Josephine coughed quietly and grabbed Katia by the chest.

"I don't like communism. I mean, gimme a break! It's only natural that those who work hard should be recognized and those who are lazy should be eliminated! I'm not going to defend the rights of the unmotivated, just like East Germany!"

"East Germany is not a communist country, it's a socialist country [\(8\)](#)."

"I don't care! Please don't utter a positive word about communism in front of me."

"But we're neighbours...! And we're originally from the same ethnic group."

"My grandfather's family used to live in Pomerania, Poland [\(9\)](#), but they were expelled by the Soviet Army! He lost all the land and property that his ancestors had worked so hard to cultivate! At that time, my grandmother was raped by Soviet soldiers. Shortly before she passed away, my grandmother instructed me in tears not to believe the Soviets and the Communists!"

Josephine tightened her arms even more, as if she was offended.

"I can't forgive the Communists who instilled such a painful memory in my grandmother!"

"Bu...., but it was the Nazis who were responsible for"

"My grandfather was a Wehrmacht [\(10\)](#) officer, but he disapproved of the Nazis! During the war, he only followed military orders as an expression of duty and loyalty to his country! Please don't lump us together.!"

Katia couldn't say anything. The finger that was digging into her throat was physically blocking her from arguing, so she kept her eyes on Josephine, trying not to lose at least her will. Perhaps she didn't like that — as Josephine brought her face up to five centimetres away.

"If you go that far, then you should take care of Zofi Veternik. I will report to the instructor. If you are aiming to become a pilot, you must take responsibility for your words."

It was impossible for her to speak while her neck was still tightened, but Josephine took Katia's stance as an affirmation and added in a triumphant manner.

"Also, from tomorrow you will be known as communist (Red) [\(11\)](#). The daughter of a capitalist dropout and a communist (Red), don't you think it's a well-matched pair?"

Her entourage started blubbering out adulation remarks, and those who had gathered to hear the commotion started laughing as well. Josephine then walked out of the room. Maybe she really was headed for the instructor's office.

I have done it again, I am always like this. I should compromise more, but I can't. I just can't go against what's in my heart. Katia thought.

But for the time being, the storm has passed — Sighing out mixed thoughts, Katia turned to look at Zofi behind her. Zofi had an uncomfortable, yet displeased expression on her face.

".....Are you okay where you got hit?"

Katia didn't know what to say to her. It was unnatural, she thought to herself, but she couldn't find any other words.

"Are you stupid? I didn't ask for your help."

With that personality, it was understandable why Josephine would hit Zofi.

"But, violence is no good. I can't just turn a blind eye!"

"Are you planning to get involved in anything and everything like that?"

"Well, not exactly, but"

Katia couldn't continue her words from there because she just reflected on herself.

"Enough. I know you're an imprudent person, and that you're a softie to the core."

"Unfortunately, I'm often told that"

"Anyway, don't get involved with me. Even if that noblewoman gets involved, there's no need to come to my aid."

"But Josefine-san asked me to look after Zofi-san..."

"Asked? You That's"

Zofi exhaled in disgust. Without replying, she put her hand on the ladder of the bunk bed.

"Oh, um, ...!"

Katia called out reflexively.

Zofi stopped and asked, "What?"

"I know it's an inconvenient question, but do you hate your father?"

After a short pause, Zofi coughed.

"I hate him.....He always neglected his family. Furthermore, dying while leaving debts behind makes you the worst scum of a human being."

There was unmistakable anger in Zofi's voice.

"That's why, I'm going to take a different path from my father."

"You are the students selected as pilot candidates."

Instructor Frolov's voice echoed through the quiet auditorium.

"Only a limited number of people can be pilot cadets. First of all, please think about the significance of this. The reason why cadets are selected is because of the high value of the TSF that they control. TSF have the mobility of planes and the firepower of tanks, and are the trump card in the war against BETA. But on the other hand, they are also much more expensive than planes and tanks. And like other weapons, tactical machines are financed by taxes paid by citizens. Therefore, the pilots who operate TSFs must be worthy of such military and cost value."

It was typical of West Germany, Katia thought, to include money in the explanation.

Citizens contribute to the state by paying taxes, and the state is obligated to use these taxes to guarantee the livelihood of its citizens. That is why citizens must pay attention to how the state spends their taxes, and the state must be aware of it. Katia remembered learning something like that in social studies class at Gymnasium.

Come to think of it — Katia suddenly thought. The people in East Germany didn't seem to be very interested in how their taxes were spent. The necessities of life were supplied by the state at a reasonable price, and the welfare system was adequate.

West Germans may call it overprotective and a social system that dampens competitiveness, but Katia, who is from East Germany, feels that neither is wrong. Nevertheless, It was true, however, that she was still a child at that time, so she was almost never aware of taxes.

"That is why you will be required to work harder than other soldiers. In the first three months, you will acquire the basics of being a soldier, knowledge and physical strength. After that, you will be trained to fly TSFs. Please remember that I will not let you touch a TSF until you become full-fledged soldiers."

Frolov smiled, but Katia felt uneasy.

Katia honestly, was not very confident in her physical strength. Her athleticism was not that great, and while she was able to play table tennis and tennis reasonably well, She has never been good at events that require basic physical strength, such as long-distance running and the shot put.

For the rest of the week, she repeated her daily routine of classroom lectures in the morning and field training for physical fitness in the afternoon.

Frolov put the students through a rigorous - but not unattainable - training regimen that made the physical education classes at Gymnasium seem like child's play.

The training menu was varied and creative, and even a single run was a mixture of dashes, jogs, backward runs, and skips. What Katia found most demanding was that Frolov never mentioned the distance or time it would take to complete the run.

It's already been an hour since Katia started running, and she's managed to stay in line, but was already at the limit of her strength and it felt like she was about to collapse. The weather, unlike the day of her inauguration, was abominably sunny. Sweat was pouring down her forehead like a waterfall. The pain in her side was unbearable, and her head was completely blank from lack of oxygen. Still, she was determined to keep moving her legs.

Even though her team was running at the same time as the ones that were advancing in the lead, she was not breathing evenly at all.

"Team D, you are slowing down! Pick it up!" Frolov clamoured

Most of the students shouted "Yes, sir" at the same time. Katia also managed to respond aloud.

"Team D, March while singing in unison. (March Lied)! ⁽¹²⁾ Student Zelewski, name your tune!"

"I'd like to sing 'Panzerlied'! ⁽¹³⁾ It was my grandfather's favourite!"

"Rejected! 'Panzerlied' is a politically controversial song that was sung by the Armed SS. It is forbidden to be sung publicly by the West German military!"

"Then I would like 'Lili Marleen'!" ⁽¹⁴⁾

It was a popular song in Germany during the war.

All right! 'Lili Marleen' it is. begin!"

The students began to sing 'Lili Marleen'. 'Lili Marleen' was a song about a male soldier's feelings for his girlfriend back home, which was not the most appropriate marching song for the all-female D group. However, since it was originally sung by a female singer, there was a strange harmony.

Then the running continued, while changing the song several times.

It was hard to shout while running, but Katia still felt like her energy was coming back. She had always liked to sing, and even in East Germany, she frequently sang in the chorus as part of the youth group (Pioneer) ⁽¹⁵⁾ activities.

This is why they like to sing in the military. She thought.

Turning around, she saw that Zofi had fallen behind the ranks of Team D, following a few dozen meters behind.

She managed to keep running, but she was very slow. It wasn't that she was cutting corners, but she was out of breath and looked to be in a lot of pain.

Katia slowed down and got in line with Zofi. Contrary to her bullish attitude, Zofi's physical strength was even lower than Katia's. When it came to running, she was the first to fall behind, and she often lagged behind others in other outdoor training sessions.

"Are you all right, Zofi-san?"

Katia asked. Zofi's breathing was ragged and uneven. She didn't seem to have the energy to answer. Suddenly, she fell down.

"Zofi-san, ..."

Katia rushed to help her up. Apparently, she had stepped on the untied laces of her running shoes. Fortunately, she didn't seem to be injured, but Zofi had a frustrated look on his face and tried to get up.

"Please wait! The laces on your shoes are still...."

Katia hurriedly restrained her, but she started running without saying a word.

"It's not safe!"

She reached for Zofi's arm, but was quickly shaken free. Katia was so stubborn that she grabbed her hand again.

"It's dangerous, please tie the string!"

"Let go of"

"But it's not safe if you don't tie the string! You'll fall down again...!"

Don't be so boringly stubborn. Katia thought to say, but quickly held back. The moment the movement stopped, Katia thought that Zofi understood her.

"I don't understand!"

It was a scream. Zofi's breathing was rough, and tears filled her eyes.

"You don't understand...What..."

"I've never tied my own shoelaces! I've always had a maid do it for me...!"

Katia was immensely surprised. She knew that Zofi came from a wealthy family, but she had never expected it to go this far.

"Wait a minute!"

Katia crouched down and quickly reached for Zofi's shoes. How did she become a soldier, Katia had no idea.

"Don't touch me! I don't need your pity.!"

Zofi's legs flailed like a toddler's, and the mud splashed up on Katia's face.

"We have to hurry! Don't be so stubborn!"

She grabbed Zofi's ankles as hard as she could and shouted.

"I'll teach you how to tie your shoelaces later! Learn it to heart, or you will get seriously hurt!"

Zofi's body froze astonishingly. Katia re-tied her shoelaces after reading that her muscle stiffness has diminished her willingness to resist. She couldn't look up at Zofi's face.

"Student Waldheim, Student Veternik!"

Frolov shouted angrily — Katia stood up, after tightening the shoelaces as hard as she could.

"Get back in formation now! Two more laps will be added to compensate for the gap of endurance!"

"Yes, Sir!"

Katia responded with a shout, then she grabbed Zofi's hand and started running.

Compared to the field training, the classroom training was a breeze. There is no problem, as long as you don't get overwhelmed by the desire to sleep due to the daily fatigue.

"The German Bundeswehr is divided into four main branches."

Instructor Frolov, standing in front of the whiteboard, was explaining the textbook in a sonorous manner. Today's classroom lecture was on the origins of the German Bundeswehr.

"The Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Regional Defense Forces. The other three are under the command of the European Union, formerly NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). This means that only the regional defence forces can be independently mobilized by the German federal government at its own discretion."

According to the schedule distributed, a lot of time was to be devoted to the historical and ideological background of the West German military.

"The reason for this distinctive chain of command is the influence of World War II. After the Cold War, the German Bundeswehr was created to counter the growing threat of the socialist camp, but European countries wanted the three armies to be under the command of NATO, the international organization for Europe, rather than under the direction of the German government, to prevent the possibility of Germany starting another war. This situation continues to this day during the BETA war."

It was a West German force, but not under the command of the West German government — Katia had mixed feelings.

She wondered what it was like in East Germany — the memory of her grandmother taking her to see the Soviet military parade in Berlin came back. Her father was in charge of the security of the parade at that time and could not come back home for a while. The citizens were generally friendly, and she well remembered the boys cheering every time a tank went by.

"The number of troops in the German Army, the mainstay of the Bundeswehr, is also set by the European Union. During the Cold War, the number of troops was set at twelve tank armoured gunboat divisions. Currently, the lessons of Operation Palaiologos have allowed for an increase in the number of divisions, and work is underway to revise the organization, but this restriction has not been lifted."

Frolov lowered her eyebrows slightly.

"Thus the presence of the three armies has become inseparable from the European Union forces. Let me add an explanation. When the German Bundeswehr came into being, public opinion also wanted NATO to take over command of the army. This was also due to the public's distrust of the military because of World War II. Another reason is that the current German Bundeswehr's existence itself is not defined by the simple framework of the "national army of West Germany," but rather as a "military force supplied by West Germany for the peace and security of Europe as a whole."

Katia could kind of understand the civic sentiment, but she wondered if it really was the right thing to do.

For her, a direct connection lies between her father and the military, so she wondered whether she needed to be so vigilant or not, or is it that she just doesn't see the true nature of the military....

"Now, here's my question. I explained that the three armies, land, sea and air, are under the command of the European Union forces. Now, what kind of mission is the last one, the Regional Defense Force, undertaking? You can imagine. Raise your hand if you have an opinion."

Several students raised their hands. This included Zofi and Josephine, but Katia did not move her hand. She knew that raising her hand would be evaluated positively, but she had no idea what the Regional Defense Force was, and more importantly, she was not in the mood for it.

"Student Zelewski."

"I think it's border security. Even though we are in a war against BETA, there is always the possibility that East German communists will try to infiltrate West Germany with the intention of terrorism. The year before last, there was a terrorist attack by the German Red Army in Bonn. I suspect that the government has command authority because of this political mission."

"I see. So, does anyone else have an opinion?"

Everyone but Zofi had their hands down.

"So, student Veternik."

"For the defence of the civilian population against the BETA."

Zofi assured her clearly.

"The Regional Defense Force is another army of sorts. I remember that the current force is 12 brigades in a state of inactivity, and in terms of numbers, it is no less powerful than the German Army. With the main force of the East German armed forces being directed to the east, there is no other reason why a regional defence force with this level of strength should continue to exist under the command of the German federal government after the end of the Cold War."

Frolov smiled at the response.

"Student Veternik's answer is the correct one."

Katia heard a small click of the tongue, and when she looked over, the owner of the sound was Josephine.

"As Student Veternik answered, the Regional Defense Force is supposed to be a force for the defence of the citizens. However, at present, there are only permanent headquarters personnel and a TSF battalion, while the other branches of the military - one tank battalion and one armoured gunnery battalion - are not fully manned and only have equipment in storage. This shortage of personnel is to be filled by reservists who will be mobilized in case of an emergency. The organization is expected to be completed in four days after the mobilization is issued."

The term "reservist" refers to a person enrolled in the armed forces who lives in civilian society during peacetime, but returns to the military upon mobilization in times of emergency. In general, it is often applied to retired military personnel.

