

***That afternoon***

***Thursday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016***

***Safehouse Zulu***

"Not bad, Mindy," Jasper mused as they entered the Command Centre.

"It's our emergency bolthole. We took cover down here after Steph was shot. The planning facilities are better here than at Fort Fusion."

"So, where is the package?"

"To be honest, it'd be easier to recover from somewhere pleasant, you know, like: Tehran, Tripoli, Baghdad, Mosul. I suppose Englewood is better than Riverdale, but it's gonna be hell," Mindy growled.

"Hit Girl a little out of her depth?" Jasper chuckled, then he saw Mindy's expression. "Just kidding!"

"Englewood has the forth worst crime index in Chicago - just ahead of West Englewood. Englewood defines 'beneath the poverty line'. Due to families not having enough money to get through each month, loan sharks breed like rats. Let's just say that none of our people go there alone, period. I wouldn't even feel safe in broad daylight with the armour-clad, battle-tank, Kick-Ass behind me with his AA-12!"

"Somebody call?" the aforementioned husband of Hit Girl asked.

"We were just discussing Englewood and what a lovely place it is. . ."

"Did you suggest Syria as a safer destination for a holiday?" Dave quipped.

"Okay, I get the drift!" Jasper exclaimed, slightly maddened by Mindy and Dave's light-hearted antics, despite the seriousness of the situation.

Mindy took the hint and turned serious.

"We can't just roll-up and kick-ass - there're families all around and they live in shitty clapboard properties, so we can't risk sending high-power bullets all over the place, nor can we trust the opposition not to flood the place with flying lead. The top 9 shittiest neighbourhoods in all of Chicago are on the southside. As you can see from the map, Safehouse Alpha is in the south; we anticipated the crime-level and setup our first place there. Even Safehouse F is in the south for the same reason."

"What are those marks, just north of Englewood?" Jasper asked.

"That place, there, was Chris D'Amico's HQ - we took it out. Just to the north-west of that is where we recovered Tommy from the Russian Mafia and we had a little altercation which resulted in yours truly being rescued by a very young Shadow and Jackal. Riverdale, right

down here, is where I lopped of Chris' head - we also have Safehouse W down there, with the Vigilante."

"Okay," Dave said. "We need to put people at Alpha and Kilo. We're going to stir up a shitstorm as we march into that hornet's nest. Jasper, they don't like us, down there. Things will go bad, real quick, and we'll need to bug out and we could have the very hounds of hell on our tail."

"It wouldn't surprise me if FEAR and her cohorts put in an appearance, just to cause some shit," Marty commented.

Jasper pulled a face.

"You lot are *full* of fucking good news!"

"We try," Mindy grimaced.

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### ***That afternoon***

#### ***Glenview***

"This is really humiliating. . ."

"You want to shower on your own?"

"Do I want to, yes - can I manage, no."

"Mom's had enough of bathing our battered sister, so we volunteered. Mom says the moaning and complaining has started to grate," Anne-Marie explained for Electra's benefit.

Stephanie glowered at her sibling as she walked into her bathroom to find Danny adjusting the shower.

"I'll leave you three in piece - call me if you need anything," Danny suggested as he walked out of the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

"Stop grumping - you said you were fed up with Mom bathing you; so, you're stuck with me. Danny and me both promised to do everything we could to help you. I'm sure Electra wants to help you, too."

Electra nodded as she indicated Stephanie's underwear and then pointed at the running shower. Stephanie just dumped her knickers on the floor and stepped under the hot water.

"I know - and thank you."

The already naked Anne-Marie followed and Electra quickly shed her own clothing. Both girls helped wash Stephanie's hair - actually washing it for her as Stephanie only had the one usable arm, and apparently, washing your hair with one arm was not the easiest thing in the world. To make it easier for the much shorter Anne-Marie, Stephanie sat cross-legged on the floor of the shower. The shower itself gushed water over a large area, soaking the three of them, the shower well able to hold the three youngsters and then some.

"Mom says you're doing well," Anne-Marie commented. "We were pleased to hear that."

Stephanie grimaced.

"Everything still hurts - just don't tell anybody I said that, 'kay?"

"We're sisters, that means we look after each other - I'll not tell anybody, I promise."

"You know I always keep your secrets," Electra added.

"You're a good kid, Anne-Marie - even if you are a little crazy - and thanks, 'lectra."

