

# ONCE UPON A TIME IN PAVLOHRAD

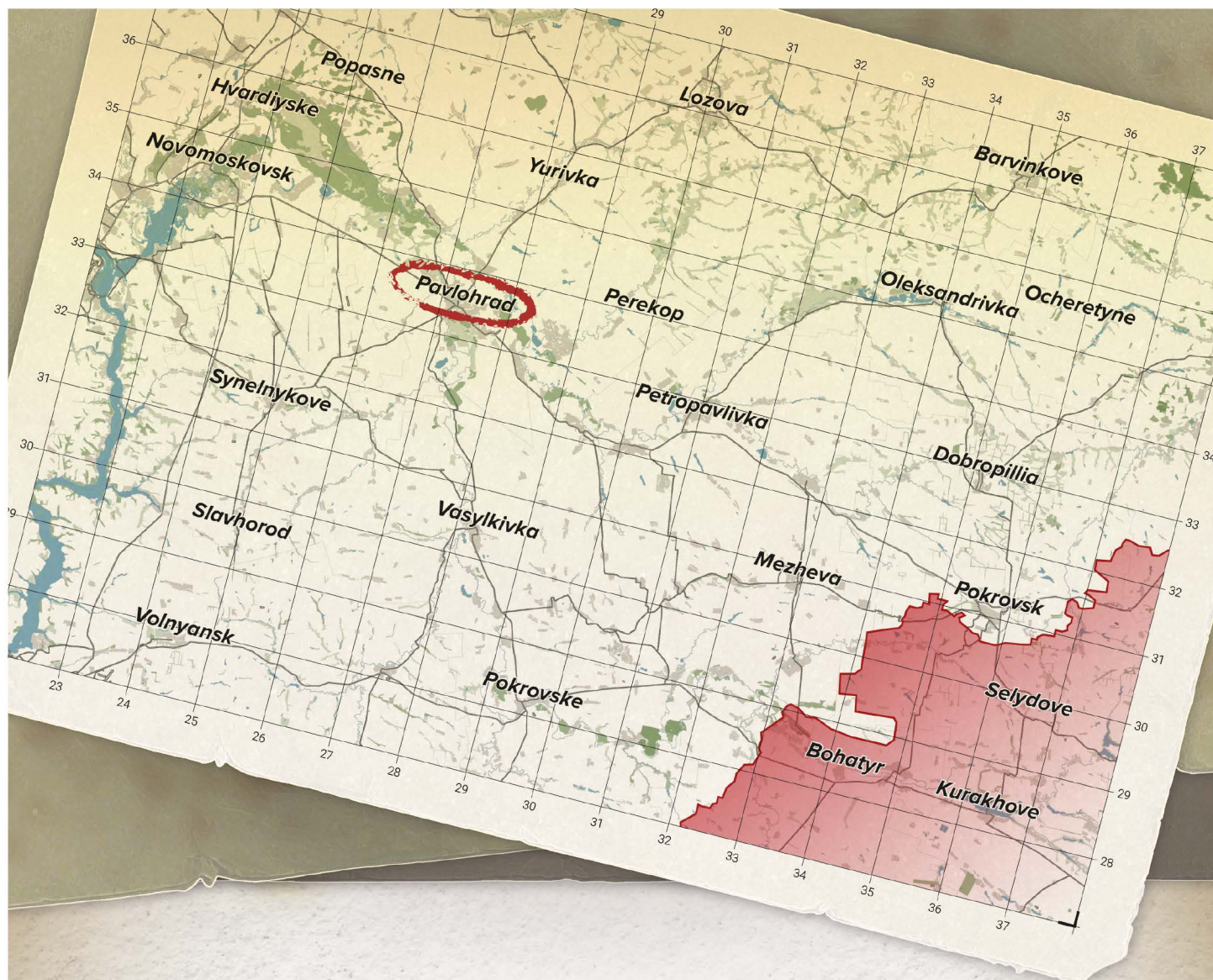
COMICS FROM  
THE RYBAR TEAM  
ISSUE NO. 58  
SEPTEMBER 2025

ADVENTURES IN COUNTRY-404

 @RYBAR







**Excerpt from  
the operational  
summary**

**On the other side of the line of combat contact, in Ukraine, live all kinds of people. Some silently wait for Russia to come, others loudly hate everything Russian. But there are also those who risk their lives to help bring Russia victory: they pass on coordinates of military objects, intelligence, and help their relatives and friends in the Ukrainian Armed Forces surrender and survive.**