This system was designed to fill the gap between the number of troops needed in peacetime and in times of crisis, and to do so in a short period of time. In many European countries that have not yet been directly exposed to the ravages of BETA, this reserve system has left a large number of reservists as a pool of human resources for emergencies. According to Frolov, West Germany still does not have a full-scale

mobilization of reservists, reflecting the need to secure labour and the anti-military attitudes of its citizens.

To Katia, this did not seem like the policy of a nation that was facing an imminent threat from BETA. According to Frolov's explanation, however, the reduction in the labour force due to large-scale mobilization would lead to a decline in the nation's economic power, and if the mobilization were to proceed forcefully, it might provoke anti-military sentiment among the citizens, so the mobilization had to be done cautiously.

"The acquisition of the Regional Defense Force was of great significance to our country during the Cold War because it was the only force at the disposal of the West German government, and it allowed West Germany to use its own troops for civil defence, regardless of NATO's wishes."

Even our allies in the West don't trust the West German military. That's why the West German government has created a low-hitting military organization separate from the national army to defend its citizens — Katia was putting her thoughts in order.

"More specifically, it is to be used as a shield for the huge number of refugees that would almost certainly be generated in the event of a full-scale invasion of West Germany by Warsaw Pact forces. Of course, this includes the assumption of all-out nuclear war."

Katia was speechless — Frolov's definition of a regional defence force is one that is called upon to shield refugees even as tactical nuclear weapons fly wildly in the air. They are sent to protect civilians, even in places where damage is clearly expected. It is a common practice for the military to go to great lengths to protect its citizens, but she had never imagined that this would also apply in a nuclear war. It is far beyond what can be described by the word "heroic".

"Of course, the mission against the BETA remains the same."

Frolov continued, warning the students who were just as shocked as Katia.

"In the event of a BETA invasion of West Germany, the Regional Defense Forces would be the first to be called upon to act as civilian shields. It does not matter if it is the Soviet Union or the BETA. Also, if the U.S. military intervenes, tactical nuclear weapons will be used."

There are no tactical nuclear weapons deployed in West Germany today, at least not officially, but as an instructor, Frolov spoke of the possibility of having nuclear weapons in the country. Katia understood the depth of what that implied.

"There is an argument to be made that the German Army under the command of the European Union Army should be responsible for these tasks. However, the European Union Army, like the entire German Federal Armed Forces, is a force 'for the defence of Europe as a whole, and there is no certainty that it will deploy forces purely for the defence of West Germany in the event of a BETA invasion.'"

The students listened to Frolov's words without making a sound.

"The fact is that in the early days of the Cold War, the West abandoned the defence of West Germany, intending to fight a defensive war on the Rhine River on the border of France, and even within the current European Union military, there is a strong opinion that West Germany should be the main battlefield for the defence of Central Europe. If this were to happen, not only would the West German land be lost, but the civilian population would be exposed to the suspicion of the enemy. In preparation for such a worst-case scenario, the German federal government acquired this unique military force after persistent negotiations with European countries."

"There is no guarantee that the European Union will protect the citizens of West Germany", Frolov said to the students, who were turning pale at the thought of the possibility.

"And as mentioned, each brigade of the Regional Defense Force has one tactical armoured battalion, and this force is the only permanent unit that does not rely on reserve mobilization to fill its ranks. The reason for this is that the high level of specialization and extreme wear and tear on the pilots makes it impossible to have a pool of reserve personnel, and our Pilot Junior Cadet Academy is directly under the Ministry of Defence, and is required to replenish both the Army and the Regional Defense Forces with pilots. This means that half of you could be sent to the regional defence forces, and the other half could be asked to fight for the European Union, not West Germany."

She swallowed her spit.

"In the education of other branches of the military, we do not go into this level of detail about the duties of the West German army. Since you are pilots deployed in the army and regional defence forces, we have decided that you should be taught the reality. Please think carefully about the meaning of this and work hard in your training as pilots.

Frolov closed her mouth there and looked at the students. The students all seemed to realize the weight and complexity of the role they had been assigned as West German military pilots..

If they were incorporated into the Regional Defense Forces, they would serve as shields to protect not only their own citizens but also refugees from the east, and if they were incorporated into the German Army, they would operate at the convenience of NATO, which prioritizes the defence of all of Europe over the mainland of West Germany.

If East Germany is crushed by the BETA offensive and the defence of the West German mainland begins, a harsh situation awaits either way. Considering the origins of the West German army, Katia can see why this is reasonable — but not easily convincing. However, she had other thoughts.

So when Frolov asked, "Any questions so far? Katia quickly raised her hand.

"Student Waldheim."

She could feel the students' eyes on her, yet couldn't help but ask.

"Um, is there any chance of West German troops being sent out of the country?"

"Good question" — Frolov's expression seemed to slightly harden.

"As mentioned earlier, the West German Armed Forces are a military force that was established "for the peace and security of Europe as a whole. Therefore, as long as this condition is met, the deployment of West German troops abroad is legally permissible."

"There used to be controversy over the interpretation of this law", Frolov added.

"At present, the West German army is under the command of the United Nations, and some troops have been sent to various countries in Eurasia. In this case, they will leave the command of the European Union forces, but this does not change the fact that the troops sent are not under the command of the federal government."

"How do you select your personnel and units?"

The classroom was buzzing. The prejudice that Katia is a communist sympathizer has been spread to all the students by Josephine's work.

"There are many forms. In some cases, we recruit volunteers, and in others, we receive designations from European Union forces."

"Are there any troops being deployed to the GDR — East Germany?"

A faint chuckle was heard.

"It's been done, but it's a very small force."

Frolov spoke clearly.

"Why is that? Even though we've been separated, they're still our people, aren't they?"

"I think that girl wants to be sent to the communist bloc [\(16\)](#)." Katia could imagine the source of the voice without even looking at her.

"This is because the East German government does not want to accept troops from the Western camp. The current number of troops is only barely acceptable due to the UN arbitration, and it is safe to say that most of the troops are only from countries in the eastern camp."

Even if she wasn't hurt, Katia felt pain in her chest. The regime in East Germany has not changed.

"So we are looking for ways to defend Europe that don't include collaboration with Eastern European countries."

Frolov ended the question and answer session with that response.

"Father, ..."

At the end of the lecture, Katia stared at her notes, which summarized the content of the lecture, and coughed in an inarticulate voice. This day's lecture contained important hints for Katia.

She wondered what her father was doing now. She hadn't heard from him in years. As expected, at her age, she had an idea of what her father was up to. However, it was far from the image of the warm-hearted father that Katia knew, and that's why she couldn't help but feel uneasy. It felt as if everything was changing without her knowledge. In order to get rid of that feeling...

"Hey, you."

Suddenly, a voice called out to Katia, making her spine stiffen. The person who called out to her was Zofi.

"What's wrong?"

It didn't seem she heard her clear her throat.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I was a little surprised ... So do you have something to do with me ...?"

"No, I was just curious, ... do you really want to go to East Germany?"

It's the most straightforward question she has ever been asked. However, considering the quality of the question she had just asked, it was only natural that Zofi would take it that way. Katia instantly thought that denying the question would make it sound fake, so she responded with an amiable smile.

"Ahaha.....! Actually, that's right! I'm very interested in East Germany! I have relatives there, and I went to visit them when I was little!

Katia was not lying. Her father's side of the family - the Strachwitzes- are a prolific family and have plenty of blood relatives. She had several relatives of the same age, and remembered playing with them as a child. Besides, when she was very young, she was left at her mother's side of the family because her father was very busy.

"Lo ...look! In the past, it was easier to go east than now, right? If you use Mark, you're welcome, right? It seems to be a lot of work to get here from the other side, though!"

"..... Sounds great, East Germany. I'd like to go there myself."

Katia rolled up the topic pretty quickly, but Zofi seemed to agree with her. It was the first time since she came here that she had heard a West German say that they wanted to go to East Germany. That question must have shown on her face. Zofi explained more.

"Don't get me wrong. I don't admire communism. I just want to be somewhere other than here. At least it would be more comfortable than West Germany."

"Haha, I'm not a communist either."

"Since my father died, I've been through a succession of worthless affairs. I was hounded by debt collectors, I sold my house, and I quit school. My mom got physically ill and was taken back to her parents' house. The executives at the company didn't want to help us, even though they sold so many prostitutes when my father was still alive It's true, truly worthless."

Zofi said as she spat out.

"We were able to outsource the repayment of our debts to a friend of my father's who was tasked with restructuring the company, but that was it. There was nothing left for us. So I decided to join the army and become a pilot. I thought I could earn money while studying, and at least people wouldn't think I was the same person as my father. My father was a man who worked all the time and had no love for us. In the end, he died with everything on our shoulders. I hope he goes to hell safely."

"No wonder he committed suicide", Zofi concluded, while stroking her hair ornament.

Katia had nothing to respond to. Those who commit suicide go to hell — it was difficult for Katia to sympathize, being born in East Germany, a country that half denies religion, but she understood that many West German citizens are Christian.

"So I just figured East Germany wouldn't be too bad. I mean, if I could go anywhere but West Germany, it would be fine."

Zofi had a look on her face that said, "It's a real shithole of a country".

"..... You knew a lot about the Regional Defence Forces then, didn't you?"

Katia remembered that Zofi had talked about the right of insubordination when she introduced herself. Maybe, just maybe, Zofi had studied a lot before joining the army.

"My father's company funded anti-war civic groups, so there were a lot of people around me who knew a lot about it. I didn't really like them, though."

I don't know what we're talking about when the BETA is closing in on us, Zofi added. Then she bent her mouth temporarily.

"You're not like me. I heard that your parents were misfortunate, but it was not their fault. I don't include you in that, but I do envy you. At least it's not like that selfish guy who keeps bothering me even after he's dead."

The way Zofi was talking, Katia was beginning to think that, no matter how you look at it, she was being too harsh on her father.

"Is that really the case ...? Maybe there was some reason he couldn't tell his family?"

Katia knew that her words would probably upset Zofi, but she still wanted to say it.

"I don't think there are many fathers who would abandon their own daughters."

Zofi's eyes narrowed.

"What do you know about it?"

"Well, I don't know. I'm sorry, I just wanted to say it."

Katia apologized obediently. When she raised her bowed head, Zofi bursted into laughter. It seems that Katia's flip-flop was too quick. It was the first smile that Katia had ever seen on Zofi's face, albeit with a bitter smile.

"Hey, you ... I don't know if you're a philanthropist or a believer of the innate goodness in others, but think a little more before you talk. If you do that, you'll be hated just like me."

Katia also replied with a smile.

"I'm fine. I'm used to being hated by my classmates at my old school. Just like Zofi-san.!"

"Don't be like me. I said I wanted to go to East Germany, but I don't like left-leaning [\(17\)](#) people. If I hadn't donated to that anti-war group, I might have been able to reduce my debt a little.

"Hahaha"

She laughed as a sign of reconciliation and showed her approval.

Zofi stared at the shoelaces with a dark expression.

"After all, The me of now, maybe not be good enough."

That afternoon, a long-distance march training was held in the open air. The teams carried the same equipment as the regular infantry and walked for over 20 kilometres. The total weight of the equipment was 30 kilos — lighter than the full infantry gear, but still a lot of hard work for the students who had only been in the army a short time. In addition, they were not allowed to touch the ration and water bottles, which was like bullying, and Katia was exhausted from the bottom of her heart.

It seemed unreasonable, but she had no intention of disobeying her instructor's orders. The desire to drink water was strong, but since it was forbidden by order, she resigned herself to the fact that she had no choice. Physiologically speaking, it was wrong not to drink water during a march. However, in an actual battle, there may be times when water is not available, so decided to relish in the experience. At that point, Katia would have thought the mission was a failure, but she guessed that's the way it is in the military. With her consciousness turned into a membrane, Katia managed to roll into her destination.

It was just after they got back to the base - a little after 7:00 p.m., six hours after their departure.

Frolov stood in front of Katia and the others as they lined up in the lighted drill hall. Even though she had participated in the training under the same conditions as Katia and the others, she did not look any different.

She felt an unpleasant sensation, but it didn't last long before the fatigue overwhelmed her. Her throat was parched and it was hard to even breathe. Anyway, after Frolov's training summary, Katia could drink water. Besides, tomorrow would be the first day off with permission for the cadets to go out, and once this training was over, they could truly relax. Her mind was already focused on that.

"Team D, all hands on deck!"

Frolov announced, looking around at everyone.

"Take your water bottles off your belts."

Everyone moved slowly, but as ordered. The canteen, which had not been opened once during the march, was heavy.

Katia glanced at Zofi next to her — somehow, she had gone pale.

The next order came shortly thereafter.

The water flowed down from the upside-down canteen, creating a puddle of water on the ground.

However, Zofi's water bottle was different. Just a single drop of water had spilled out and the flow had stopped completely. One by one, more and more people noticed this fact, and soon everyone's eyes, including Frolov's, were on Zofi.

"Student Zofi Veternik."

Frolov called out to Zofie in a cold voice.

"I'm sure you've been informed that hydration is forbidden during this training?"

Zofi's body trembled. Katia was not sure if Zofi decided that she couldn't even respond, but Frolov turned her gaze to the squad leader, Josephine.

"Student Zelewski, what is the meaning of this? This training is not only to march long distances, but also to develop the mental strength to endure difficult situations for a long time. Some of you don't understand that and break the orders — what do you think of this as the leader of D squad?"

"I... I am deeply sorry! But, this is Student Veternik's"

Her expression contorted, Josephine tried to defend herself by standing upright.

"A TSF unit requires a high degree of coordination. Therefore, each of you must be aware of the situation not only of yourself, but also of your colleagues, platoons, and squadrons. And yet, you overlooked the actions of your squadron members."

Frolov looked around at everyone again and then announced in a cold voice.

"As I told you before, everything is a joint responsibility. As an instructor, I cannot allow you to disregard this awareness. If you see a fellow student in distress, call out to them. If you are in pain, ask someone for help. That's the level of communication you lack, isn't it?"

Katia felt a pain in her chest. She was the one who was closest to Zofi.

Frolov said, exhaling tiredly.

"The permission to go out tomorrow has been revoked. Everyone is to remain on base. Dismissed!"

