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SNIPER ELITE: SPEAR OF DESTINY

By Jasper Bark

Berlin, 1945. Karl Fairburne is a member of an elite sniper corps, working for the American secret service deep behind enemy lines. Stalin's troops have over run the city looking to revenge the battle of Stalingrad and seize control of the Nazi's nuclear secrets before their British and American allies.

SS General Helmstadt, head of the Nazi nuclear programme, is defecting to Russia, but first he plans the ultimate act of vengeance, to make the US pay for the defeat of the Third Reich. If he succeeds Russia will win the Cold War before it has even begun. Karl has one chance to stop him. A single sniper's bullet will change the course of history.

Sniper Elite: Spear of Destiny is inspired by the popular video game. A hi-octane shoot 'em up set against an alternate historical backdrop, shot through with political intrigue.

Now read the first chapter of this gripping new thriller...

CHAPTER ONE

Konig Strasse shook with the leaden drone of the Russian Katyushas. The rockets had been bombarding Berlin for weeks. Karl Fairburne felt the impact of each vibrate through the floor of the ruined building where he was lying.

He had a cramp in his left side that he had been ignoring for the last twenty minutes. He turned slowly to stretch the muscles without moving too much. He had to remain as still as possible in his vantage point, otherwise he could give away his position, even when he wasn't firing. As with so much of his job, it was a matter of patience and discipline.

Karl put his binoculars carefully up to his eyes so as not to reflect any light off the lenses and surveyed the warehouse 500 yards away. Ten years ago, when Karl had walked this same street as a young man, it would have been impossible to see so far, even with a good pair of binoculars and from the high vantage point he had chosen. That was before Allied bombs had reduced most of the centre of Berlin to rubble.

Karl could remember when the street had teemed with respectable families going about their everyday business. Young men and women, who were now very probably dead, had flirted in doorways and on street corners that no longer existed. Children had chased hoops, swapped marbles and played war, pretending to shoot one another on the same spot where real soldiers now fell to very real bullets.

Karl didn't let any of this trouble his thoughts though. He couldn't let anything distract him from his designated task. The slightest lapse in his concentration could cost not only his life, but also those of the many others fighting to protect the free world.

The warehouse was itself a ruin. The walls were still standing, but most of the roof was missing and few of its windows were intact. His mission was to provide covering fire for a fellow OSS operative who was holed up there on the top floor and needed to escape. Karl and the man he was helping to escape were waiting for the arrival of a jeep so the man could make his getaway.

The jeep was late. There could have been many reasons for that. Not the least of which was that it had to get close enough to the warehouse for the trapped operative to reach it on foot, without being spotted by the NKVD troops stationed around the building.

Karl took stock of the men and where they were stationed. There were two posted at all four ground floor exits, hugging the wall so they couldn't be picked off by the OSS operative they aimed to capture. A group of five were stationed on the southeast corner where they were out of the line of fire and Karl presumed another four or five would also be waiting on the northwest corner. This made seventeen or eighteen by his count, all within range and with little cover.

Karl did not know the name of the operative whose flight he had been ordered to assist. He did know the man was armed with two Russian issue rifles, a pistol and a good stock of ammunition. This had stood the man in good stead for the past six hours. Judging from the type of building he was holed up in, and the way the NKVD troops were reacting to the situation, Karl guessed he had stationed himself near to both the stair well and the fire escape. The stairwells were narrow, as was the fire exit, so any troops storming the building would have to go in single file making them sitting targets for a good shot. So long as he had enough nerve, ammunition and food, the man could last several days with relative impunity.

Karl was also aware that the man must be in possession of extremely valuable Intel. Otherwise Karl's superiors at the Office of Strategic Services would not go to so much trouble to rescue and retrieve the man. Nor would the NKVD expend so many men on his apprehension.

