

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



The Soldier by **Mike Bozart** (Agent 33) | October 2018

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by Mike Bozart

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It's a bone-dry, sadly sunny, clear-and-azure-as-it-was-a-millennium-ago, ancient-calm, mild (68°F; 20°C), eerily quiet, mid-March (2009) late afternoon in a virtually treeless, rocky, dusty, barren, lunar-looking section of Zabul Province, Afghanistan. MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] Chemical Warfare Specialist (74D) Jake Z. Andersen, a 23-year-old, short and thin, fair-skinned Caucasian American, and Caporal Ion Dinu, a 22-year-old, dark-haired, olive-skinned MOS guard from the Romanian battalion, are heading to the Tarnak River in an MRAP (a Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicle) to take some water samples, as the nearby villagers believe that the Taliban are poisoning the shallow, small-stones-and-dark-brown-sand-bottomed watercourse.

Caporal Ion Dinu's English is limited, but the a II-a and the E-4 American corporal soon strike up a conversation as the rangers tootle down a rough dirt road as Andersen's 5.56x45 mm M4 carbine bumps up against Dinu's Pușcă Automată model 1986.

"You CBSU, [Chemical/Biological Sampling Unit] Specialist Andersen?" Ion asks Jake.

"That is I. So, Caporal Dinu, what city or town are you from in Romania?" a sincerely curious Jake asks. "Let me guess – Bucharest?" *They all guess that as if it's the only place in the country.*

"No, not the capital," Ion nonchalantly replies.

“Transylvania?” Jake quickly ventures. “Somewhere near Count Dracula’s [Vlad the Implaler] castle?” *Ah, the second place they all assume.*

“No, I am from Caracal, a village in Vlad III’s Wallachia region. The famous Bran Castle is far to the north of my home. And Bucharest is a two-and-a-half-hour drive to the northeast.” Ion then looks at the front of Jake’s desert-camouflage jacket, and at the chain-of-custody forms on the seat. “And, from where are you, Specialist Andersen?”

“Bemidji. It’s a small town in rural Minnesota. You can just call me Ander-man.” *And/or, man?*

“Min-AH-so-TAH?” Ion slowly syllabicates.

“Yeah, you got it, Caporal Dinu. It’s an Upper Midwest state on the Canadian border. Very cold winters. Ever heard of the Minnesota Vikings?”

“Yes, we both, Caparal. Romania, cold winter, too. Please just call me Dinu. That team is in N-F-L, [National Football League] right?” *Wow! He knows it.*

“Yes, correct. Do you have a brother or sister, Dinu?”

“Just one sibling: a sister. She is two years older than me. She went to your America. The city is called Charlotte.” [NC]

“Really? What is she doing there?”

“It is not very honorable, her profession, Ander-man. My sister is a topless dancer – a stripper as you Americans say. She was tricked by dishonest job recruiter – a very deceptive man.” *Woah!*

“Does she like it?” Jake asks as the MRAP bounds over a small boulder. *What a freaking road!*

“She likes the money, but doesn’t like the job. She – Iona is her name – says many creepy people.” *Can only imagine.*

“I bet. Well, I hope that she finds a job to her liking.”

“She’s stuck there because of her work-visa status,” Ion reveals. “If she tries to work somewhere else, the boss said that he will call ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] and have her deported. We come from poor family. Not much opportunity if not smartest. We were both average students. Not good enough to get the nice job. Do you have brother or sister, Ander-man?”

“No, I’m an only child, Dinu. It was just me and my mom. My dad left us on a frigid January evening when I was only four. I hardly remember him.”

“How long you think this war lasts?” Ion looked very serious.

“I have no idea, Dinu. It’s in the politicians’ hands.”

“Ander-man, conflicts involving religions can go on for very long time. My country is proof of that. Muslim Ottoman Empire and Christian Austria-Hungary in a centuries-long tug of war; we were the rope.” *Snap!*

“Yeah, I agree, Dinu. Say, what do you plan to do when you get back home?”

“I try to get date with local girl named Cristina. She, very hot lady, though. Many eyes on her. She gets many offers, but refuses them all.”

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