No one said a word. Frolov walked away in brilliance. Eventually, some of the students began to trudge away. Zofi stood there silently, biting her lips.

"Zofi-san, ..."

Katia called out to her, but didn't know how to continue beyond that. She just felt responsible. She should have realized this. She should have realized it and stopped Zofi.

"Um, I'm.....!"

The next moment, Katia was being choked by someone. Zofi was also yanked by her backpack from behind and fell over. The backpack was stripped down, and her limbs were also held down.

They were Josephine's cronies who made Zofi fall. In addition, there were students who had not joined Josephine's circle before.

"What are you doing! Let go of me! Get off of me!"

"I'm not letting you go, you piece of shit.!"

Josephine announced as she spat.

"You broke your instructor's orders, you humiliated me and to make matters worse, everyone's permission to go out was....!"

She walked up to Zofi and looked down at her with a furious expression.

"We were all looking forward to it! Some of us were going to go home to our families! It's all your fault.! It's all your fault, ..."

"Wait!"

Katia shouted.

"It's not right to talk like that! Zofi-san indeed broke the order, but as the instructor said, everyone should be held responsible! — Of course, me too!"

"You're a communist, don't talk to me like you know what you're talking about! I'm just a squad leader educating my comrades!"

"Communism has nothing to do with this! Besides, this isn't education, it's just bullying, isn't it?"

A war movie flash-back — the excited students are terrified. Katia was very conscious that she must not be consumed by fear.

"I don't care what you say, as long as this piece of shit listens to me!"

Josephine looked hatefully into Zofi's face.

"I'm going to beat you up. No, that's going to leave a scar. Then I'll cut off that long hair of yours, or....."

Josephine then grabbed Zofi's hair ornament with vigour.

"Shall I trample it down?"

Zofi's face twisted in fear.

Katia crouched down suddenly and escaped from the arms of the student who was holding her. She continued to rush towards Josephine — snatching the hair ornament and tumbling to the ground.

"Katia Waldheim...! You"

"Of course it's useless!"

Katia shouted at Josephine.

"I'm sure this is very important to Zofi-san! You can't destroy it. Absolutely not!"

There was no logic to it — she just sensed it from the expression on Zofi's face.

"You're protecting her?"

"Zofi-san is one of us! If you're in the same class, you should be helping each other out, right?"

The situation did not change, though she was desperately appealing. The entourage was getting excited and couldn't control their emotions anymore.

"Everyone makes mistakes! We're training to make fewer mistakes, right? Then..."

Someone threw up in Zofi's face. This spurred Josephine to action.

"If someone who works well with others makes a mistake, no one will take it so seriously! That's the problem with Zofi Veternik! An individual's selfishness can bring down an entire army!"

Josephine's story made sense, but at any rate, this seemed like an overreaction.

It was very similar to the act of slaughtering prey to relieve stress, which is peculiar to when a group excludes an individual.

"There is no such thing as a perfect person! I, Josephine, and all of you make mistakes.! The important thing is that Zofi-san learns from this failure, not our condemnation, right!? — If you still want to hit Zofi-san, only those who can say they will never make a mistake should hit her!"

The students stopped moving at Katia's exclamation.

Katia could feel everyone's eyes on her. Zofi, who was still pinned down, was also looking at Katia.

"So, until the end, you still take her side?"

It was Josephine who was the first to speak out of the silent group.

"Because I believe it is the right thing to do. ...I'll appeal to Instructor Frolov if you want to keep your vigilantism."

For a short while, Josephine felt outlasted and couldn't put up with Katia's stubbornness, so she looked away from her eyes as if she couldn't take it anymore.

However, Josephine was also stubborn. In the same vein, she grabbed Zofi's hair with her left hand, took out a knife with her right hand, and quickly calmed it down beside her.

"Oh, ...!"

Her hair fell to the ground, torn into flakes.

"..... That's all for today's forbearance. If you want to tell the instructor, do it. It seems to be your favourite kind of total responsibility after all."

Josephine left angrily with her entourage. The rest of the classmates followed suit, as if reading the mood, and in less than a few tens of seconds, Zofi and Katia were the only students left in the drill hall.

"Zofi-san, um, ..."

Katia was about to call out to Zofi — but was speechless.

Zofi was crying. She was crying as she stared at her hair, which was scattered on the ground.

Katia watched in silence.

".....Why are you defending me?"

No matter what anyone says — Katia thought a bit. Considering what she was trying to do here, it was better to keep a low profile, yet still, she helped Zofi.

"I'm just a scum who's always causing trouble for everyone."

Tears soaked Zofi's clenched fists. Scum of a human being — Katia remembered what Zofi had said about her father.

"I wasn't like this. I was naive, but I got along well with everyone. Everyone liked me. I had a brighter personality."

"Zofi-san..."

"But I can't remember myself like that anymore. I don't even have the confidence to go back to being that person again, so I'm going to beat myself up, I cheated and I'm not worth anything."

A sorrowful whimper followed. There was nothing Katia could say. She could only watch for a while as Zofi cried. The wind was whirling around the empty ground.

Katia wondered, for how long Zofi had been crying. Eventually, she wiped away her tears and coughed with all her might.

"But, running away from this place is something that's even more detestable for me... I want to be me.... not the daughter of that father, only me, Zofi Veternik."

Katia reflexively tightened her grip on Zofi's hand. In her hand was Zofi's hair ornament, which she had snatched back from Josephine earlier.

Why did she try to protect Zofi — that's obvious. Katia finally understood the root of her own heart.

She sympathizes with Zofi Veternik. Timid, stubborn, and helplessly self-loathing, just like her. While grasping Zofi's hand tightly, Katia said....

"Let's do our best together. I'm also a dullard, but let's both do our best and get Josephine and the others' approval."

"Not prove ourselves?"

"Proving ourselves superior will just turn into revenge. I want to be friends with Josephine-san and the others, not just with Zofi-san."

Katia couldn't seem to make herself hate others no matter how much they hate her. She has a secret in her heart, and feels that other people are doing so because of some inexplicable circumstances. So, she couldn't hate even that mean Josephine from the bottom of her heart.

"If we work together, there's nothing we can't do! I'm sure Josephine-san will understand!"

Zofi was silent for a while, but then asked as she looked away from Katia...

"You can't be that kind to others. How can you so confidently assert your own opinion?"

Her heart raced. Katia put her hand on her chest. She wondered why she was able to say it so proudly. The answer was obvious: it was not her weak and pathetic self, but her strong and kind father's words.

"Someone....."

She thought for a moment about whether she could use the word "father", but she knew that she couldn't leave out her father if she spoke these words.

"No, My father ... used to say — If you want people to believe in you, you have to believe in **yourself** first. If you want people to believe in you, you have to believe in **them** first. If you want people to believe in you, you have to make an **effort** to make them believe in you."

Tears spilled from Zofi's eyes again — but then she smiled at Katia.

"You must have had a wonderful father."

Katia was very happy to hear that.

"Yes, but it's actually been a while since I remembered my father's words"

Katia kept her admonition down. She didn't remember because she didn't want to think about it.

As for why she stopped thinking about it, there was only one answer.

"...I didn't know how much I could trust my father anymore either. I thought that maybe he never loved me..."

Katia smiled and continued.

"But then I decided to believe again. A lot of things happened, and I had a lot of worries, but I loved my father, too! I'll never forget that feeling."

The gleam of the mercury lamp illuminated the sunken ground.

"I get it. I'll do my best, so help me."

It wasn't clear how Katia's words had affected Zofi's mind, but she seemed to have regained herself.

"Yes! Well then, for starters, we need to go to the hairdressing salon on the base. A hairdo like this is just too much. I am sorry I couldn't protect your hair."

"Don't worry about it. I don't really care about my hair."

"I see. But I'm glad this hairpiece is safe."

"..... I'm sorry, but that might not have mattered either."

Zofi said as she lowered her gaze.

"Eeeh, ...r-really??"

"Yes. This hairpiece was a gift from my father for my birthday last year."

Zofi replied boringly, but the sound of her voice was somehow cheerful.

"Thank you for protecting me."

I remember well the nervousness in my father's voice. His face was more serious than ever as he talked with his friend. He shook his friend's hand firmly and then turned to me and said...

"Don't worry about anything. I'll come and get you in six months, I promise."

He had told me a few hours before why I was the only one who had to go on the trip. He told me that there was something that he had to do, and in order to do it, he needed a friend and his wife to take care of me for a while.

So, for me, who had been in my grandparents' house for a long time, I thought it was just something that was a little troublesome.

I am embarrassed to say that I had changed schools on the advice of my father after I had been excluded from my original school.

He told me that it was not an escape, but an adventure to make new relationships. As it turned out, he was right, and I was able to enjoy a peaceful school life again, surrounded by new friends.

So, for a while, I had no great qualms about going west to live with my father's friends. Maybe it was because my father had told me growing up that we were originally from the same country.

When we parted, my father gave me a pendant that held a photograph. Inside the pendant was a photo of me and my father in front of the Brandenburg Gate.

He said, "I care for you as you care for me. So, you are not alone. Don't forget that and try your best to live."

I was on the verge of panic as I suddenly understood that I would be separated from my father — that it might be a permanent separation.

"Father! Wait! Why am I the only one who can!"

I hate it. I hate it so much. I don't remember my mother's face. She died right after I was born, so I've only seen her in pictures. But I had a father. He was a busy man, but he always took me seriously, so I never felt lonely. But now, I was filled with anxiety that my father was going to disappear.

"Do you remember what your father used to say?"

My father asked me. I remember that I answered clearly, sobbing.

"If the East and the West get along, mankind will never be defeated."

He patted me on the head.

"Do you agree?"

"Yes! because playing with friends is more fun than playing alone, and you can do more things with two people than with one!"

But I'd rather have my father with me — I almost said that, but I couldn't continue. The look on my father's face was something I had never seen before.

"I want you to remember that. I want you to remember to trust people, to be compassionate, and to help each other. Even if that feeling is betrayed. If you do that, one day"

My father squeezed my hair lightly and smiled sadly.

"When you grow up, you will understand."

The car started to move slowly as my father closed the door. I instantly put my face out of the window and asked my father.

"We'll see each other again, won't we"?

My father took a deep breath and gently waved at me. His figure soon became hazy in the deep white mist.

In my vision, what was approaching was a swarm of monsters.

They looked really grotesque, like a combination of a crustacean and a caterpillar divided by two — The Destroyer Class Group. Their bodies billowed with dust as they pushed forward across the land of virtual reality.

The terrain was flat, with only roadside trees, villages, and a mountain range low on the distant horizon jutting out from the surface. In other words, once the Oder-Neisse defensive line was breached, the BETA would move westward across this flat, unobstructed terrain, the exercise said loudly.

"Instructor's TSF to all D team units! Prepare for bombardment!"

Instructor Frolov, projected on the retina, shouted.

"60 seconds later, we'll land in front of the village! Commence bombardment at a relative distance of 2,000 meters! — Cadet Naumann, please explain why this point is chosen as the starting point for the bombardment."

"Yes, sir! This is to shield the buildings in the village from laser radiation."

"Good! Then why don't you fire from the flank and behind, which is the weak point of the destroyer class? Candidate Waldheim!"

Katia responded loudly.

"Yes, sir! This is because it is the mission of the artillery to crush the destroyer class! In addition, due to the relative speed of the enemy, it is difficult to observe the impact of mobile attacks by TSF, and as a result, there is a possibility of missing a shot! Therefore, TSF units are required to stand in front of the enemy as a shield for friendly forces!"

The tactical machine was supposed to use its mobility to repair the crumbling defence line — that was the general method of operation for tactical machines.

"All right! All TSFs, begin landing!"

As she listened to Frolov's command, Katia thought that the terrain of Bavaria projected on her retina was similar to the scene of the plains of northern Europe, where she had travelled with her father many years ago.

"This is the first TSF you'll be boarding."

Frolov said to the Group D cadets gathered in the TSF hangar, three months after the end of basic training.

All of them were looking up at the TSF fixed to the gantry.

"F-4 (Phantom). It was put into service in 1974, and since then it has been used as the main weapon in the war against BETA throughout Eurasia."

While listening to Frolov's explanation, Katia also gazed at the majesty of the F-4 (Phantom) and was amazed.

She wondered if she would actually get to fly this TSF — it didn't feel real. Her father had told her about the importance of TSF units on the front lines, and she had seen TSF flying over Hamburg several times. However, the TSFs that she saw at close range were as unrealistic as giants in a fairy tale.

Anxiety and anticipation - or rather, a kind of guilt - enveloped Katia's entire body.

"This is the F-4 (Phantom)"

Zofi, standing next to her, seemed to be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the F-4 (Phantom). Zofi's hairstyle had changed to a side-tail after the incident two months ago. However, she still wore the small hair ornament that Katia had given her back that day.

Zofi turned to look at Katia, as if she had noticed her gaze. Katia approached Zofi and whispered to her.

"Finally, We have made it here..... It's been worth all the hard work."

Zofi's voice was slow. Katia understood that this was Zofi's way of expressing her gratitude.

"Finally, we can ride this..."

Ever since that day, Katia has been training with Zofi. At first, Zofi tended to be reserved, but as the results - specifically, the improvement in her physical strength and motor skills - became visible, she began to actively interact with Katia. Katia herself, by accompanying Zofi's training, was able to train her body in the same way. It did not go without harassment from Josephine and the others, but she continued her efforts regardless. It was a precious time for both of them.

As a result of their efforts, they had passed their field training examinations a week earlier and were now second lieutenant cadets, qualified to fly Tactical Surface Fighters.

"I prefer the F-5, the F-4 is too rugged for my taste."

The F-5 is the F-5 Freedom Fighter, a TSF developed by Northrock and deployed by the Western German Army in large numbers. Neither Zofi nor Katia were TSF enthusiasts, but they had heard about the variations of TSFs that each country had in their arsenal.

"I like the F-4 better. It's kind of nostalgic."

The MiG-21 (Balalaika) was the main TSF of the East Germans, and it was impossible to say that the prototype of the TSF that her father admired was the F-4.