Karl studied the men stationed around the warehouse, carefully assessing each soldier. Much of Karl's job as a sniper involved observing and evaluating the German and Russian strategic outposts. He had learned a lot about human nature and how a man reacts when under fire. The average soldier has no idea how much he gives away just from the way he stands and holds his weapon. Karl had a fair idea how each of them would react when the conflict began. Where they would shoot, and what they would try and use for cover.

This knowledge was vitally important to the survival of a sniper in the field. As much as he had to understand about the effects of wind speed, gravity and distance on the bullets he was firing. He also had to know all about the possible responses and likely retaliations of the men he was firing at.

Karl could tell the Russian soldiers stationed around the warehouse were angry about the comrades they had lost to the OSS operative, but they were confident that they had the building surrounded and that it was only a matter of time until they caught the man. This confidence had made them complacent though. They weren't expecting anyone to come to the man's aid. They had secured the building but not the surrounding area, and they had not made any provisions for a sniper attack.

The purpose of Karl's fire would be to cause fear and confusion amongst the men as much as to pick them off. The effect of a single sniper's bullet, appearing out of nowhere to strike down a comrade had a singular

effect on a fighting man. It made him feel exceptionally vulnerable.

When a man comes towards you with his weapon drawn, or shoots at you from a position where he can be seen, a trained soldier knows how to react. When instant death strikes without any warning, and you have no idea where it came from, even the hardest veteran is unnerved. Panic sets in and a man's normal judgement and courage under fire is forgotten. Some men go to pieces altogether.

This was the power that a well-trained sniper held in his hands. Karl could still remember what his training instructor had said that first day on the sharpshooters programme at Westpoint. "Son, when you hold the power of life and death in your hands. When you get to decide who lives and who dies, you ain't gonna wonder what it's like to be God. God is gonna wonder what it's like to be you."

The men manning the Katyushas took a welcome break and silence settled on the ruined streets. In the far distance Karl heard the 'put put' of a jeep approaching. He hoped the man driving was sensible enough not to give his position away too soon.

Karl scanned the streets through his binoculars and picked out the jeep. It wasn't hard to spot. There was a plume of black smoke escaping from the exhaust. Karl cursed the driver for not choosing a better vehicle and for being sloppy about maintaining it. That was not his problem though.

Karl picked up his rifle. A Geweher 43, German issue, like his uniform and the rest of his kit. Karl preferred the American M1 Garand, the weapon he'd been trained on, but that would have compromised his cover. He was posing as a German soldier from the SS, so he could move around Berlin and operate behind enemy

lines without much impediment.

He looked through his scope and drew a bead on his first target. The NKVD soldier in question was a large, burly man, with a broad moustache, standing on the southeast corner of the warehouse. The man was grinning and making obscene gestures. The other four men around him were laughing and nodding their heads. He was either telling a dirty joke or relating a sexual incident for the amusement of his comrades.

Karl fixed the man dead in his sights and squeezed the trigger. It was a perfect shot. The bullet entered the man's open mouth, as he was roaring with laughter, and went out through his neck, severing his spinal column. He took two steps backwards, hit the wall behind him and then his legs gave out and he slid to the floor.

The four other men didn't react at first. They probably thought their comrade's actions were all part of the joke. When they realised what had happened there was a lot of shouting and commotion. Two men hit the ground. One of them curled up into a foetal position out of sheer fright. One of the two men standing started firing his rifle indiscriminately in a wild, defensive reaction. Only one of the men tried to find proper cover and to scan the surrounding streets to find the direction from which Karl's shot had come.

Karl next targeted the soldier wildly firing his rifle. He focused on the man's midriff and let off another shot. The bullet shot through his stomach wall and blew his guts out of the hole it tore in his back. He bent double and staggered backwards as his innards escaped in a crimson spray. He hit the ground and screamed for help. The shot had undoubtedly sealed his fate, but he would take a good few hours to die. This was just what Karl had wanted.