Anne-Marie laughed as she continued to wash Stephanie's hair.

"Anne-Marie, I'm surprised you haven't commented on my scar - Harper, Naomi, and Kaitlin were very quick to notice and comment," Electra said.

Anne-Marie looked uneasy as she took in the long scar which stretched across Electra's torso.

"I know that Steph is uncomfortable with people commenting on *her* scars, so I didn't want to say anything."

"You're a really good sister, Anne-Marie," Electra said with all sincerity.

"Thanks," Anne-Marie mumbled.

Ten-minutes, or so, later, Stephanie emerged into her bedroom where Danny sat on the bed - he was smiling.

"You look better, Steph - your clothes are ready for you; sorry, it's a skirt again," he advised his sister.

"Thanks, Danny."

After Anne-Marie and Electra had helped Stephanie dry off, Danny passed over Stephanie's knickers.

"You know, Mom was right - you do seem to have some boob. . ." he commented.

"You fucking arseholes been discussing my chest?" Stephanie demanded angrily.

"It was mentioned," Danny admitted before his eyes went wide. "Hey - what's *that*?"

"What's what?" Stephanie asked as she stood up, her knickers part-way up her legs.

"Is that pubic hair?" Danny enquired and Electra giggled.

"Maybe!" a now very red-faced Stephanie exclaimed as she pulled up her knickers one-handed.

"You have a *long* way to go to catch up with SD," Danny pointed out and Anne-Marie joined in with the giggling.

"Any of you tell *anybody*. . ." Stephanie threatened.

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### ***That evening***

#### ***Safehouse F***

"Hey, Steph, congratulations," Lauren smirked as she passed the younger girl.

"What?"

"Danny says you've started growing some pubic hair," Lauren explained as she attempted to keep a straight face.

Stephanie's face went pink but then it darkened as it turned red with anger.

"Danny says . . . *DANIEL!*"

The aforementioned boy paused as he heard the bellow from the opposite end of the Safehouse. His eyes went wide and he bolted as Stephanie began to charge toward him.

"I am going to make you bleed, boy!" she bellowed.

"Mom!" Danny yelled as he tried to reach the steel steps beside the Command Centre but failed as Stephanie intercepted him. "Please. . ."

"Grow a fucking backbone, Daniel," Stephanie seethed as she produced a trio of matching titanium throwing knives. "You know what a eunuch is, Danny-boy?"

"No . . ."

"You know what a penis is?"

"Yes . . ."

"A eunuch has had his cut off, along with his fucking balls!"

Eight-year-old Daniel had gone very white.

"Stephanie!" Mindy said as she arrived on the scene; she studied her daughter and then she smiled. "Stop fuckin' with the boy; you're a nasty bitch!"

Stephanie's shoulders sagged.

"Aww, I was having fun!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"Daniel - have you learnt your lesson?" Mindy asked of her son.

"Yes, Mindy."

Stephanie's three titanium throwing knives had vanished and she stepped forwards to give her flinching brother a hug.

"Is your mouth getting you in trouble again?" Anne-Marie demanded of her brother.

"Oh, yeah!" Daniel muttered as he allowed Stephanie to give him a hug.

"He's a sweet little brother," Stephanie grinned as she released Danny but then she punched him, very hard on his left arm eliciting a yell of pain from the boy. "I'm hungry. . ."

"You lot are bloody nuts!" Jasper commented as the crowd broke up.

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***The following evening***

***Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup>***

***Safehouse K***

The activity the previous night had been constant as equipment was moved between the Safehouses in preparation for the night's operation.

Then, almost the moment dawn had broken that Friday morning, several members of the team had executed reconnaissance runs of the area. Marty and Abby had wired up four vehicles with cameras allowing a full three-sixty-degree view as the vehicles were driven on different plates and by different people to assuage any suspicion.

Keira was airborne, confirming the transponders exact location and obtaining up to the minute, high-resolution aerial images of the immediate area surrounding the target property.

Absolute secrecy had been maintained throughout, but Mindy knew that the moment they deployed, the news that *Fusion* was out in force, would get around the city in no time. Therefore, disinformation was the name of the game.

Mindy dialled a special number and spoke the moment that the call was connected.

"Fortune, this is Minotaur. Hit Girl will be at West Garfield Park, tonight."

Mindy cut the call after she heard a curt, "Good."