"What's that? You're still a strange girl."

"Ehehe It's just a cute childhood sentiment."

"Cadet Veternik! Candidate Waldheim!"

Frolov's voice rang.

"No private conversations in lectures! After the lecture, run ten laps around the schoolyard!"

"Ye....yes!"

Katia carefully manoeuvred the controls to bring the TSF into a landing position. The bottom of the legs made contact with the surface of the ground, braking the TSF as it scraped the farmland. Meanwhile, the sights remained fixed on the destroyer class, to prepare for the bombardment immediately after the stop.

Since semi-automatic landings were prohibited during the training, many of the TSFs were caught in the changing terrain and fell over. Some of the TSFs even suffered damage to their leaping tunics.

The warning winds floating in the space in front of Katia's eyes transmitted the damage to the squadron — a fatal mistake in a real battle. But this was a virtual space, and any mistake would not lead to death. However, there is no psychological margin for the candidates. Everyone grasped the controls with a desperate expression, struggling to control the TSF that was moving like a roller coaster.

The looming target, the speed finally dropping — Katia glanced at Zofi's TSF, her eyes widening.

Zofi was landing with a much more stable motion than the other TSF.

"Zofi-san, awesome!"

Katia was saying what she had thought many times in the past month. Immediately, a scene flashed through her mind.

It was during a long-distance march training session in a TSF that Katia had noticed Zofi's talent. The training consisted of getting into an F-4 (Phantom) and walking endlessly on the road prepared for the

walking training of TSF in the training area, but for Katia and the others, who had mainly trained on simulators and were not used to flying actual TSF, the training was quite stressful.

If the TSFs were to fall over and be damaged, A sum of money equal to millions of marks would vanish like bubbles on the surface of the water. It would also cause trouble for the maintenance team. The use of autonomous manoeuvres was not allowed until they got a feel for the TSF, so it was really nerve-wracking.

"Good work, Zofi-san!"

As soon as Frolov announced the end of the training, Katia called out to her. Group D managed to finish the march without causing any accidents. Many of the TSFs had blackened legs from walking around in the muddy training grounds.

"I almost fell over! I didn't realize how difficult it is to fly when you turn off the autonomous control!"

"I'm just glad that nothing happened to you."

After completing the basic training course, Zofi's indecisiveness had completely disappeared and she was able to follow the training without making any major mistakes.

"Yes! And so after that..."

Katia noticed something strange about Zofi's plane. While all the other planes were covered in mud, only Zofi's F-4 (Phantom) was still clean. There was not much mud left on it.

"..... Your plane looks great, Zofi-san."

"Is that so? I was just walking around normally, trying not to overload the machine."

"Overloading the machine...?"

It was not an unknown idea, rather, it was an idea outside of the realm of the imagination. When the autonomous control is turned off, one would have their hands full just getting the TSF to walk in a stable posture. Katia couldn't afford to think so far ahead.

Katia checked the remaining fuel of Zofi's TSF displayed on the data link. Compared to the other candidates' TSF, it was significantly less depleted. Zofi seemed a little surprised by Katia's reaction.

"I was just trying to make it look like a person walking."

"I can't normally move it that well! Even the fuel is not as low as mine."

After that, Zofi continued to demonstrate her outstanding talent in training to fly the TSF, Considering that her training time was the same as Katia and the others, she was truly gifted. Especially when it came to TSF control and sniping, there was no other candidate who could match Zofi.

I don't think it's something to be proud of. Once we're in the real world, the difference in skill here will only be a matter of degree. — Whenever Katia expressed her admiration, Zofi would reply in the same way, but by the time a month had passed since the start of the TSF training, everyone in Team D had come to recognize Zofi's talent.

Team D started bombarding the village, using it as a shield. They aimed at the legs of the destroyer Class, but the bullets did not converge and only a few were confirmed destroyed. The group of destroyer class was heading towards them, unconcerned about the damage. If they were caught in the rush, they would be killed like butterflies — even though they knew it was a drill, they were filled with fear. It was then that a high-pitched swooshing sound reached them from behind.

After a moment's delay, a chain of huge explosions erupted around the destroyer class. The artillery fire had begun.

Most of the destroyer class were mowed down by the explosions and blown away.

"Holy!"

Katia coughed involuntarily. She hadn't forgotten that it was virtual reality, but she still felt a sense of admiration.

"—This is how our TSFs operation emphasizes cooperation with various military departments!"

Frolov explained in a sharp voice.

"—We do not fight the BETA with TSFs, but with firepower — in this way we limit the damage and preserve the value of our forces!"

In other words, the West Germans perceive TSFs as purely defensive weapons, Katia thought. The emphasis on cooperation with artillery means that operation outside the range of artillery is not emphasized. Wouldn't that kill the high mobility and manoeuvrability that were the characteristics of a TSF? That was the question Katia had.

However, considering the national situation of West Germany, she was convinced of this policy.

As an army of citizens, the West German army could not officially adopt tactics that would abandon the civilians living west of the East-West German border. If tactical planes were to be manoeuvred, then West Germany would have to use East Germany as its main battlefield, just as East Germany now uses Poland, which has been slaughtered by BETA and is uninhabited, as its main battlefield.

Katia wondered what her father would have thought of the war against the BETA — surely there would have been countless refugees and endless tragedies on the Soviet battlefields as well.

The bombardment continued, but a small number of destroyer class were approaching through the storm of fire. Behind them were a large number of grappler classes. It seems that the bombardment alone is not enough to handle them.

".....!"

Katia braced herself involuntarily. Even the artillery's surface suppression could not completely stop the BETA's rush. The only way to stop them is to use TSFs in close combat.

"All hands, continue bombardment! I'll clear out the destroyer class and grappler class! Cadet Zelewski, do you have any other orders?"

"Yes, sir! When intercepting a mixture of grappler and destroyer classes, the pilot with the best sniper skills should be assigned to the destroyers and the rest to the grapplers."

"Then order them to do so."

"Yes, ...! Then, um, Cadet Veternik..."

Josephine gambled on Zofi's name, but something red sprang from the abandoned moat at her feet as if to strike her momentary hesitation.

"Tank Class?"

Josephine screamed — Before they knew it, a swarm of tank class had invaded the city.

"Watch out!"

Katia shouted. If Josephine is shot down by a tank class in this situation, the D team will lose control.

The next moment, however, an explosion occurred in the vicinity of Josephine's F-4 (Phantom), and the tank class was caught in the impact and blown away, spraying red bodily fluids.

"Zofi-san"

It was Zofi's F-4 (Phantom), which had been in close proximity to Katia's plane, that had shot the tank class. In the communication window, Josephine was frozen in place.

"Cadet Veternik, well done on stopping the tank class attack!"

Frolov shouted, somewhat happily. She then turned her stern voice to Josephine.

"Cadet Zelewski! Even if you are in the middle of an artillery battle, be careful of the approaching tank class.—You can imagine what will happen if you, the squad leader, are defeated."

"R-Roger! Cadet Zofi Veternik, intercept the destroyer class. The rest of the pilots will use their firepower on the grappler class! When the distance is less than 2000, start firing in retreat!"

"Roger!"

Katia responded loudly and turned her attention to Zofi in the corner of her vision. Zofi was not enveloped in her own battle results, and with a calm expression on her face, she was resuming her bombardment as ordered.

When it's the middle of October, it becomes the winter season in West Germany. In the mornings, frost sets in, making it hard to get up early.

This day was a holiday. Katia woke up at 4:30 a.m. as usual, got ready, and went for her daily run. After that, she went to the cafeteria to have breakfast and then watched the TV in the cafeteria in a daze.

Most of the candidates were out, as they had been given permission to go out. But Katia, who had no home to go back to and no friends to hang out with, had decided to stay at the base. She thought about visiting her parents-in-law's gravesite, but it was too far away and she had to give it up.

The TV was showing the morning news. She thought it would be mostly about current affairs in West Germany, but it started to report on the war situation in East Germany. It was not a specific story about the war situation, but a report about a TSF squadron that had been making remarkable progress in the East German army.

On the screen was a MiG-21 (Balalaika). On its left shoulder were a black line of paint and the number "666". Katia guessed that it was an unauthorized use of propaganda footage from the East, but she couldn't take her eyes off it. She wanted to know information about her homeland, no matter how trivial.

Eventually, the control unit of the TSF on the TV screen opened up, and a blonde female pilot appeared from within. She was called Captain Irisdina Bernhard, commander of the 666th Tactical Surface Fighter Squadron.

According to the announcer, Irisdina. The 666th TSF Squadron, led by Captain Irisdina Bernhardt, took pride in being the unit with the leading crushing ratio in Eastern Europe, and has shown heroic performance on many battlefields.

It's cool, Katia thought sincerely. There were women like this. She was not just working on the battlefield on an equal footing with the men, but also being praised as a hero of Eastern Germany.

Katia felt depressed as she remembered the little mistake she had made the other day in the exercise. She was embarrassed to even think of her own heroic exploits when she had just managed to become a pilot.

At the same time, she felt a certain amount of relief. The East Germans were reportedly outnumbered, yet they still had such a strong force. The numbering "666" was a socialist denial of religion, but it rather gave their form a pseudo-evil quality.

"Is this a good place?"

Before I knew it, Zofi was approaching. In her hands was a tray with breakfast on it. She wore her hair up in a bun, probably because it was a holiday. She didn't have the usual hair ornament on.

"Oh, come in! I'm sorry, I was a little spaced out."

"It's a holiday, so no one will mind. Everyone knows you're a strange girl."

"Heh heh"

Katia scratched her cheek to cover up her embarrassment. Zofi sat down in the chair across from her and began to eat her breakfast. Since she could not find anything to talk about, Katia turned her attention back to the TV.

In the meantime, the news on TV had ended and a children's animation had started instead.

It seemed to be a story set in the mountains of the Alps ⁽¹⁹⁾ and featuring a young girl.

"Peace."

Zofi coughed as she watched the animation of a little girl dancing around with her dog and friends.

"It's like there's no BETA."

"Yes, it does."

I know the story of this one. I remember my father reading it to me when I was little. I wondered what my father, who had been so kind to me, wanted to do, even if he had to leave everything behind. Did my father hate me? No, it couldn't be. My father loved me.

Then what was it that he had to do even if he had to abandon his child? I had to find out for sure. If I didn't, I'd be too miserable — a thought occurred to Katia.

"I don't care about the BETA. Isn't that what you think?"

Katia's heart was beating hard.

"Wh....What's wrong, suddenly?"

The sudden change in the conversation was unnerving.

"I have a feeling that you have other things on your mind than us."

Zofi's face loomed in front of Katia.

"I don't know if you like East Germany, but I think you have something else in mind. That's why we think fundamentally different and what we're trying to achieve is also different."

Katia smiled fondly to hide her upset.

"Hahaha I didn't mean that! Oh, I am weird, aren't I!"

Katia was afraid of Zofi's gaze peeking at her. She had to cover it up at all costs. If she is found out at a place like this, the whole thing will go down the drain. It gave her goosebumps.

"Don't worry about it..... It's just something I thought of."

With that, Zofi resumed her meal. Katia was relieved to realize that she was not going to expand on this topic any further.

She regretted her ineptitude, but at the same time realized that she was strangely not uncomfortable being observed by Zofi. This was a fresh surprise for Katia, who had tried to be as inconspicuous as possible since she had been smuggled into West Germany.

"Um, ... do you still want to leave West Germany, Zofi-san?"

Katia asked. She wanted to know. She thought that now Zofi might be able to give her a different answer than the other day.

"..... Honestly, I'm not sure anymore."

Zofi replied, looking up at the ceiling. Her white throat looked strangely limp.

"Thanks to you, I'll be able to become a pilot somehow, and if I stay in the army, I'll be able to eat. If I die, I would lose everything, but that's the same no matter where you are, right? and at least it's better than being an infantry."

Katia felt a little relieved. She thought that Zofi was more positive than she was right after she started at this school.

"The other day, I heard something that made me happy. My grandmother informed me that my mother, who had been recuperating at home, is getting better."

Zofi continued shyly.

"She asked me if I would like to come and see her during my next vacation. My mother's family lives in Munich, so it's not that far."

"I'm glad to hear that.!"

Katia had very few memories of her mother, who passed away soon after she was born. She only remembers her face from photographs, but she has an image of her as warm and soft. It was lonely, but

not painful. She was sure that her mother loved her, because that's what her father had told her. Zofi's mother must have loved her daughter, too. Zofi's smile told Katia so.

"I'm sure your mother will be very happy to see you now, Zofi-san!"

"Why do you think that? It's an indisputable fact that I abandoned my parents."

The sad expression on her face was familiar — the smile of someone with inexplicable regret. So, as if speaking to a mirror, Katia strongly stated.

"You didn't throw it away! You just left it on the side! Just pick it up again!"

Zofi rolled her eyes and then laughed as if she were having a seizure.

"You're a strange girl after all. It's not like she is a parcel or a cat..."

"e...eh?"

Katia thought she had said something rather nice, so she was quite shocked.

She wondered if that reaction was funny — Zofi smiled again and wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes.

"I've never seen a girl who can give courage to others like you. —There must be something strong inside of you."

Does it really look like that — and if so, what is dwelling inside of me? Katia thought.

"Yeah, so you better take care of it. I'm sure there's someone out there who will take good care of you."

Zofi stared out the window. Katia had no answer.

Their conversation was cut short there. Frolov, the instructor, appeared in the dining room. They stood up together and straightened their posture, which Frolov held in place with one hand.

"Make yourself comfortable. Cadet Zofi Veternik, You have a visitor request."

"Yes! Um, Who is it?"

Katia wondered, who on earth could this person be? There should be no one to visit Zofi or herself.

"He said his name was Derfelt Löwe."

Zofi's expression hardened.

"He said he was the heir to your father's company."

An hour later, Zofi returned to the dining room, her face drained of blood.

"Zofi-san, are you alright? You look pale."