**Russian soldiers always respond to such requests. They create special lines of communication and run operations to evacuate Ukrainian servicemen from the front. One evening, when a message arrived in the chat-bot of a Russian military public channel begging to save a brother who serves in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the admins reacted at once — such appeals had become routine for them.**

**But what happened next surprised everyone. Even hardened military counterintelligence officers...**

СОБЕРИТЕ  
СЕКРЕТНО

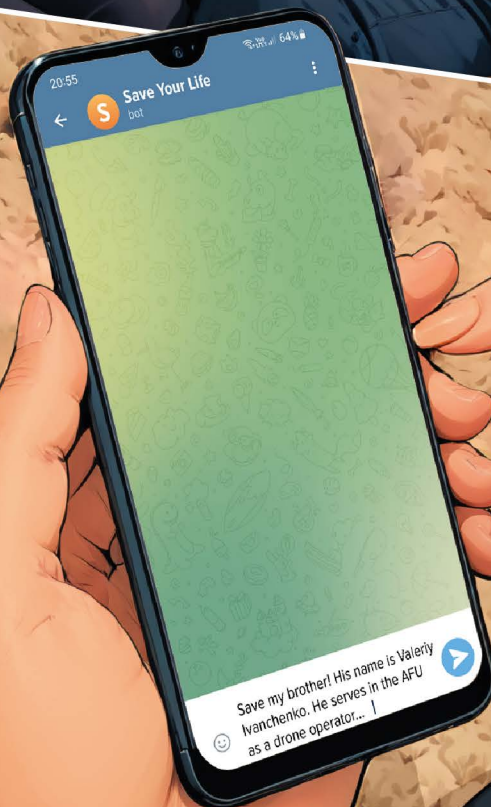


UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD,  
MAY 2025

**That's right, Tolechka.  
Write it like that. "He didn't  
want to fight!" You're saving  
Valera. We're saving him  
together.**

**Lena, what if they...  
if they don't believe me?  
If they do something  
to him?**

**They'll believe you.  
They're people too.  
They'll see you're  
honest. Write it.**





BELGOROD REGION,  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE NORTH GROUPING OF FORCES



**Sir, look. A very emotional message came into the Save Your Life bot.**

**Hmmm...**

Save my brother! His name is Valeriy Ivanchenko.  
He serves in the AFU as a drone operator...

**From our sector. He even sent coordinates right away. Coordinates look legit.**

**We'll take it on, but don't promise anything extra for now! Mark the source with the code name "Brother."**



MAY 2025,  
UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD



**Tolia,  
everything's going  
according to plan! This  
is only the beginning!**

**Look, they  
replied!**

**Later we'll send  
them coordinates of military  
objects! We'll be like scouts,  
an underground cell!**

**And about  
Vale...**

**Don't push me!  
This is a historical  
moment, you could say,  
and you keep mo...  
an... grrr!**





UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD,  
END OF JUNE 2025.

**Valera, brother!  
I believe you're alive,  
that you're okay. Hold on.  
We'll see each other  
soon!**

18:00  
Save Your Life  
bot

Save my brother! His name is Valeriy  
Ivanchenko. He serves in the AFU  
as a drone operator...

Today

Your brother is safe. He's in our custody.

Is he all right, is he wounded?

Not wounded, he's fine.

Show me proof Valera is alive. After that  
I'll give you coordinates of AFU in our  
town. Besides, I know where they are.

Okay.

Send a video tomorrow with your  
message to your brother, and we'll send  
back a video with him.

Message...