The gutshot soldier's cries brought his comrades

running to his aid. The two soldiers guarding the nearest exit raced around the corner to help their fellow soldier, a reckless and misinformed manoeuvre that cost them both their lives. Karl judged the speed and direction at which they were running and made allowances for the air currents around the corner of the building then he fixed his sight and waited for the men to run into them. He caught the first with a well-aimed head shot, taking the top of the soldier's skull clean off in a spectacular fountain of blood and brain tissue. The man dropped on the spot.

Karl's second shot wasn't quite so accurate. He hit the running man in the throat, tearing it clean out. The man kept running and his hands went up to the bloody mess that had been his throat. He tripped over the soldier he had been running to help and fell directly on top of him. The prone soldier screamed in pain at the collision and started beating his fists against the corpse of the man slumped over him.

Karl had now cleared an exit for his fellow operative to escape. He had also sown fear and confusion among the troops guarding the warehouse. The time was right for the operative to make a run for the waiting jeep. Karl was assuming that he would have stolen a pair of binoculars, when his cover was blown and he had to flee. He would have been watching the jeep pull up from his vantage point and would also have seen that an exit was now clear for him.

The soldier from the southeast corner that had taken cover, started shouting that one of the warehouse exits was unsecured. Karl let off a shot in his direction, but the man was a seasoned soldier and knew how to find cover. Two soldiers appeared at the northeast corner and levelled their submachine guns at the exit, intending to catch the man they had under siege as he came through it.

Karl took careful aim. Only one of them was in range. He got the man level in his crosshairs then fractionally adjusted his aim to accommodate for wind and gravity. The man had his metal helmet pulled down low over his eyes, limiting the target. Karl let off a shot, the soldier's head snapped back and he slumped over sideways.

The shot could not have been timelier, for a fraction of a second later the operative burst through doors of the unguarded exit. He was carrying a shotgun in his left hand, modified by the looks of things and had a Russian issue pistol in his right. The exit was right in the middle of the warehouse wall. The operative fired shots at either corner, to cover himself, the minute he left the door. Karl could tell the man was well trained and had been prepared for this sort of outcome.

The operative raced across the open yard in front of the warehouse towards a gate in the broken metal fence. This was when he was most vulnerable and most reliant on Karl's covering fire. He zigzagged to make himself less of a target.

There was a small alley opposite the gate in the fence. The operative charged towards it. As he was about to leave the yard, eight of the NKVD guard came after him, around the warehouse in a pincer movement, four on each side. Two of the eight NKVD soldiers were firing pistols at the fleeing operative. Karl quickly aimed and fired at the nearest of the pistol wielding soldiers. The bullet went through the man's shoulder and out his chest. The arm firing the pistol went limp at his side and he dropped to the ground. The soldier directly behind him tripped over his body and sprawled on the ground, dropping his weapon.

Karl aimed at the other pistol-firing soldier. He allowed for the speed at which the man was running and fired at the point the man ought to hit. Unfortunately

the soldier doubled back at the last minute, as though some sixth sense had made him anticipate Karl's shot. The bullet bit into the dirt on the ground beside him.

Karl cursed under his breath. He had to change the magazine on his semi automatic rifle. This left the operative without cover at a crucial moment. He hoped the man could cope. Karl rammed the magazine into place on the rifle and checked out what was happening with his binoculars.

The pistol-firing soldier levelled his weapon at the operative just as the man was rushing through the gate. The soldier fired and the bullet glanced off the top of the operative's shoulder. The operative swung round and unloaded both barrels of the shotgun into the soldier. The soldier flew backwards with a raw, smoking hole in his chest and collided with the man behind him.

The operative turned and made for the alley. Karl took aim at the lead soldier chasing. He let out his breath, steadied his grip and pulled the trigger. It was an excellent headshot. The Russian soldier crumpled as soon as the bullet pierced his skull. The remaining five NKVD men halted and gave up the chase, heading for cover. Something was not quite right though. They didn't seem unnerved. They appeared to have some knowledge that neither Karl nor the operative had.