Katia heard that Zofi's father's company had gone bankrupt with huge debts. The person who succeeded the company appeared — it might not have been a good development for Zofi. Should she listen to him, or should she leave him alone.... Katia was worried.

Zofi sat down in her chair without saying a word, and then opened her mouth.

"I heard that my father's company has been restructured."

"eeeh...?"

That was good news, wasn't it?

"I heard that the coal mine my father was developing before he died has found a larger vein of coal than ever before. Thanks to this, the company is on track to pay off its debts, and it seems to have completely recovered. I was also told that I would be given an undivided inheritance and a portion of the company's management rights. I heard that my father made such a promise to him before he died."

Zofi's voice was trembling.

"He said that the downturn in the company's performance was due to a temporary capital investment and that my father had estimated the same. She said that my father committed suicide because of stress caused by overwork. This year, Essen's coal mines are being excavated like never before in preparation for BETA's invasion of the West German mainland, and there is a wave of foreign trade, which may be the cause."

He said it was because of the pressure of representing the country — her voice melted into the void.

"So your father didn't abandon you, Zofi-san."

Katia thought she had said something positive, but Zofi broke down in tears as if a dam had been broken.

"I didn't know what was going on, and I hated my father for it. Even at his funeral, I threw dirty words at him. I, I!"

"Zofi-san...."

"I am sorry father, I am really sorry..."

Zofi's sobs were filled with regret. Katia was speechless for a few seconds, but then she regained her composure and stood up.

"Zofi-san.....!"

Katia shouted loudly. Zofi was surprised by the loudness of her voice — she took advantage of the opportunity and hugged Zofi.

"Wait, Katia, ...?"

"It's ok. Zofi-san didn't do anything wrong."

Katia gently hugged Zofi's shoulders.

"It's just that you had a little misunderstanding. I'm sure your father will forgive you, because you are your father's child."

This is a story that I should be happy about — so why am I feeling lonely? Katia was in doubt.

"There is no such thing as a parent who doesn't care for their own child. I believe that, so please don't cry anymore. I'm sure your father is watching your efforts in heaven."

I don't know if the words that spilled out of my mouth were really just for Zofi — I don't even know if they were for me.

However, at Katia's words, Zofi let out a big sigh and wiped away her tears as if she was shaking something off and said with a bitter smile.

"That's enough. You're really ... a strange girl."

"Yess... Yesss!"

I thought I had hugged her in an intimate manner — but Zofi screamed in protest, her face turning red. The depths of my emotions. I have to paint over them with joy.

After giggling at Katia, Zofi spoke up.

"But thank you Truly, you are being nothing but helpful."

"That's not true! I'm always getting help from people too!"

Katia shook her head widely.

"If it weren't for you, I'd be all alone in Team D."

I think I was saved in some ways by the fact that Zofi attracted the malice of the people around me. And if it weren't for Zofi, there is a definite possibility that I wouldn't have any friends here at all.

"..... Oh, so we have become friends now?"

"Oh, no I didn't mean..."

"I'm just kidding" — said Zofi, smiling mischievously. Katia caught on and laughed as well.

"But what are you going to do now, Zofi-san?"

Katia asked a simple question.

"To be honest, I don't think I need to go to the front lines as a pilot anymore,....."

In East Germany, it would have been a crime just to say it. In West Germany, however, there is still an atmosphere of forgiveness.

"I can't make up my mind at the moment. Löwe-san said that he would like me to participate in the management of the company in the future."

Zofi broke off her words in hesitation.

"But for now, I'm graduating from this school. I think that's the way it should be."

"..... I'm a little relieved."

"What? Are you afraid of being alone?"

"Yes."

Katia was embarrassed. She felt that she could reveal her true feelings to Zofi, so she put them into words.

"I don't want to be alone anymore."

Katia asked as she walked from the cafeteria back to the sleeping quarters of the Group D cadets.

"Oh, by the way, you're not wearing the hair ornament your father gave you today, are you?"

"It's my day off. I wanted to change my hairstyle once in a while."

Zofi answered as she opened the door to the room.

"But if it was going to be a day like this, I might as well have kept it on."

"You can put it on now! I cherish my father's memento, too."

"You do? Then..."

Katia couldn't hear what Zofi had to say after that. When she looked at Zofi, her expression was even more frozen than before. And at the end of her gaze....

"Oh, ..."

Katia's breath leaked out at the unbelievable sight. There was Zofi's hair ornament smashed to pieces on the floor near the bed that Katia and the others shared.

Katia looked around the room to see Josephine, the leader of Team D, and her entourage looking at her with thinly veiled smiles on their faces.

"No way, ...!"

Before Katia could move, Zofi reacted to Josephine. Her fists were clenched tightly, and there was unusual anger in her profile. Sensing what Zofi was trying to do, Katia hurriedly grabbed her and stood her ground.

"No! You can't fight! Zofi-san, please calm down!"

"Move! Get out of the way, Katia.!"

Zofi flailed about, trying to shake Katia loose.

"These women, Father's Memento....!!"

"No, ...! Calm down, ...!"

She clung desperately to her, but was almost knocked away.

"Even though I've been trying really hard not to be ridiculed.....! Those people haven't changed at all!"

That's the truth, so Katia was at a loss for words.

"They make fun of me when I'm inferior and harass me when I'm superior...! That's That's not!"

"Still! Violence is not allowed.!"

"You're too naive! Are you really my friend? All you ever do is whitewash everything!"

That's right - I've always been that way. And yet, I can't forsake my principles. Katia thought.

"Ara ara. What's the matter? Did you get into an argument?"

"Josephine, ...!"

Josephine laughed slyly as the distance between them grew closer. Katia shouted as she held Zofi with her body.

"Why are you doing this!"

"What do you mean?"

"You are the only people who would do such a thing to Zofi-san's hair ornament!"

"I don't know, about such a thing. Besides, I think she can handle the loss of a hairpiece, hasn't she returned to being a real young lady again?"

"How did you know?"

"Well, someone somewhere must have overheard your conversation, didn't they? I just overheard it."

"This was a very important memento of Zofi-san's father!"

"Oh, I didn't know that. Coincidences are scary. Poor thing."

Josephine shrugged her shoulders, and her mouth twisted in jealousy.

"Good for you, now you can stop being a pilot without any regrets."

"How dare you!"

Zofi said in a furious voice.

"How dare you!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"I don't care what you think. Just don't incriminate me, okay? Do you have any proof? If you have proof, bring it to me."

Josephine left with a graceful attitude. Zofi tried to chase after her, but Katia desperately held her back.

"Why are you.....?"

After a few moments of grappling with Katia, Zofi sadly capped as she collapsed as if she had lost her patience.

"Why are you doing this!"

All Katia could do was watch in helplessness as Zofi's tears soaked the floor.

When I rushed to the hospital, my mother-in-law had already passed away. My father-in-law was lying in bed with only a few days to live. So I stood transfixed by the sight.

Why, why, why... These thoughts were spinning around in my head, and no words came out.

I heard my father-in-law's voice calling my name, and saw the blood bubbling at the edge of his mouth. I ran to my father-in-law and grabbed his hand.

"Father, Father, ...!"

Even at a time like this, I had to go through with the lie — my heart was about to be torn out. The couple, friends of my real father, had been so good to me.

My father-in-law smiled at me, and I think it was his way of showing his love to me, as I was going to be alone in this world.

"I've been so happy to have you in my life for the past four years,..... We were all trying to be a family together and we were doing well It's regrettable it had to end like this."

"Father, ..."

The tears spilled. For this moment, there was no question of calling him "father".

"You weren't abandoned, ... I'm sure he still loves you, ... But he the two Germanies .."

The words trailed off there, and my father lost consciousness. A high-pitched sound echoed from the machine by his bed.

As the hospital room was in an uproar, I continued to cry out, tears streaming down my face. Father, FATHER, FATHER!!!.....

"Tomorrow we will use the simulators to train for urban combat against the BETA."

The next afternoon, on the platform in the lecture room, the instructor, Frolov, announced.

Next to Katia was Zofi. The two hadn't spoken a word since yesterday's incident. It didn't matter how many times Katia tried to talk to her, Zofi didn't say a word to anyone.

As Katia listened to Frolov's words, she felt gloomy. The words that Zofi had spoken to her were weighing heavily on her mind. It's always whitewashing, Zofi said.

Maybe she was right. I have always said what I thought was right. Katia thought.

I don't think it was wrong, but at that moment it must have been unbearable for Zofi. I might have done the same if someone had broken the pendant that contained my father's picture. And yet, I stuck to my own justice and stop Zofi.

What was I supposed to do then? Should I have kept quiet and let Zofi and Josephine get into a fight? Should I have allowed my emotions to explode like that, and only followed up if they got hurt? Should I have chosen that approach? There was no way I could have done that.

We are trained in military combat. They were learning military combat techniques, and if they went off on a tangent, they could end up using the techniques they had learned in the worst possible way. There was a possibility that they would be scarred for life. Then what I really should have said was...

"The location is Regensburg. It is one of the cities of Bavaria. It is a major transportation hub located at the confluence of the Regen and Danube rivers."

Frolov showed an aerial view of Regensburg city on the projector, which was divided into three sections by the confluence of the Danube and Regen rivers in the centre of the city.

"The BETA is approaching Regensburg from the north along the Regen River, moving south, and I want Team D to intercept them at the front of the city and draw them into Regensdorf, buying as much time as possible for the entire city to fall."

Katia focused her attention on Frolov's explanation. She has done simulator training for urban warfare a few times, but this is the first time she has done anything this serious. Katia had already learned that fighting against the BETA in urban areas was far more difficult than fighting against the BETA in the field. The city limits the mobility of TSF, and there's no telling where the tank class might jump at you.

"In addition, the exercise will be conducted under the assumption that a large number of refugees have been left behind in Regensburg. However, the information we obtained in advance is not complete and the total number of civilians left behind is unknown."

It's finally here — Katia tensed up. It was expected among the candidates that the simulator training would be based on the assumption that they would be escorting refugees. The West German army is an army of citizens — that's why they were concerned with the large number of refugees that will certainly be generated by the BETA invasion. It would be strange if there were no training done for their sake.

"Citizens are expected to flee the city by various means, but we can assume that most of them will be riding cars or on foot. Team D, please protect the refugees as much as possible and retreat to the front lines."

Tomorrow's mission would require the full strength of Team D to succeed in the training. The fact that the training would include helping refugees escape meant that the difficulty of the operation would be much higher than in the past. A decision would have to be made. After the lecture, Katia approached Josephine and called out to her.

"What do you want, communist?"

The first thing Josephine said was as if she was trying to control the situation. Her entourage was already gathering around her.

"Are you going to rehash what you said yesterday? I'm telling you, without proof —"

"It's not about that."

"Then what do you want?"

"Stop hating us and treat us like proper companions. Zofi-san too."

Josephine rolled her eyes along with the others.

"Can you stop joking? I'm not working with Candidate Veternik."

"..... But tomorrow's training can only be accomplished with the combined efforts of all members of Team D."

Katia spoke as calmly as she could. Josephine looked at her as if she was questioning her sanity.

"So you want me to compromise? No, why should I compromise with a woman like that?"

Katia blocked Josephine's rebuttal with a few more words.

"To protect our citizens, we must join forces with any opponent. Isn't that right, ...?"

"A righteous argument as usual. For the record, I'm not excluding her because I don't like her."

"Then why?"

"I told you. I'm eliminating her because she is not cooperative. How can I work with someone who breaks cooperation through selfishness? The sooner she quit, the safer we will be."

"Is it right to exclude people who can be useful for your own safety?"

That's what Katia was wondering, and that's why she can't give up.

If they disliked her so much, it would be one way to leave and start over somewhere else. In fact, Katia has done that before and got her life back on track. But she wondered if she could have done everything she could to repair her relationship with the people around her. Didn't she just take her father's word for it and run away from school?

"Zofi-san has changed. She is now able to coordinate properly. When it comes to piloting, I think she is the best of the team."

The lecture room was silent. The fact that there were no voices from anyone must have meant that everyone in the room secretly recognized Zofi's abilities.

"..... If Zofi-san is good, then excluding her makes no sense. Isn't that right?"

Katia pushed the words out slowly so that only Josephine can hear them. She didn't mean to provoke her. She was just thinking about how she could get Josephine to listen to her.

Then, after some silence, Josephine answered.

"If that's the case, why don't we have a contest? During tomorrow's training, we'll see who destroys more BETA, you or our platoon. If you guys can beat us, we'll consider it."

"..... That doesn't make any sense! We need to succeed in the mission as a whole, instead of fighting for results between platoons."

It was a suggestion to make tomorrow's training go well, but it was as if it was meaningless if it left a grudge afterwards.

"Platoon coordination requires a relationship of mutual trust among the members. and because of that, her true essence can be seen, don't you see? Besides, I don't want to graduate while being looked down upon by that woman."

Josephine said firmly.

"I am a pilot from a Junker [\(20\)](#) family. I can't allow myself to be defeated."

"Training is meant to prepare you for actual combat! I can't believe you're using it for that.!"

"Killing as many BETAs as possible is also part of the training to prepare for a real battle. If you don't accept my proposal, we're done here. How about that?"

"No way..."

"Okay, then."

A voice from behind Katia — Zofi was standing behind her before she knew it.

"I've been meaning to challenge you for a while. I want to pay you back for everything you've done to me."

"Zofi-san!"

"Then the proposal is accepted."

Josephine answered triumphantly and smiled superiorly at Katia.

"After all, your righteousness is only worth so much."

The exercise was chaotic.

Group D divided its forces into three sections of Regensburg and intercepted the BETA rushing in from the north. The strategy was to draw the BETA into the urban battle with artillery support and buy time for the refugees to escape. The BETA had a habit of preferring TSF to humans, and this was a tactic that Team D itself used as a decoy.

The strategy was right on target, and most of the BETA were drawn into the city. However, the cost of this was that the battle became more severe. As expected, the buildings in the city were more crowded than expected, and as a result, the TSFs were not able to use their mobility, resulting in a lot of close combat.