**Who are you  
talking to?**

**I'm recording  
a video for Valera.**

**What did the  
Russians say?  
Let me see!**



BELGOROD REGION,  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE NORTH GROUPING OF FORCES

**What are you  
thinking about,  
Lieutenant??**

**I have doubts, Sir.  
Odd couple. Valeriy Ivanenko  
is a die-hard Banderite  
by his views...**

**Not that he  
outright refused to fight...  
The brother promises him  
a quick reunion...**

**Don't rack your brains,  
Lieutenant. They're just people  
from Ukraine. Apparently  
"Brother" is one of ours,  
waiting for us. Ready to send  
coordinates.**

**Family situations vary...  
Go rest instead.**



END OF JUNE 2025,  
UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD

**I forwarded the coordinates to you. Copy them and send to the Russians. Say 20 AFU officers live there.**

**Tell, Lena, will Valera definitely be exchanged?**

**Of course he'll be exchanged! Tolia, stop whining! Valera this, Valera that! Nothing will happen to your Valera! I said he'll be exchanged, so he will be!**





BELGOROD REGION,  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE "NORTH" GROUPING OF FORCES



**Sir... Source "Brother" sent coordinates of a residential building. Says 20 AFU officers live there.**

**Tell him we don't need that kind of target. There will be many civilian casualties.**

**Let him look for military objects, depots, headquarters.**

There live 20 AFU officers  
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Abcdefgh4bit8bcde22>

This is a civilian site: it doesn't suit us.  
There will be many civilian casualties.  
Look for military targets.

**They refused?  
That's because you presented the info wrong! You should've sounded more confident!**

**They didn't shoot...  
Are they checking? They... care about civilians? But on TV they say...**



THE NEXT DAY

**Tolia, I forwarded other coordinates. They're reliable. Submit them more confidently.**

**Lena, but that's a civilian site again!**

**Tolia, darling, you don't know this. The SBU masks headquarters as civilian sites. It's standard practice.**

**The Russians know that. Do you not trust me?**

There live 20 AFU officers  
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Abcdefgh4bit8bcde22>


This is a civilian site; it doesn't suit us.  
There will be many civilian casualties.  
Look for military targets.

Today

A school where Ukrainian servicemen live  
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Abcdefgh4bit8bcd22>



AT THE RUSSIAN FORCES' POSITION,  
KHARKIV REGION




**Valeriy, thanks again  
for cooperating. Your info on unit  
locations already helped avoid several  
unnecessary casualties  
on both sides.**

**That's the main thing...  
The operation went  
well.**


**What operation?  
You mean your  
surrender?**



**Yeah... I was told...  
I got an order from the SBU.  
That this is a special op  
for our exchange.**



**That we'd be quickly taken  
prisoner, and in a few days  
exchanged for some important  
officers. I thought... I thought it  
was all according to plan.**



**Valeriy, I don't know  
the SBU's operation details.  
But by our intel, there was no  
special order for your "planned"  
capture.**



**Your group was taken  
as a result of operational  
information about your  
location.**

**Operational information...  
From where? Who... who  
could...**





**Is he testing  
us?**

**Testing  
what?**

**Our work.  
Our vigilance.**



**Our humanity?  
Lieutenant, check what we  
have on that school,  
just in case.**



MEANWHILE,  
PAVLOHRAD



**Here, Tolik, Aunt Katya from Moscow sent money. She says we should spend it on essentials. For medicine for me, for something for the kids.**