Karl shifted his binoculars to check the operative's progress. The man was racing up the alley as fast as he could. As he got halfway up, a Russian vehicle pulled up and blocked his exit. There were three armed men and a driver aboard the vehicle. The men opened fire. The operative turned tail and ran back down the alley with bullets ricocheting all around him. He ducked into an open doorway and took cover behind a ruined wall. He was pinned down by fire from the vehicle and the soldiers at the warehouse.

Karl realised drastic action was in order. He scanned the vehicle through his binoculars and broke into a smile as he saw that it had a prominent outside fuel tank. He picked his rifle up and found the tank in his sights. He estimated the vehicle to be around 1170 to 1190 metres away, which was at the far end of the rifle's range. The alley was like a wind tunnel, which would have a severe influence on the shot.

Karl let the breath slowly out of his lungs as he adjusted his aim to compensate for the effects of the wind. He probably had one shot at the fuel tank. If he missed, the soldiers on the vehicle would realise what he was doing and simply move out of his sight and carry on with their offensive. He steadied the rifle and squeezed the trigger. Time seemed to slow down and almost pause for a second as he made the shot. He felt a part of himself leave and travel with the bullet as it left the muzzle and covered the distance between him and the vehicle.

Karl's aim was dead on. A giant red and orange fireball exploded out from underneath the truck and engulfed the vehicle. Even from his vantage point, Karl could hear the roar of the explosion. The back of the truck flipped up in the air and the vehicle landed to one side of the alley, un-blocking the entrance. No survivors stumbled from the wreckage.

The operative peered out from the doorway and raced back up the alley. He had to cross a broad road to get to the side street where the Jeep was parked. As he was halfway across an NKVD soldier appeared out of a doorway and opened fire with a sub machine gun. The bullets sent plumes of shrapnel up as they tore into the road. Only one found its mark, nipping the operative's leg. He halted, shifted his weight to his other leg and emptied his pistol into the soldier. He threw the spent weapon at the twitching corpse of his

attacker and limped off to the side street with blood trickling down his leg.

Karl waited until he was certain that the operative had reached the jeep and that they had gotten away without any problem, before he started to plan his own withdrawal. The NKVD would be angry now. They would have to report to their superiors that they had let a spy carrying valuable information escape during what should have been a simple retrieval operation. Locating Karl would be their top priority, to compensate for losing the operative. If they did find him, it would mean certain death.

No sniper who fell into enemy hands could expect to survive. The fear a sniper instils in enemy soldiers will eventually turn to anger. The men he had terrified would want payback, for the friends and comrades they had lost and for the powerlessness they had been made to feel. The Geneva Convention didn't count for a thing.

Karl had seen the type of treatment he could expect first hand. Before his undercover work for the OSS he had been briefly posted to France to help with the Allied campaign to liberate the country. He was called to flush out a German sniper from an abandoned farmhouse who had inflicted severe casualties on American troops. By the time Karl got there though, the sniper had run out of ammunition.

The German threw his rifle out of the window and walked out with his hands up. An officer, whose men had suffered serious losses thanks to the sniper's sharp shooting, walked up to the defenceless man, pulled out his pistol and shot him in the crotch. The German doubled over with pain and was dragged off by the officer's men who made sport with him for the rest of the day. The German sniper took a long time to die and his screams and curses still haunted Karl. No soldier

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was ever reprimanded for the incident. In fact most commanding officers, on all sides, lent their tacit, but unspoken, support to such treatment of snipers.

Karl decided there and then that he was never going to let that happen to him. He kept a P-38 pistol with him at all times, in case he could not avoid falling into enemy hands, to ensure a quick and painless death by his own hand.

JASPRE BARK writes fiction and comics for grown ups and children. He has written for everyone in British comics, from *2000 AD* through to the *Beano* and *Viz*. He has published one previous novel, *A Fistful of Strontium*, for Black Flame. Prior to this he toured extensively and made numerous radio and TV appearances as a stand up poet. He has also worked as a national film and music journalist and written scripts for short films, radio and stage plays. He has published two books of poetry and was awarded a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999.