"Multiple grappler class in Neuhaus and Drei-Mohren-Straße! We'll intercept them!"

Zofi, the commander of the second platoon of D squad, gave the order — Katia took Zofi's order, executed a TSF jump for a moment, and climbed over the buildings. Most of the buildings were less than fifteen meters high, so it was possible to move from street to street with a momentary leap. Since Regensburg was hardly bombed during World War II, the old city remained untouched.

"Tsk...."

A silent click of the tongue from a pilot of the same platoon. Katia felt the same way.

In a street no more than ten meters wide, a swarm of grappler class rushed forward in a procession. This was because the road was too narrow for the grappler class

"First squad to Neuhaus Street, second squad to Drei. Mohren Street! Katia, let's go!"

"Copy!"

Katia shouted as she chased after Zofi's F-4 (Phantom). Her relationship with Zofi had not yet been repaired, but she was at least willing to treat her as a colleague.

Katia deployed to the Neuhausstrasse and opened fire on the swarm of grappler classes that were causing a traffic jam on the street.

With a shout, the two F-4s continued their bombardment, destroying one by one the grappler class in front of them, turning them into grotesque wrecks.

However, in theory, the tank class is supposed to swarm around the grappler class. Where are the tank class — Katia began to search for them as she fired sonic sensors together with the artillery, and found more than 200 tank classes approaching from both sides of the street through the rooftops of the city.

"I'll take care of the tank class.! Zofi-san..."

"Haaah!"

A moment before Katia could move, Zofi's F-4 (Phantom) leapt into the sky and attacked the tank class. The grenade fire shattered the roofs of many of the tank classes in the city.

Katia gritted her teeth. Zofi's actions were clearly designated to compete with Josephine, and it would be a bad idea for the platoon commander, Zofi, to take the initiative in this situation, as it would disrupt the unit's leadership. Katia wanted to stop her, but there was a grappler class approaching on the street, and she had to pay attention to them as well.

"There are a lot of grappler classes on Scherhorn and Urban streets! Let's go!"

Zofi, who had destroyed a small group of tank classes, shouted without pause.

In response to Zofi's order, the four F-4s begin jumping again. The ammunition and propellant were both severely depleted, but it was no longer pointless as the BETA were being sucked into the city one after another. But Katia was not convinced. Zofi's quest for perfection had left her with little time to fight.

"Zofi-san! Please stop! You can't fight like this!"

Katia shouted, connecting the radio line only to Zofi, but Zofi did not answer. However, Katia did not care and continued to shout.

"Don't be fooled by my promise to Josephine! Is that how you're going to fight in real life?"

"What do you know about anything?"

Zofie replied as if she was picking a fight.

"We have to win! We have to shut those guys up.!"

"We're in the middle of an exercise.!"

"It's true that I may have behaved badly! I may have caused her some trouble.! But I'm sure I didn't do anything that warrants destroying my father's legacy!"

"I know that! But don't get hung up on it just yet!"

"They think it's okay to get rid of your allies if they find them uncooperative, don't they? It's much more dangerous for them to be on the battlefield!"

"I know that!"

Some people will try to get rid of anyone they don't like, no matter what it takes. Katia knew that and knew that Josephine and the others were that kind of people. But...

"So, no matter what it takes, we'll win...! We're going to win and get rid of her.!"

"But that's not like us! Isn't that what Zofi hates the most.....!?"

Katia didn't want Zofi to go down the same path as Josephine and the others.

"You're going to do the same thing as the people you hate?"

Katia could see through the communication window that Zofi was breathing heavily. She had been kicked out of the group she belonged to and had joined the army as a way to escape. And there, too.....

"The West German army is the army of the people, and we must do everything in our power to save them!"

For Zofi, who had suffered so much, this was something she and Zofi should not do. Katia just wanted her to understand that the way they should choose to fight is different from Josephine and the others.

The next moment, the face of a cadet was projected onto the screen. It was one of Josephine's team members from the 1st platoon.

"Second Platoon! We're in trouble. Josephine and her comrades have lost their jump unit and are now isolated among the enemy! It's in the heart of the old city — around the cathedral!"

Zofi listened with an awakened expression on her face.

"We're going to be destroyed! We can't devote our forces to holding off the incoming BETA! Second Platoon, support! Please! If we continue like this, the first platoon will be wiped out."

In the next moment, the war situation window that Katia and Zofi were looking at showed a new reaction: a large number of BETA, including destroyer and grappler classes, were approaching the war zone that the second platoon was in charge of. They would reach their position in five minutes at the latest.

".....!"

Katia bit her lip. If they move their platoon there to help Josephine and the others, the defence of the section they were in charge of will be thinned and then breached. They would not be able to achieve their mission objective of helping the civilians escape.

The enemy was closing in, the call for help was coming in, and Zofi was still being stubborn — Katia was desperately trying to hold back the urge to give up and throw everything away.

If she can't do anything here and now, she doesn't know what she can do in the future.

If she can't unite the hearts of her friends here and now, She'll never be able to fulfil her father's dream.

Katia looked at Zofi once again. She still had the same wary expression, but there was a hint of betrayal in her eyes.

Zofi was also lost. If she abandoned Josephine here, the game they had promised yesterday would be won by Zofi, and Zofi would be able to give Josephine a blow. But was that really the right thing to do — she was thinking about it, then they still have a chance.

Katia shouted.

"Come on, Zofi, let's go!"

Katia looked at Zofi.

"Josephine is an important friend! Promise or no promise, we can't abandon her!"

Zofi didn't answer anything. However, the hesitation in her eyes was getting bigger.

"Let's rescue Josephine and the others and return to our posts before the enemy reinforcements arrive!"

".....!"

"We can do this!"

This time she was forcing herself — but she was sure that her actions were not meant to be the same as Zofi's behaviour earlier.

"If we don't do that, we'll just be living a life of fighting! That's what my father said! We all need to help each other!"

It was Katia's father who taught her those words, and her father-in-law and mother-in-law who taught her what those words meant — She could feel her emotions rising. Finally, Katia shouted with all the voice she could muster.

"I think we should not be ashamed to fight for the people who gave birth to us and raised us! Because if we don't! Their feelings and thoughts will be cut off there!"

Zofi bit her lip, remained silent for a few seconds, and then spoke softly.

"..... How can you always say the right thing like that? I didn't even have the courage to do that."

Zofi squealed loudly, as if she had lost her patience and was trying to shake something off. She stared at Katia.

"Saving Josephine and protecting the 2nd platoon's war zone. Both of them are absurd goals, but that's what it's all about, right?"

"Yes, yes! Something like that!"

"Then let me show you how it's done, 2nd platoon, 2nd squad! We'll be back in 10 minutes, so hold the line for that long!"

[[[Roger!!]]]Voices of confirmation overlapped.

"Okay, Let's go, Katia!"

"Yes!"

The two F-4s (Phantoms) began to leap across the streets littered with the remains of the BETA.

The area around the cathedral was filled with flames, debris, and the remains of the BETA swarm. Black smoke and dust filled the air, blocking the view.

In this situation, two F-4s (Phantoms) continued to engage. Both had damaged jump units on one side. A skilled pilot could have flown in this condition, but it was an unknown skill for the cadets who had only been flying TSFs for less than two months.

"Yuuuuuu!!!"

One of the two planes - Josephine's F-4, the commander of the first platoon - opened fire with an angry shout. Several of the destroyer class in front of her were crushed and silenced.

But in the grand scheme of things, it was a drop in the bucket. One by one, the Destroyer class poured in, unconcerned about the loss of others.

"Josephine, we can't go on like this! The mission will fail.!"

The cadet in charge of the TSF screamed.

"We've only got one magazine full of ammunition. and we've only got sixty seconds left!"

"I don't want to hear any complaints! This is an exercise, just keep hitting the BETA and you'll accomplish your mission."

"The reason we were isolated in the first place was because Josephine continued to manoeuvre unreasonably for the sake of the game."

"Shut up! You didn't oppose me either!"

"No, that's"

"We have to win against that idiot! We can't allow anyone to go into battle who disrupts military discipline!"

And then, the war situation alarm rang — hundreds of tank class were approaching like a red carpet.

Josephine turned pale. At this rate, they will be swallowed up by that red carpet and the TSF will be devoured — even though this is a simulator exercise, or perhaps because of this reason, the reality of the situation was quite severe.

"Josephine! If I'm destroyed in such a miserable manner, my aptitude will be questioned! It might affect where I'm assigned! I can't stand it if I'm sent to a remote area instead of West Germany! I don't want that!"

Josephine was pale. It was a thought that had completely slipped her mind.

She realized how foolish she was to be so focused on her rivalry with Zofi, but she couldn't stop fighting now.

"If that's the case, don't interfere...."

And then a roar from behind - two F-4s were rapidly approaching, weaving through the narrow alley. It was obvious from the icon on the war situation window that someone was controlling them.

"Zofi..... Veternik"

"Let's get you out of here, Josephine!"

Katia shouted over the radio.

"You still have one jump unit left, right? Then you should be able to escape with our help!"

"You are my enemies"

Josephine shouted hysterically.

"You think you've beaten us with that?! Most likely, you've come to take advantage of the predicament I'm in! I'm sorry, but I'm not going to ask for your help."

"But that doesn't mean it's a good idea to break up our friendship."

There was no reply from Josephine, but Katia was sure she's listening. She shouted again with all her feelings.

"We're the same people..... We are friends to be protected! It doesn't matter if you like it or not, if you were born or raised! If this were a real battle, I would make the same decision!"

The sound of someone gasping for air hit her ears.

"I will not give up on my ideals! No matter what happens, if I give up, that's it!"

Katia called out desperately, but there was no response — or was there? Can humans have this much stubbornness and pride? If Josephine doesn't respond, this will harden the attitude of Zofi. The worst future was foreseen, and Katia felt that she was starting to lose hope.

People hate each other over simple events, and it is impossible for me to undo them. I am helpless, stupid, and a foolish child who is not needed by my father. Katia was in despair.

"Well... that seems to be Katia's point."

It was Zofi.

"What are you going to do? I can win the game if I abandon you, too, but Katia would not listen to me."

Then Zofi continued, gruffly but somewhat happily.

"But as long as they don't destroy your TSF, you can still fight, so I think we can continue the game. The rest is up to you to decide."

Zofi continued to talk to Josephine.

"I'm sorry for the trouble I caused you during basic training, but it's not without resentment. So, with this, we're even now. What do you think?"

Josephine, who was projected on the retina, looked as if she had been struck by emptiness. However, it was only for a moment, and she soon returned to her usual expression of pride.

"You're the daughter of a greedy capitalist.!"

Her voice was bright.

"I don't need to be told that by a fallen Junker.!"

There was a hint of a smile in her voice.

"All right, rescue me, please! In exchange, I won't apologize for what I've done to you! It all depends on the game after that!"

"I don't want to be bothered with your apology now, either. Anyway - Katia, let's do it!"

"Roger!"

Katia replied happily as she landed her TSF, bringing it to a stop in close proximity to Josephine's F-4 (Phantom) and her comrades, sweeping up the surrounding BETA. After that, she put her right arm around the waist of Josephine's plane and held it.

She wasn't sure they would be able to work together without mishap, however, if they abandon hope now, then that's the end.

And if they don't give up, they should be able to do something, like now, like themselves at this moment.

Katia shouted cheerfully.

"Let's go, Zofi-san, Josephine-san! Let's kill the BETA together!"

After a month of sorting out my in-laws' estate, I came to a decision.

I was going to East Germany - or to be more precise, I was going back to East Germany. I would return home and find out what my father really meant.

My in-laws were planning to move to the UK to avoid the BETA invasion of Europe.

After the accident of my parents-in-law, the recipient contacted me and informed me that there was no problem with me alone, but I decided to decline the offer.

I was fed up with a life of just running away. I wanted to move forward by changing my environment, not by running away, as I had done when my father encouraged me to change schools.

That's why I wanted to go back to East Germany, reunite with my father, and see what he really meant. And if I could help, I was determined to do so.

Unlike four years ago, when I defected to West Germany, travel to East Germany was severely restricted. In addition, I am an exile with a false name. I don't think the East German government would accept me with open arms if I revealed my real name.

Even if I went to East Berlin as a tourist, I wouldn't be able to stay there for a long time. I have heard that the police in East Germany are excellent and very strict. Anyone who looks suspicious will be eliminated.

So, how could I be allowed to naturalize? If I did not give myself enough value to be recognized by everyone, Katia Waldheim's asylum would not be recognized by the East German government.

In the back of my mind, I thought of my father's words.

My father had told me that the future battlefield would be built around TSFs.

If I could become a pilot operating a TSF, I might be able to go to East Germany. I had heard on the news that West Germany was sending a TSF unit to East Germany under the command of the United Nations. If I can join them, I can enter the East as Katia Waldheim. Once I crossed the border, I could handle the rest — I had no proof, but I was confident.

So I decided to drop out of the Gymnasium and take the entrance exam for the Young Pilot Academy.

It was all for the sake of returning to East Germany. That's how I decided to move forward, to return to East Germany and be reunited with my father.

The graduation ceremony was a simple affair.

In front of the cadets gathered in the auditorium, the principal gave a statement that said, "It is the pride of our profession to have had the privilege of educating you. I hope that you will make the most of your experience at this school and play an active role in the war."

Then the officer's insignia was presented and the national anthem was sung. After that, the second lieutenant cadets - or rather, the second lieutenants - were dismissed to their rooms. All the cadets had already been informed of their assignments, taking into consideration their aptitude and intentions.

"Are you really going to East Germany, ...?"

Josephine asked Katia in disbelief. Both of them were wearing West German uniforms - with the rank insignia of second lieutenant on their lapels, which they had just been awarded.

Around them, the same former cadets from Group D were engaged in a final chat before parting.

"Yes. That was my wish from the beginning."

Katia replied, somewhat embarrassed. Standing next to her was Zofi, who was already familiar with the situation.

"I talked to my instructor about it, and asked if there were any units that could be sent to East Germany. She told me that there was a tactical armoured battalion that was being formed for deployment to East Germany, and that they were looking for volunteers."