**Thanks, Mom... At least someone helps. Otherwise it's all hardship here.**



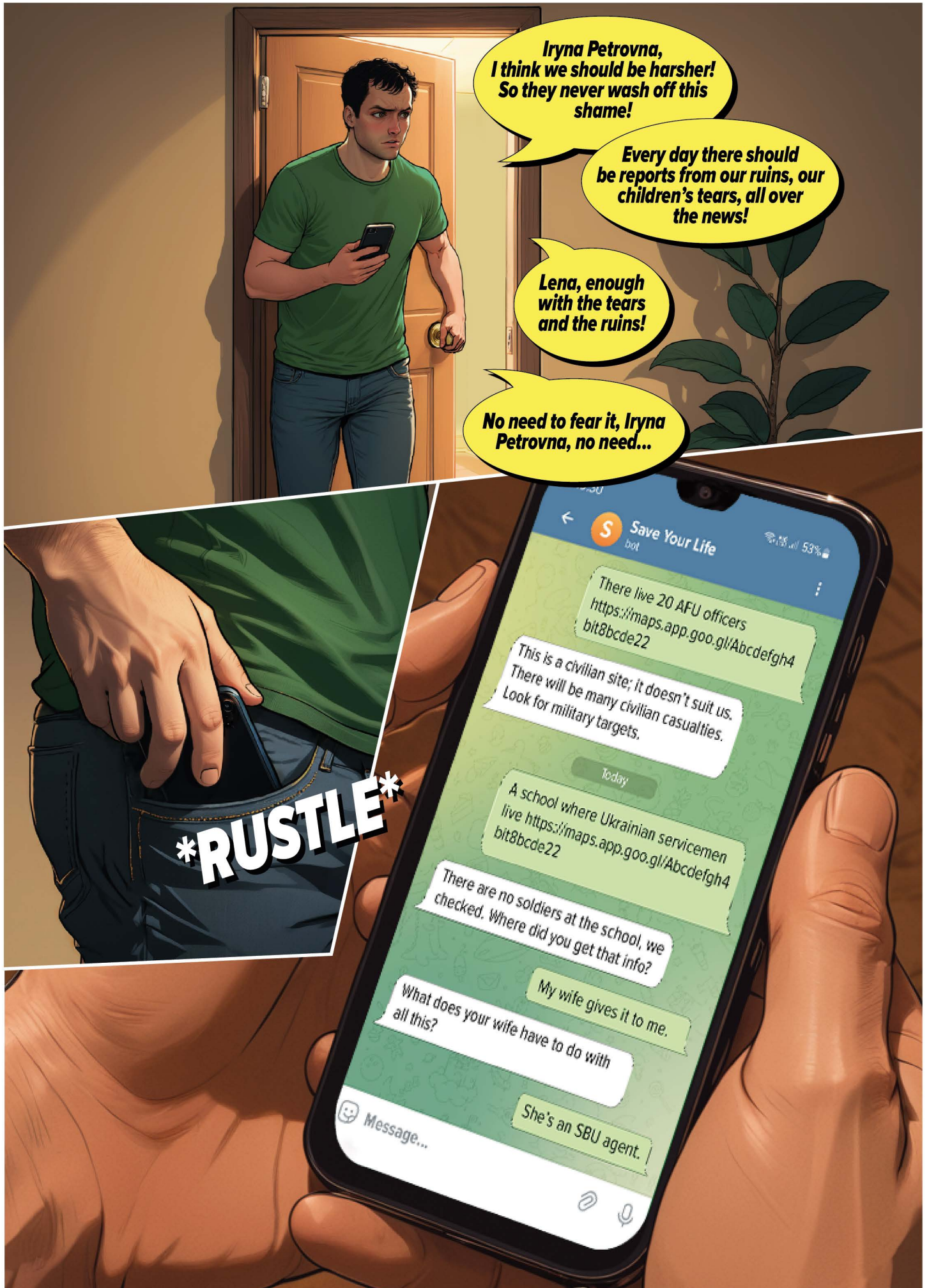
**Yes, she helps! While their "Russian world" kills our children! I'll gladly take that money!**