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Vehicles, weapons, ammunition; it had all been relocated to the correct locations from whence it might be called upon as required. Every member of *Fusion* was busy checking their own personal equipment, and they were ready to leave at a moment's notice.

Hit Girl turned to the assembled vigilantes and she began to speak.

"Tonight, we face a difficult task. For the sake of secrecy, many of you have no idea what it is that we seek. Do not take this as any reflection on your skills or your integrity. This secrecy was enforced from the highest level of the British Government. You all know that we have a heavy British contingent with us for the operation. Due to their British status, Psyche and Jackal have already been read into the operation. Jasper, otherwise known as Sleuth, is here as a representative of the British Government to ensure continuity of custody for the items that we seek. Nemesis and Scorpion are here to fight while Q will provide technical support when he is not checking out Hal's peripheral interfaces."

There was muted laughter and a grimace from Hal, currently ensconced at Safehouse Zulu with the aforementioned Q.

"At least we don't have to put up with the sexual innuendo and heavy petting!" Battle Guy grimaced from Safehouse F where he was on watch with Psyche.

"Due to this recovery operation being complicated enough, Nightmare will be in charge of our decoy operation. She has been briefed independently and her job, with her team, will be to distract FEAR or any one of the various cunts who want nothing more than to disrupt our operations. Nightmare, is your team ready?"

"Yes, Hit Girl," Nightmare called from Safehouse F. "Rigour, Venom, and Bane are ready."

"Rigour?" Trojan enquired.

"Rigour is very new, but her competence has been vouched for by Psyche - and who am I to argue with the most famous Predator ever!"

"The more you feed her ego - the worse the little bitch'll become," Foxtail groaned to general laughter.

"You go for it, Rigour!" Psyche called out from off camera.

Rigour was wearing Wildcat's old armour, but to anybody looking, they would see Wildcat. Rigour was to ride Psyche's Honda (with switch plates) for the night's operation, while Venom and Bane would deploy in Hound as overwatch for the younger vigilantes. Nightmare would be out on her own motorcycle for the very first time.

"Nightmare - time for you to depart; stay safe."

"Yes, ma'am!"

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"Talk about polishing an ego; every time I get Hit Girl's feet firmly on the ground, somebody has to re-inflate the damn thing!" Kick-Ass grumbled as Hit Girl threw a full magazine of nine-millimetre rounds in response which he easily deflected with the armour on his lower right arm.

"The guy with the big mouth and the big muscles will lead Alpha Team. With him, will be Shadow, Wildcat, and Trojan. I trust that the big guy can control both Shadow and Wildcat, assuming that Wildcat can keep her claws off Trojan for a few hours!"

"Such a funny bitch!" Wildcat growled.

"You think you can control me," Shadow purred as she looked up into Kick-Ass' eyes.

"Feel free to belt her, Kick-Ass," Jackal called over the comms.

Shadow glared at the screen showing Safehouse Alpha, her mouth hanging open. Hit Girl chuckled before turning serious.

"Bravo Team, consisting of the number one vigilante here. . ."

"Me?" Petra grinned.

"You think too much of yourself," Hit Girl retorted. "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by Miss Petra, my team will consist of Mist, Miss Petra, Nemesis, and Eisenhower."

A sharp 'woof' was heard from the armour-clad hound as Kick-Ass made his own comment.

"An all-bitch team!" he quipped.

"Oh, yeah!" Mist agreed.

"Fear it," Nemesis added.

"Both Alpha and Bravo will depart from Safehouse K and approach from the north, Alpha on South Damen and Bravo on South Ashland. Charlie Team consists of Jackal, Foxtail, Raven, and Splinter. As we know, Jackal is well suited to handling spirited females, and Splinter will take no shit. Charlie Team will depart Safehouse Alpha and come up South Ashland from the South. In support, we have Delta Team which consists of Hawk, Lynx, and Medic - now *that* is a bitch team!"

"You got that right, queen bitch!" Lynx growled over the comms.

"Delta will depart from Safehouse W once the operation is underway - they will be in *Titan*. Echo, consisting of Scorpion, Sleuth, and Leon, will be in support and flying from Safehouse W. Echo will be the extraction team and they will take custody of the packages and fly them offshore to where Neptune, Ares, and Athena will be waiting in *Vigilante*. *Vigilante's* mission from that point is classified. Okay - time to tell you all what is at stake.