"What unit?"

"The 101st Tactical Armored Battalion of the West German Army, based at Paderborn in Neutran-Westphalia.

"Are any of your classmates assigned to that battalion?"

"Apparently none. There aren't many volunteers, so they're having to recruit from other places."

"Well, that's the way it is."

In East Germany, the war of attrition is still raging. Even though it is a neighbouring country where their compatriots live, few pilots would want to go there.

Josephine turned to face Zofi.

"And you, Veternik-san?"

"I belong to the 512th Tactical Armored Battalion, 8th Homeland Defense Brigade under the command of the Homeland Defense Forces. We are deployed to Essen."

"Join the Home Defence Pilots? And Essen is supposed to be your hometown. Did you volunteer?"

"Yes, I wanted to protect my homeland anyway."

That's just like Zofi, Katia thought.

"Didn't you ever think of going back to the private sector? I thought you said your company's business was recovering?"

"I thought about it, but I'm not really cut out for that kind of thing."

Zofi shook her head.

"It is certainly tempting to take over my father's company, but that would mean that I would have the same problems as my father. My personality can't handle that kind of thing. So"

That was Zofi's choice, to take a different path from her father.

"Where are you assigned, Josephine?"

If I had been born in West Germany - would I have chosen the same answer as Zofi?

"I'm with the 52nd Tactical Armored Battalion, an elite unit of F-5Gs deployed to Northern Europe. They're participating in the containment of the Rovaniemi Hive."

Scandinavia is one of the main battlefields of the European Union forces, and the containment of the Rovaniemi Hive is taking a heavy toll. Josephine will be making her first campaign there. Perhaps they would never be able to meet again. When she thought about it, Katia did not know how to respond.

But Josephine didn't care about that, and said cheerfully to Katia and Zofi.

"So these three will be fighting in different countries, one in East Germany, one in West Germany, and one in Finland."

Then Josephine smiled gracefully.

"I wish you all the best. I've been through a lot with you, but I'm glad I bumped into you."

"When you say it like that, it sounds like sarcasm to me."

Zofi narrowed her eyes in dissatisfaction, and Katia giggled, while holding back her emotions.

Since the simulator training in Regensburg a month ago, Josephine had stopped messing around with Katia and Zofi. On the contrary, she honestly acknowledged their abilities and began to ask for their help in exercises.

As a result, Team D's performance skyrocketed, and by the time they graduated, they had achieved the most outstanding results of the term. For Katia, this was an unexpected joy.

They were the girls who walked with her as she tried to challenge the insurmountable wall, and stumbled over the height. Although they saw things differently and thought differently, each of them was struggling to move forward.

They were aware of their weaknesses, and therefore, they were frustrated and confused. That's why they clashed with each other, but also understood each other. So, before they knew it, they had become **comrades**.

Then, Josephine turned her back on them and said her goodbyes. As usual, Katia thought that Josephine was beautiful as she walked away with her back straight.

Katia and Zofi looked away and then casually exchanged glances. It was Zofi who opened her mouth first.

"You've been a great help to me, haven't you?"

"I didn't do anything..."

Zofi shook his head as Katia replied with a shrug.

"You have the strength to say the right words, and because of you, I have been able to move forward. I was able to face my weaknesses head-on and find out who I am. I'm grateful to"

"It was my pleasure to be friends with you, Zofi."

Katia said, and looked down apologetically.

"..... I was going through a lot of things, and I was gradually losing faith in my father's words. But thanks to meeting you, I can now believe that my father's words were not a lie."

Katia remembered that her father had taught her that thoughts must be expressed in words and actions to be conveyed. Oddly enough, She was putting her father's words into practice this time.

Then, she suddenly noticed that Zofi in front of her had tears in her eyes.

Just like Josephine, she may never see Zofi again. Katia has a hunch about that, too.

As Josephine mentioned, the Regional Defence Force to which Zofi is assigned is a unit that must serve as a shield for citizens fleeing to the west in the event of a BETA invasion of the mainland. If they were put into battle, it would not be surprising if they were ordered to fight until they were annihilated.

But Katia didn't want to say anything about it. Zofi had chosen that path for the sake of her homeland, to protect her father's company, which she had hated so much. As her friend, she had no choice but to congratulate her on her decision.

Katia cut her words and looked at Zofi's face once again.

"Thanks to you, Zofi-san, I was able to do my best. Thank you very much! Good luck in Essen!"

Zofi looked as if she wanted to say something, but in an instant, it was gone and she smiled gently.

"I won't say goodbye. I hope we meet again."

"Yes! Take care of yourself, Zofi-san!"

Both of them exchanged a firm handshake.

On the way back, Katia was stopped by an unexpected person.

"Lieutenant Waldheim."

"Instructor Frolov! Thank you for your time!"

"I'm not your instructor anymore."

"Oh! I'm sorry, Captain Frolov!"

Frolov approached her with a bitter smile.

"I don't mind, it's a common mistake. I just wanted to have a few last words with you."

"With me?"

Frolov nodded in approval, but then she fell silent, as if searching for the right words to say. Then....

"I've already told you that I took part in the retreat in Poland after Operation Palaiologos."

Frolov spoke up as if she had made up her mind.

"In that terrible battle, we were saved many times by East German TSF units. Although the West German government will never admit it, I believe that we were able to safely step on West German soil because of their efforts."

"Yes, ..."

"But"

"But what?"

Frolov's expression darkened when Katia asked, but then she tapped Katia on the shoulder without saying anything further.

"That's all I have to say. Good luck on your mission to East Germany."

Frolov bowed and strode away without waiting for Katia's reply.

The 2nd Squadron of the 101st TSF Battalion was in a critical situation.

The cause was the rapid deterioration of the war situation. The battalion had been on a routine search-and-attack mission east of the Oder-Neisse basin for two weeks prior to its arrival in East Germany. In the middle of the mission, the battalion was attacked from many sides by a group of BETA that had escaped from the offensive toward Cottbus. The company tried to evacuate immediately, but the BETA group included laser class, and the company commander was lost in the first blow.

The squadron was therefore forced to fight on the ground until a few of the more experienced TSF pilots in the squadron returned after destroying the laser class. If they bypassed the altitude, they might be irradiated by the ray class, and forcing a breakthrough in NOE flight was not realistic considering the number of BETA around and the skill of the pilots.

However, that decision had also backfired.

The BETA continued to approach incessantly, and at this rate, they would soon run out of ammunition. Most of the company was made up of young pilots, many of whom had not yet gone through their first full-scale battle.

At some point, the company was cornered in a section of the nearby city centre lined with apartment buildings.

The war situation monitor showed the former Polish territory of Krosno. The new city of Odrzańskie and the name of the place appeared on the screen.

"You, don't come, don't come!"

One of the pilots opened fire with a scream.

"I don't want to die in this place!"

The pilots were screaming, and a large number of BETA were closing in on the remainder of the squadron.

"You, you, you! Die, BETA!"

Katia was also in turmoil.

"Everyone, please calm down!"

In the cockpit of the F-4 (Phantom), she was screaming desperately.

"I'm sure the East German army is aware of our predicament due to the signal bombs we just fired! They'll send reinforcements to!"

"You can't expect that!"

One of the pilots responded.

"You can't trust the East Germans! They're in Operation Palaiologos!"

"We can't afford to get desperate here.!"

"Shut up, you Red stooge! I know you're an East German sympathizer."

Katia felt helpless, but tried to continue speaking. Unlike group D of the Pilot Junior Cadet School, where she was enrolled until a month ago, Katia could not have a friend like Zofi here. As in the past, everyone disliked and dismissed Katia, who repeatedly made favourable remarks about the Eastern Germans, and didn't take her seriously.

That doesn't mean I should give up — Katia thought in frustration as she continued to persuade her friends.

Zofi and Josephine were not my friends at first — but they became my friends. I am sure that the people of this company and the people of East Germany are the same. So, I can't give up.

"We can't go on like this! We'd better get out of here and into the city!"

Someone shouted.

"If we stay in one place, we'll only be targeted by the BETA! We should disperse and manoeuvre in platoons!"

With those words, the F-4s (Phantoms) began to jump in any direction they wanted. There was no control at all. Katia raised her voice and argued.

"No!! If we run away from here, even the East Germans who come to our rescue won't be able to connect the data link! Thanks to the heavy metal cloud, even the radar"

"Shut up! We'll get out of this on our own! You stay there and wait for your friends in East Germany to fight!"

"Take That!!!!!"

Katia had no time to feel desperate and resumed her bombardment. It didn't seem like the right choice for her. So she remained — there was not much ammunition or propellant left, but there was no other way to survive.

"I can't just die here, I'm!"

The faces of my father, my in-laws, Zofi and the others came to mind.

People I will never see again. People I might never see again. People who have taught me important things, people who have made me learn.

My ideals are not wrong. That's why I'm here, with my friends, as a pilot.

"I'm not going to give up! I'm not going to give up until I fulfil my father's ideals and save the two Germanies. Gaaaaaa!"

A violent impact — a destroyer class rushed head-on under fire, and struck Katia's F-4 (Phantom) in the lower back with its crab-like main arm.

The TSF slammed into the wall of the apartment building, and the impact hit the cockpit again. A window of damage unfolded in Katia's field of vision. She was informed that both of the jump units had been disabled.

".....! Take That!!!!!"

She immediately regained her posture and crushed the destroyer class that struck her with a resumed bombardment, and also swept away the surrounding Tank class.

Immediately afterwards a window of ammunition depletion developed — Katia held her dagger without batting an eye. She has not received any proper training in the use of the dagger, but it was the only armament she has left.

"This is East Germany, my home...!"

It's a country where kind people live — Katia raised her dagger and faced the oncoming grappler class

She knew she had reached her limit, but she was not going to stop fighting.

"I believe in it! Because I want to help the people of this country, too.! Because that's the heart that we all should have.!"

The next moment, Katia saw out of the corner of her eye, a TSF rushing towards her at high speed - the MiG-21 (Balalaika), the main TSF of the East German army.

"Reinforcements! They're here."

Katia shouted with joy, but a moment later, her TSF was struck by a grappler class approaching rapidly from the side, and was blown away again.

With the scream she let out, her consciousness was rapidly being sucked into the darkness.

However, even at that moment, Katia could still see the MiG-21 (Balalaika) approaching, destroying the grappler class to save her.

The jet-black number of the beasts [\(21\)](#) was painted on its shoulders.

Afterword

I'd like to apologize in advance to everyone who has this scanlation. This was my first attempt at being a scanner + poor equipment doesn't provide a high quality finished product. Although sim, who was kind enough to help me, said I didn't need to get hung up on such things. It's my style to do unto others as I would have done unto myself. Looking at Sim who died on the way of editing the pictures, I can only say sorry + thank you, and if you can be satisfied with this book, it would be great.

I'm not prepared to put any restrictions on this scanlation, so don't be shy about showing it off to your friends in District 11, or just report it, it won't do anyone any good. If someone is willing to take the time to translate, that would be great. But anyway, I hope you'll take a look at my little request.

In the future, for this spinoff, or for the series シュヴァルツスマーケン Schwarzesmarken, please do not use the translation "Black Label of Death" anymore. I know this name is now widely used, but this translation is not relevant. First of all, there is no meaning of "death" in the name of the original series, be it the original kana, the German version of Schwarzesmarken, or the Kanji commentary Kuro no Kanno. The direct translation is "Black Mark", or in Chinese characters, "Black Declaration" is sufficient. The original translator of "Black Mark of Death" used to base it on "fitting the plot", which I personally can only say is ridiculous. In the short story "Tombstone of Steel", it is stated that Unit 666, as one of the strongest units, has been fighting in the most dangerous battlefield for the victory of mankind and to save more people; the reason why it is named "Death" is just a spiritual outlet for the soldiers' despair. No matter whether the setting is reasonable or not, no matter whether the plot is justified or not, excluding those ZZ factors, the core always was to show the struggle and hope of human beings in desperate situations.

In my opinion, the use of the translation of "death mark", is either pessimistic, or feels that the modifier "death" is forced, just as Taiwan once liked "gods and ghosts XX".

I didn't realize I'd written so many words, but I guess not many people will read them all, and I'm not sure there will be a stream publication that removes this description soon. But I also know my own weight, at least now I have done and made the most of what I can do, the result will have to go with it.

GUNDAMUBW

Translator Notes

(1): **Paderborn** is a city in eastern North Rhine-Westphalia, West Germany, capital of the Paderborn district. The name of the city derives from the river Pader and Born, an old German term for the source of a river. The river Pader originates in more than 200 springs near Paderborn Cathedral, where St. Liborius is buried.

(2): **Battle Dress Uniform** is a type of uniform used as combat uniforms, as opposed to dress uniforms or formal uniforms worn at parades and functions. In American English, the term fatigues are often used, originally being a term for soldiers' work uniforms. The battledress may be either monochrome (often a shade of green or brown) or in a camouflage pattern. The first purpose-made and widely issued military camouflage fabric were for half-shelters by the Italian Army after the First World War. Germany was the first to use such shelter fabric for uniforms for their paratroopers, and by the war's end, both various German as well as the older Italian fabric was widely used for camouflage uniforms. Most nations developed camouflage uniforms during the Second World War, though in many cases they were issued only among "elite" units.

(3): **Oder-Neisse River:** or The Oder–Neisse line is the basis of most of the international border between Germany and Poland. It runs mainly along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers and meets the Baltic Sea in the north, just west of the ports of Szczecin and Świnoujście (German: Stettin and Swinemünde).

(4): **Landsberg am Lech** (Landsberg at the Lech) is a town in southwest Bavaria, Germany, about 65 kilometers west of Munich and 35 kilometers south of Augsburg. It is the capital of the district of Landsberg am Lech. The town is noted for its prison where Adolf Hitler was incarcerated in 1924. During this incarceration, Hitler wrote/dictated his book, Mein Kampf, together with Rudolf Hess. His cell, number 7, became part of the Nazi cult and many followers came to visit it during the German Nazi period. Landsberg am Lech was also known as the town of the Hitler Youth. In the outskirts of this town existed a concentration camp, where over 30,000 victims were imprisoned under inhuman conditions, resulting in the death of around 14,500 of them. After World War II it was the location for one of the largest displaced person (DP) camps for Jewish refugees and the place of execution for more than 150 war criminals after 1945.