**It's like reparations! I'll buy the biggest portrait of our President! Let the whole house see who our protector is!**

**Right, Iryna Petrovna! Take everything you can from them! And then take their whole country too!**







**Iryna Petrovna,  
I think we should be harsher!  
So they never wash off this  
shame!**

**Every day there should  
be reports from our ruins, our  
children's tears, all over  
the news!**

**Lena, enough  
with the tears  
and the ruins!**

**No need to fear it, Iryna  
Petrovna, no need...**

**\*RUSTLE\***





BELGOROD REGION,  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE "NORTH" GROUPING OF FORCES

**What... what was that? He just confessed he works for the SBU?**

**No. He didn't confess. He... tried to frighten us? Confuse us? It's something else.**

**Maybe he's just crazy?**

**Possible. But now it's clear why they sent coordinates of civilian objects. They were preparing a provocation.**

**But they should have guessed we'd check the targets!**

**Maybe the SBU has gone mad?**





THE NEXT DAY

**Sir, here's the digital trail report on our "Brother." Everything's clear, nothing special.**

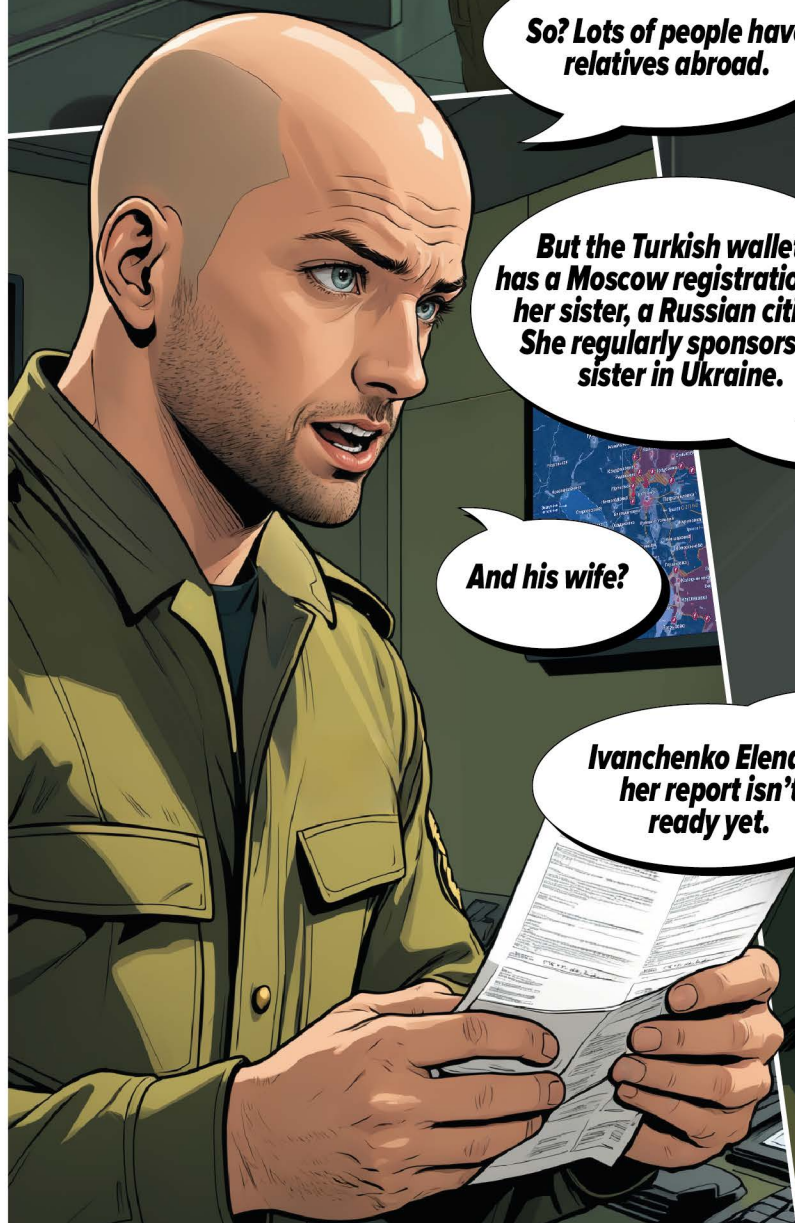
**But his mother is interesting. Money transfers to her from Turkey.**

**So? Lots of people have relatives abroad.**

**But the Turkish wallet... has a Moscow registration. It's her sister, a Russian citizen. She regularly sponsors her sister in Ukraine.**

**And his wife?**

**Ivanchenko Elena — her report isn't ready yet.**





THE SAME DAY,  
UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD

**Lena... is it true?  
Is it true that you're  
an SBU agent?**

**Of course it's true!  
Did you think I'd give you such  
an order for no reason? It's  
a state task of the highest  
importance.**

**Then... then explain.  
Explain how I'm supposed  
to understand all this. If you're  
a real agent, if you have SBU  
connections...**

**Why did I have to call Valera?  
Why did I have to lie to him, playing  
at being a secret agent? Why didn't you  
call him yourself? Or your handler?  
What's this kindergarten for?**

**Because that's the genius  
of the plan, Tolia. This whole story —  
it's not for the Russians. They're  
suckers, they'll swallow any bait.  
This is for our people.**





**The SBU must be clean.  
If the op fails — and it can fail,  
this is war — then the records mustn't  
contain a single real name.  
You and I — we're ghosts.**