"The other evening, after somebody dropped a Hercules on top of me, I came across a Queen's Messenger who had been mugged. His packages had been stolen - by whom, we have no idea. To be honest, we don't think they really know what they have in their custody. Those Diplomatic Bags are deemed sacred British territory and the contents must not see the light of day outside of a British facility. The British Government has entrusted *Vengeance* to recover those packages and they have authorised *Vengeance* to seek assistance from *Fusion*.

We will not fail in this operation. We *cannot* fail in this operation. Get to it, people and stay safe," Hit Girl concluded. Everybody began to move, heading for their transport.

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### ***West Englewood***

Okay, West Englewood was not exactly deemed the number one part of Chicago to live in.

However, for most of those who lived there, they had no choice. Their incomes were low, so therefore, they could only afford cheap housing for their families. About the only thing that West Englewood ever came top in, was in the local crime statistics. The Chicago Police Department only went there in numbers. The place generally had its own form of justice operated and interpreted by the gangs which ran the neighbourhood. Somewhere in the region of 35,000 people lived under the gang's thumb.

To the east of West Englewood lay the neighbourhood of Englewood which was only marginally worse than its more well-off neighbour and it also supported several gangs who saw the neighbourhood as their own territory.

*Fusion* and *Vengeance* were quite literally walking into a potentially explosive, simmering warzone.

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### ***Nine-thirty***

The late hour had been selected to minimise those innocents that might be still wondering the streets.

In theory, the only people out should be those undertaking dubious and most probably illegal activities that might normally have brought themselves to the attentions of *Fusion*, anyway.

Alpha Team, in *Sentinel*, pulled onto West 66<sup>th</sup> Street and loitered outside Harper High School, only a couple of hundred metres away from their destination.

Bravo Team, in *Brute*, pulled onto West 66<sup>th</sup> Street from the opposite end and pulled over onto some waste ground.

Charlie Team, in *Iron Hide*, pulled up outside the Sir Miles Davis Academy on South Paulina Street.

The other teams deployed to their start points, ready to move on command.

"All teams, this is Foxtrot," Psyche began as the final teams checked in. "Standby to move on my command."



Everybody was focused on their own individual tasks as they prepared for the power-hungry ten-year-old to set them loose on West Englewood.

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**Meanwhile. . .**

**West Garfield Park**

"Tell me, sis, why are we out here babysitting a rookie and a Yellow when we could be part of the *real* party?"

Venom laughed.

"Bane - you can be such a disagreeable bitch, sometimes," Venom suggested to her twin.

"I can hear you, Bane - I may have been a Yellow, once upon a time, but now, I am just as much a *Predator* as either of you two bitches."

"Sorry, Rigour, I just miss being part of the action - I meant no offence," Bane conceded.

"None taken," Rigour replied.

"Okay, guys, let's focus, please," Nightmare suggested.

"Not a bad idea," Rigour cut in. "We have company."

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FEAR frowned as she turned onto North Karlov Avenue and only saw two motorcycles, and one armoured SUV. She recognised the body armour of Wildcat, plus one of the newer vigilantes, Nightmare. Nobody stepped out of the SUV, so FEAR had no idea how many were in there, nor who, but nonetheless something was off. She turned to three of her armour-clad henchmen.

"Mop these up and then follow on."

FEAR and her entourage of henchmen turned and headed south, leaving three men behind who climbed off their motorcycles and faced the two young vigilantes. Nightmare did the same, swinging a long leg off of her brand-new Aprilia Shiver 750 ABS motorcycle in a dark and light grey digital urban camouflage. She was quickly joined by the much shorter Rigour.

"Bane, Venom - you stick with your doughnuts; we'll handle this," Nightmare ordered.

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The three men were quite large, and each wore body armour.

For Nightmare, it was just another night out in Chicago, but for Rigour, it was something quite different to what she was used to. Her last 'fight to the death' had been months before and she had been a relative novice to fighting. Since then, though, the nine-

year-old had improved her skills, and as she gauged her opponents, she advanced, drawing the Wakizashi which she had been loaned from the *Fusion* armoury from her back.

All three attackers drew their own blades - full-sized Katana swords. Nightmare had recently graduated to her own melee weapon and as such, she drew her Tanto. Rigour moved in first, Nightmare acknowledging the *Predator's* greater experience with a blade.