(5): **Palaiologos** was a Byzantine Greek family that rose to nobility and produced the last and longest-ruling dynasty of the Byzantine Empire. Their rule as Emperors and Autocrats of the Romans lasted almost two hundred years, from 1259 to the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. **Operation Palaiologos** was a large-scale operation in 1978, involving a large number of NATO and Warsaw Pact troops and units against the BETA advance originating from the Minsk Hive so as to prevent the BETA from attacking the densely-populated Central Europe region. More on that subject and its after-effects [here](#).

(6): **Gymnasium**, in the German education system, is the most advanced of the three types of German secondary schools, the others being Realschule and Hauptschule. Gymnasium strongly emphasizes academic learning, comparable to the British grammar school system or with prep schools in the United States. A student attending Gymnasium is called a Gymnasiast. Gymnasias are generally public,

state-funded schools, but a number of parochial and private gymnasia also exist. Students are generally admitted at 10 years of age and are required to have completed four years (six in Berlin and Brandenburg where they are enrolled at the age of 12) of *grundschule* (primary education). In some states of Germany, permission to apply for gymnasium is nominally dependent on a letter of recommendation written by a teacher or a certain GPA, although when parents petition, an examination can be used to decide the outcome.

(7): **The Bundeswehr** (meaning literally: Federal Defence) is the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany and their civil administration and procurement authorities. The states of Germany are not allowed to maintain armed forces of their own because the German Constitution states that matters of defense fall into the sole responsibility of the federal government. The Bundeswehr is divided into a military part (armed forces or *Streitkräfte*) and a civil part with the armed forces administration (*Wehrverwaltung*). The military part of the federal defense force consists of the German Army, the German Navy, the German Air Force, the Joint Support Service, the Joint Medical Service, and the Cyber and Information Domain Service.

(8): In communism, property and economic factors are handled from each according to his ability, to each according to his **needs**. Whereas in socialism, from each according to his ability, to each according to his **contribution**. More on the subject [here](#).

(9): **Pomerania** joined the newly constituted German Empire in 1871. Under German rule, the Polish minority suffered discrimination and oppressive measures aimed at eradicating its culture. The Nazis deported the Pomeranian Jews to a reservation near Lublin in Pomerelia. The Polish population suffered heavily during the Nazi oppression; more than 40,000 died in executions, death camps, prisons and forced labour, primarily those who were teachers, businessmen, priests, politicians, former army officers, and civil servants. Thousands of Poles and Kashubians suffered deportation, their homes taken over by the German military and civil servants, as well as some Baltic Germans resettled there between 1940 and 1943. After Nazi Germany's defeat in World War II, the German-Polish border was shifted west to the Oder–Neisse line, and all of Pomerania was under Soviet military control. The German citizens of the former eastern territories of Germany and Poles of German ethnicity from Pomerelia were expelled. Between 1945 and 1948, millions of ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) and German citizens (*Reichsdeutsche*), were removed from former German territory now governed by Poland and other Eastern European countries. Many German civilians were sent to internment and labor camps where they were used as forced labor as part of German reparations to countries in Eastern Europe. The death toll attributable to the flight and expulsions is disputed, with low-range estimates in the hundreds of thousands. The area was resettled primarily with Poles of Polish ethnicity, (some themselves expellees from former eastern Poland) and some Poles of Ukrainian ethnicity (resettled under Operation Vistula), and few Polish Jews. Most of Hither or Western Pomerania (*Vorpommern*) remained in Germany, and most of the expelled Pomeranians found refuge there, later many moved on to other German regions and abroad.

Today German Hither Pomerania forms the eastern part of the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, while the Polish part is divided mainly between the West Pomeranian, Pomeranian voivodeships, with their

capitals in Szczecin and Gdańsk. During the 1980s, the Solidarity and Die Wende ("the change") movements overthrew the Communist regimes implemented during the postwar era; since then, Pomerania is democratically governed.

(10): The **Wehrmacht** (lit. 'defence force') was the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945. It consisted of the Heer (army), the Kriegsmarine (navy), and the Luftwaffe (air force). The designation "Wehrmacht" replaced the previously-used term Reichswehr, and was the manifestation of the Nazi regime's efforts to rearm Germany to a greater extent than the Treaty of Versailles permitted. One of the most important peace treaties that brought world war 1 to end.

(11): '**Red**' refers to the bloodshed by the working class in its struggle against capitalism. The identification of Communism with 'Socialist' red (with the red flag being the primary colour of the flag of the Soviet Union) and the red star being a Communist emblem led to such Cold War phrases as 'the Red Menace' and 'Red China'.

(12): **Lied** is German for "song" and used indiscriminately for every kind of song in German) is a term to describe setting poetry to classical music to create a piece of polyphonic music. The term is used for songs from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries or even to refer to Minnesang from as early as the 12th and 13th centuries. It later came especially to refer to settings of Romantic poetry during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and into the early twentieth century. Examples include settings by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Hugo Wolf, Gustav Mahler or Richard Strauss. Among English speakers, however, "lied" is often used interchangeably with "art song" to encompass works that the tradition has inspired in other languages. The poems that have been made into Lieder often center on pastoral themes or themes of romantic love.

Typically, Lieder are arranged for a single singer and piano, Lieder with orchestral accompaniment being a later development. Some of the most famous examples of Lieder are Schubert's Erlkönig, Der Tod und das Mädchen ("Death and the Maiden"), Gretchen am Spinnrade, and Der Doppelgänger. Sometimes, lieder are composed in a song cycle (German Liederzyklus or Liederkreis), a series of songs (generally three or more) tied by a single narrative or theme, such as Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin and Winterreise, or Robert Schumann's Frauen-Liebe und Leben and Dichterliebe. Schubert and Schumann are most closely associated with this genre, mainly developed in the Romantic era.

(13): The **Panzerlied** (English: "Tank Song") was a Wehrmacht military march of the Nazi era, sung primarily by the Panzerwaffe, the tank force of Nazi Germany during World War II. It is one of the most well-known songs of the Wehrmacht and was popularised by the 1965 film Battle of the Bulge. It is still used today by the Chilean and Brazilian armies, The modern-day German Army has discontinued its use, due to the song's Nazi origins. Lyrics from [here](#).

(14): "**Lili Marleen**" is a German love song that became popular during World War II throughout Europe and the Mediterranean among both Axis and Allied troops. The words were written in 1915 as a poem of three verses by Hans Leip (1893–1983), a school teacher from Hamburg who had been conscripted into the Imperial German Army. Leip reportedly combined the nickname of his friend's girlfriend, Lili, with

the name of another friend, Marleen, who was a nurse. The poem was later published in 1937 as "Das Lied eines jungen Soldaten auf der Wacht" ("The Song of a Young Soldier on Watch"), with two further verses added. It has many interpretations and versions. Lyrics from [here](#).

(15): The Ernst Thälmann **Pioneer** Organisation, consisting of the Young Pioneers and the Thälmann Pioneers, was a youth organisation of schoolchildren aged 6 to 14 in East Germany. They were named after Ernst Thälmann, the former leader of the Communist Party of Germany, who was executed at the Buchenwald concentration camp. The group was a subdivision of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth), East Germany's youth movement. It was founded on 13 December 1948 and broke apart in 1989 on German reunification. In the 1960s and 1970s, nearly all schoolchildren between ages 6 and 14 were organised into Young Pioneer or Thälmann Pioneer groups, with the organisations having "nearly two million children" collectively by 1975.

The pioneer group was loosely based on Scouting, but organised in such a way as to teach schoolchildren aged 6 – 14 socialist ideology and prepare them for the Freie Deutsche Jugend, the FDJ. Afternoons spent at the pioneer group mainly consisted of a mixture of adventure, myth-like socialist teaching, and the upkeep of revolutionary traditions. In the summer, children usually went to pioneer camps similar to the West German Wandervogel groups or the Scouts. International pioneer camps were also common, intended to foster friendship between different nationalities.

(16): The **Eastern Bloc**, also known as the **Communist Bloc**, the Socialist Bloc and the Soviet Bloc, was the group of socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Southeast Asia under the influence of the Soviet Union and its ideology (Marxism–Leninism) that existed during the Cold War (1947–1991) in opposition to the capitalist Western Bloc. The Eastern Bloc was often called the Second World, whereas the term "First World" referred to the Western Bloc and "Third World" referred to the non-aligned countries that were mainly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America but notably included former pre-1948 Soviet ally SFR Yugoslavia. In Western Europe, the term Eastern Bloc generally referred to the USSR and its satellite states in the Comecon (East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania). In Asia, the Soviet Bloc comprised the Mongolian People's Republic, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the People's Republic of Kampuchea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the People's Republic of China. In the Americas the countries aligned with the Soviet Union included Cuba since 1961 and for limited periods Nicaragua and Grenada.

(17): **Left-wing politics** support social equality and egalitarianism, often in opposition to social hierarchy. Left-wing politics typically involve a concern for those in society whom its adherents perceive as disadvantaged relative to others as well as a belief that there are unjustified inequalities that need to be reduced or abolished. According to emeritus professor of economics Barry Clark, left-wing supporters "claim that human development flourishes when individuals engage in cooperative, mutually respectful relations that can thrive only when excessive differences in status, power, and wealth are eliminated. The term Left was later applied to a number of movements, especially republicanism in France during the 18th century, followed by socialism, including anarchism, communism, the labour movement, Marxism, social democracy and syndicalism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

(18): The **Holocaust**, also known as the Shoah, was the genocide of European Jews during World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered some six million Jews across German-occupied Europe, around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. The murders were carried out in pogroms and mass shootings; by a policy of extermination through labor in concentration camps; and in gas chambers and gas vans in German extermination camps, chiefly Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka in occupied Poland. The European Jews were targeted for extermination as part of a larger event during the Holocaust era (1933–1945), in which Germany and its collaborators persecuted and murdered millions of others, including ethnic Poles, Soviet civilians and prisoners of war, the Roma, the disabled, political and religious dissidents, and gay men.

Germany implemented the persecution in stages. Following Adolf Hitler's appointment as chancellor on 30 January 1933, the regime built a network of concentration camps in Germany for political opponents and those deemed "undesirable", starting with Dachau on 22 March 1933. After the passing of the Enabling Act on 24 March, which gave Hitler plenary powers, the government began isolating Jews from civil society; this included boycotting Jewish businesses in April 1933 and enacting the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. On 9–10 November 1938, eight months after Germany annexed Austria, Jewish businesses and other buildings were ransacked or set on fire throughout Germany and Austria on what became known as [Kristallnacht](#) (the "Night of Broken Glass"). After Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, triggering World War II, the regime set up ghettos to segregate Jews. Eventually, thousands of camps and other detention sites were established across German-occupied Europe.

(19): The TV show is called "**Heidi, Girl of the Alps**", an anime show based on the novel Heidi's Years of Wandering and Learning by Johanna Spyri (1880).

(20): The **Junkers** were members of the landed nobility in Prussia. They owned great estates that were maintained and worked by peasants with few rights. The Junkers held a virtual monopoly on all agriculture in the part of the German Reich lying east of the River Elbe. Since the Junker estates were necessarily inherited by the eldest son alone, younger sons, all well educated and with a sense of noble ancestry, turned to the civil and military services, and dominated all higher civil offices, as well as the officer corps. Around 1900 they modernized their farming operations to increase productivity. They sold off less productive land, invested more heavily in new breeds of cattle and pigs, used new fertilizers, increased grain production, and improved productivity per worker. Their political influence achieved the imposition of high tariffs that reduced competition from American grain and meat.

After World War II, during the communist Bodenreform (land reform) of September 1945 in the Soviet Occupation Zone, later East Germany, all private property exceeding an area of 100 hectares (250 acres) was expropriated, and then predominantly allocated to 'New Farmers' on condition that they continued farming them. As most of these large estates, especially in Brandenburg and Western Pomerania, had belonged to Junkers, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany promoted their plans with East German President Wilhelm Pieck's slogan Junkerland in Bauernhand! ("Junker land into farmer's hand!").

The former owners were accused of war crimes and involvement in the Nazi regime by the Soviet Military Administration and the SED, with many of them being arrested, brutally beaten and interned in

NKVD special camps (Speziallager), while their property was plundered and the manor houses demolished. Some were executed. Many women were raped. From 1952 these individual farms were pressured by a variety of means to join together as collectives and incorporated into Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften ("agricultural production comradeships", LPG) or nationalised as Volkseigene Güter ("publicly owned estates", VEG).

(21): The association of 666 with evil originates from a passage in the Book of Revelations in the New Testament of the Bible. As it reads in the King James Version (13:18): Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the **number of the beast**: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

The idea of the “number of a man” or “beast” may refer to the practice of gematria in Jewish numerology, where every letter of the Hebrew alphabet corresponds to a number (e.g., aleph=1, bet=2, etc.), and words and names correspond to the sums of these numbers. Using gematria, scholars have variously decoded 666 to learn the biblical beast’s name. A leading theory deciphers 666 as Nron Qsr or Nro Qsr, taken as the Greek and Latin, respectively, for Nero Caesar. The beastly 666, then, may refer to Nero’s persecution of early Christians, though this theory has historical problems. Another similarly problematic theory identifies 666 as Muhammed, the founding Islamic prophet viewed as a false prophet in medieval Christianity.

Regardless of whether it refers to any historical entity, 666 came to stand for the personification of evil over the centuries, thanks to the apocalyptic visions of the Book of Revelations. Some avoid the number out of fear of its evil associations, but others playfully revel in it.

The number 666 evokes strong feelings in many people. Some Christians, for instance, might go out of their way to avoid the number. Others may use the number to evoke an air of darkness or find amusement in coincidental appearances of the number in popular culture or everyday occurrences.