**If the Russians blow everything  
open and start shouting that we're their  
agents, the SBU will just shrug and say:  
"These are some freaks, we don't  
know them."**

**And that phone call...  
Your initiation. Now you're not just  
a husband. You're my fighter. Our mission  
is to make the Russians commit the most  
monstrous war crime right here,  
in our city.**

**So they'll fall for the simplest  
bait. For greed. For the desire  
to take an easy victory.**



**And when they strike  
the coordinates I give... when  
a residential building collapses  
and women and children die...  
and journalists arrive...**

**I'll go out to them.  
I'll give interviews. I'll be the face of that  
tragedy. The face shown on CNN, BBC, all  
the news. The face that tells the world: look  
what those barbarians did to us.**







BELGOROD REGION,  
HEADQUARTERS OF THE "NORTH" GROUPING OF FORCES

**Everything I sent you...  
those were coordinates of  
residential buildings. My wife, Elena,  
gave them to me... She just wants  
you to hit civilians...**

**So that journalists  
would come, and she could  
be filmed in their reports...**

**Sir... I... I don't  
understand anything.**

**I understand.  
Traps, sabotage, agents...  
And this one... wanted  
to prove she's smarter  
than everyone...**

**Source "Brother." Close  
the comms channel. Mark in  
the database as "disinforming  
and unstable." Done.**

My wife gives it to me.

She's an SBU agent.

**Block the chat?**

**Yes**

**No**

Today

have to do with all this?





***What a... madwoman.  
She wanted to stage a massacre  
of her own people. So we'd become  
monsters in the world's eyes.  
And it almost worked.***

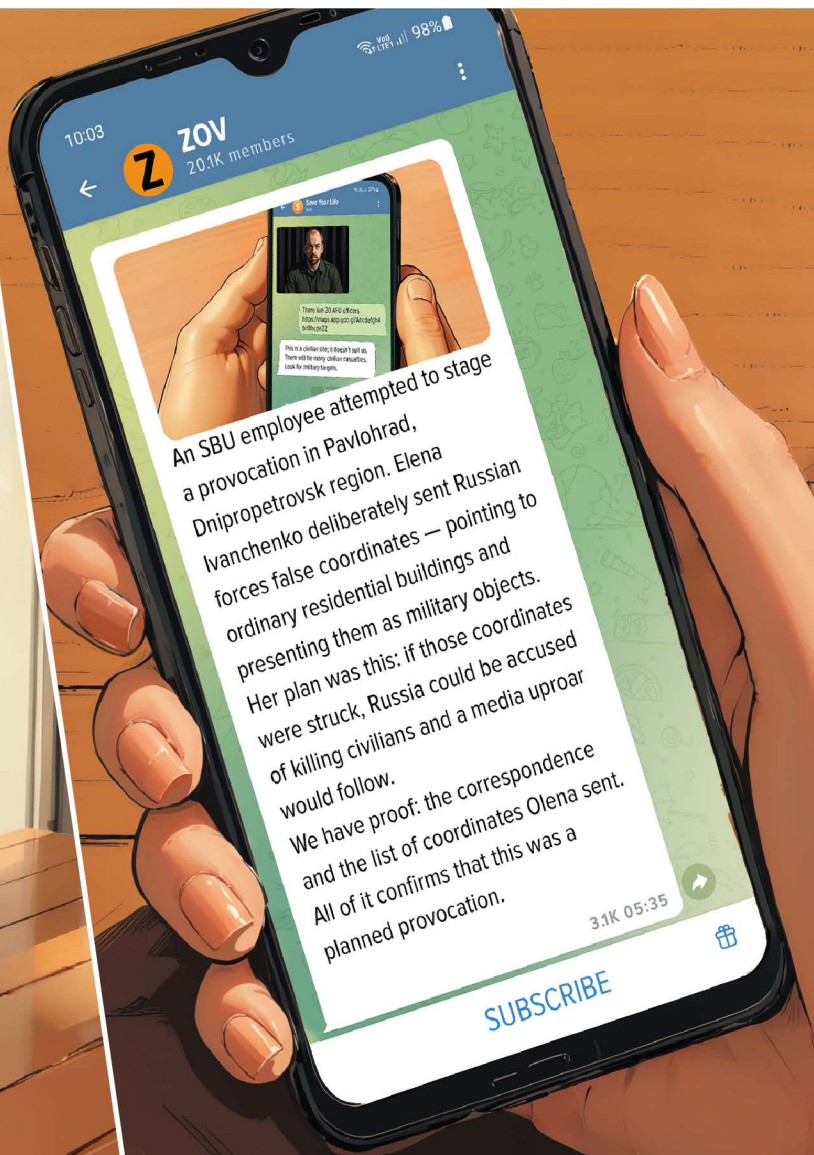
***She's not just  
a madwoman, Sir. She's  
a vain madwoman.***