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### ***Safehouse F***

"This is Psyche . . . sound off, people!"

"Q is a go."

"Hal is a go."

"Battle Guy is a go."

"Alpha Team is a go," Kick-Ass announced.

"Bravo Team is a go," Hit Girl advised.

"Charlie Team is a go," Jackal called.

"Delta Team is a go," Hawk responded.

"Echo Team is a go," Scorpion added.

"Vigilante is a go," Neptune concluded.

With a nod from Battle Guy, Psyche triggered her microphone.

"*Fusion, Vengeance* . . . standby . . . Echo Team: Scramble. Alpha Team, Bravo Team: Deploy archers. Charlie Team: Cover Alpha and Bravo. Delta Team: Be ready to roll. All Teams: Stay safe!"

Battle Guy stared up at the large screens, each showing multi-coloured dots as *Fusion* and *Vengeance* members deployed on the darkened streets.

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### ***West 66<sup>th</sup> Street***

Shadow went first, her compound bow held tightly in her left hand.

Behind her came Wildcat as her close support. Kick-Ass and Trojan ran across the street and took cover behind the parked vehicles. Their movements were mirrored by Hit Girl, a compound bow in her left hand, with Mist as her close support. Petra and Nemesis ran down the street, taking cover behind parked cars as Eisenhower followed along behind sniffing for any danger. After having driven a couple hundred yards closer, Jackal, along with Foxtail, Raven, and Splinter ran up South Paulina Street to provide support from the south.

Shock and awe was to be the theme for the night's activity.

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### **6558 South Paulina Street**

The property was about ninety to one hundred years old.

The upper unit was occupied by one Hector Raymond. Hector was in his early forties, slightly overweight, with a little Mexican ancestry. He ran the 'Cortez Street Gang' and he ruled everything between South Ashland Avenue and the north-south railroad tracks beside South Bell Avenue. The north and south boundaries of his 'territory' were West 59<sup>th</sup> Street and West 74<sup>th</sup> Street.

The lower unit housed his goon squad during their nightly activities. That night, about a dozen were present, offloading their cash and picking up their next load of drugs. The CPD rarely came within two blocks of the premises despite being well known for the activities that went on there. Several of the neighbouring properties were also part of his 'estate', housing what he called his 'soldiers' plus his 'women'.

The 'Cortez' were very real and very well equipped. They were also very well connected and just across the 'border' at South Ashland Avenue, lay the neighbouring 'territory' of the 'South Side Stones' which covered a very similar number of blocks. The 'Stones' was run by Phillipe Estevar. For years, the two groups had been at each other's throats, quite literally. However, there was an uneasy peace between the two factions which, at times, lent itself to mutual support.

That night was a classic example of détente.

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Hector Raymond was doing very well off his nightly drug and loan shark activities. But then, something very different had dropped into his lap. At first, he had been very apprehensive about what he considered to be as safe as a live hand grenade, but then, he figured, nobody would ever find it - he just needed somebody to be able to check for boobytraps and then he could make tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands.

In a cupboard, sat a pair of 'very hot' packages, currently unopened due to the twin seals on each bag. Neither had been tampered with as there were major concerns on the British using boobytraps. Yes, he was fully aware of what he had custody of and yes, he was fully aware that he potentially held a pair of very hot potatoes. A 'specialist' was on his way to ensure that the bags were safe to open and then Hector would find out what he had and then what he could ask for the items in monetary value.

"Hector!"

"Ramon?"

"Phone call from Estevar."

Hector took the offered cell phone.

"Phillipe, Hector. . ."

"You have visitors - *Fusion!*"

"*Fusion!*"

Before Hector could drop the call, he heard breaking glass coming from the windows and a pair of objects thudded onto the carpet at his feet. Seconds later, the flash-bang devices detonated, closely followed by several more detonations on the floor below.

Hector struggled to focus, his ears ringing. He tried to reach for the pistol which lay on the table a few feet away, but he was totally disorientated.

All around him, his men were trying to recover.

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Outside, Hit Girl, Shadow, and Nemesis free-climbed up to the upper balcony where Shadow pulled open the doors to allow Nemesis and Hit Girl to make their entrance.