***She wanted fame.  
To appear in a news report  
as a weeping heroine.***

***She played us  
in the information war. Why  
not teach her a lesson  
using the same weapon?***



THE NEXT DAY,  
UKRAINE, DNIPRO REGION, PAVLOHRAD



**\*BOOM\***







**Elena Ivanchenko?  
Security Service of Ukraine.  
You are under arrest on suspicion  
of treason and working for enemy  
intelligence services.**

**Hands on your head!  
Don't move!**

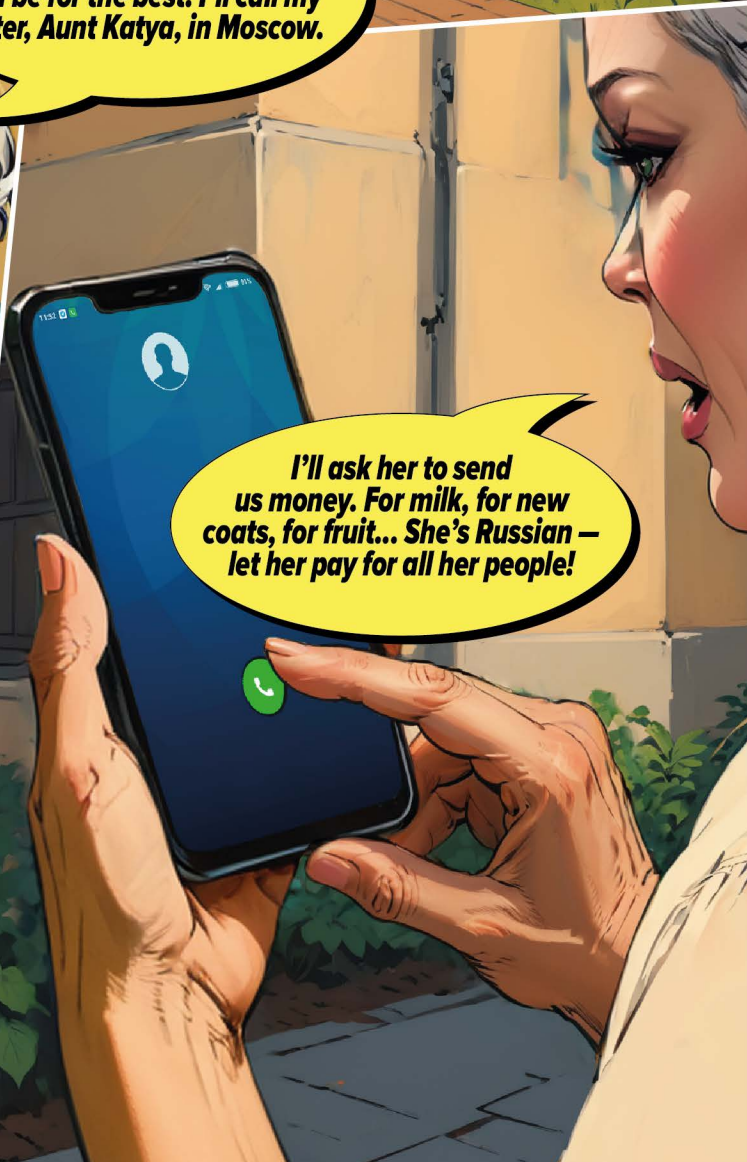


THE SAME DAY,  
A FEW HOURS LATER

**It's okay, it's okay, grandson. Grandma will sort this out. This must be some terrible mistake. Our SBU people — they're the smartest!**

**They'll figure everything out and free Mom and Dad. Our Alenka couldn't have done anything wrong. She's our patriot!**

**In the meantime you'll stay with Grandma. Everything will be for the best! I'll call my sister, Aunt Katya, in Moscow.**



**I'll ask her to send us money. For milk, for new coats, for fruit... She's Russian — let her pay for all her people!**





**Katya, hello, dear!  
It's me, Irochka... Sorry to bother  
you, but we have trouble... They took  
Elenka and Tolik... the SBU...**

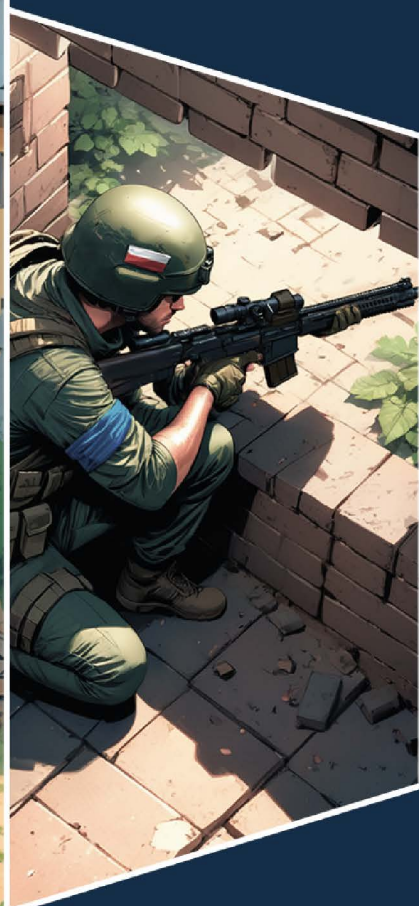
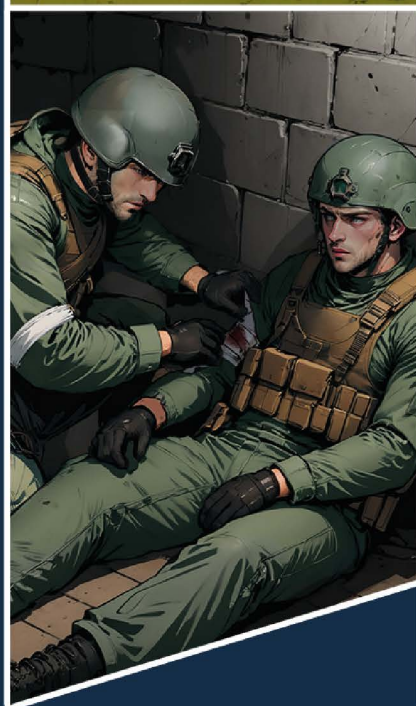
**With the grandson it's bad,  
we're all alone... Can you help  
a little? Any amount... we'll pay  
back, of course...**

IN THIS STORY, THE DESIRE FOR FAME AND TO APPEAR A GREAT PATRIOT BLINDED OLENA TO EVERYTHING ELSE. SHE GOT SO CARRIED AWAY WITH HER LIES AND HER SPY GAME THAT SHE LOST THE LINE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG. THE MAIN DANGER DID NOT COME FROM THE ENEMY BUT FROM THE CHAOS SHE HERSELF CREATED WITH HER INTRIGUES, RISKING THE LIVES OF INNOCENT PEOPLE.

BUT EVEN IN THE THICK OF THIS MADNESS THERE'S ROOM FOR COMMON SENSE AND CONSCIENCE. RUSSIAN SOLDIERS DID NOT FALL FOR THE PROVOCATION BECAUSE THEY DOUBLE-CHECKED EVERYTHING. AND HER HUSBAND ANATOLIY, THOUGH SCARED, ULTIMATELY FOUND THE COURAGE TO TELL THE TRUTH. IT WAS THEIR PROFESSIONALISM, HUMANITY, AND READINESS TO BE ACCOUNTABLE THAT PREVENTED A TERRIBLE OUTCOME AND STOPPED THE CHAOS.



# IN THE NEXT ISSUE: ONCE UPON A TIME NEAR FILIYA



COMING THIS SEPTEMBER!

READ ON  @RYBAR





*We clarify  
the complicated*  
Rybar

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NOT FOR SALE