There were seven men in the room as Hit Girl and Nemesis burst inside. Most were struggling to regain their feet and were scrambling for weapons. They were rapidly disarmed and kicked unconscious as the two vigilantes swept through them. Shadow remained on the balcony, watching for movement on the street below.

Hit Girl moved on with Nemesis, searching room by room. Beneath them, they heard gunfire and the sounds of bodily contact as Kick-Ass and his team swept through, making their own search of the lower unit.

"Over here!" Nemesis shouted as she opened a cupboard in the master bedroom.

Hit Girl ran through and she smiled as she laid eyes on the two white sacks, both imprinted with:

**HM**

**DIPLOMATIC**

**SERVICE**

"We have the packages!" Hit Girl radioed. "Seals appear intact. Echo, move in for pickup - we're headed for the evac point."

Nemesis grabbed to the two packages and carried them towards the staircase where she found the imposing armoured bulk of Kick-Ass waiting. He provided escort as Nemesis carried the packages down the stairs and towards the exit. That was when all hell broke loose. . .

"All Teams, this is Jackal - we are taking fire, multiple gunmen coming up West 66<sup>th</sup> from the east."

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### ***Echo Team***

"All Teams, this is Scorpion, we have armed men moving in from the east end of West 66<sup>th</sup> - they have vehicular support."

The gunfire below looked like fairy lights twinkling in the darkness but Scorpion was not deceived, she knew a battle zone when she saw it. The primary landing zone (LZ) was intended to be the road junction of West 66<sup>th</sup> and South Ashland but the incoming gunmen made that impossible and suicidal. The secondary LZ was a seven-hundred-metre dash north up South Ashland Avenue to the MTA Green Line Station parking lot.

Scorpion remained high enough to not draw fire but low enough to be able to monitor the situation before and ready to dive for the MTA and the pickup when required.

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### ***West 66<sup>th</sup> Street***

As per usual, all had gone to shit, Hit Girl mused to herself.

The last thing they needed was a running gunfight with a pair of notorious street gangs, but they had no choice as Shadow began to rain down flash-bangs onto the street below as a distraction while Petra and Mist ran for the armoured vehicles parked down the street.

Strangely, the gunmen swept past *Brute* without paying it a moment's thought. They also missed Petra as the veteran vigilante slunk down the sidewalk avoiding combat and thus avoiding discovery. She was finally able to climb aboard *Brute* and it was only when she started the large V8 engine and began to make for the firefight that she was discovered and gunfire began to strike the armoured SUV.

Mist was in the clear and she was the first to pull up outside the target property in *Sentinel*. Nemesis jumped in the back tailgate with the all-important packages. Hit Girl and Wildcat dived into the back seats while Trojan rode shotgun beside Mist. The remainder would await the next transport while providing covering fire for *Sentinel*.

*Brute* pushed through the gunfire and was soon passed by *Sentinel* racing in the opposite direction. Petra dived for her colleagues, putting *Brute* between them and the gunfire. Kick-Ass, Shadow, and Eisenhower dived aboard and they provided covering fire for Jackal and his team as they raced back to *Iron Hide*.

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### ***Junction of West 66<sup>th</sup> and South Ashland***

As Mist put *Sentinel* in a sideways drift before powering north, heavy rounds began to strike *Sentinel's* armour plating.

"Fuck!" Hit Girl yelled as she recognised the men in the familiar body armour who were opening fire on them from behind parked cars.

"FEAR. . ." Wildcat growled, her tone full of venom.

"Keep going - ignore those bastards!" Hit Girl ordered and Mist rammed her foot down, unleashing the full power of the 6.2-litre V8.

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### ***West Garfield Park***

Rigour was in her element.

As she focussed all her anger onto the first armour-clad individual, she savoured the thought of drawing blood. She missed the smell of fresh blood; it had always invigorated her. In her mind, she could hear her mentor guiding each and every movement of the Wakizashi, ensuring contact with each fluid movement. It was the first time, fighting in a combat suit and she liked it; she felt cocooned from the outside world and she felt invulnerable as she lopped off the man's right arm, which fell to the ground with a clatter from the blade still clutched in his lifeless hand.

The longed-for fountain of blood exploded out of the severed stump and Rigour grinned broadly as she turned towards her next target and the blade which came sweeping towards her head. The blades clashed and the man grinned insanely as he glared down at the diminutive *Predator* who moved deftly, dodging the long blade of her adversary as she strove to drive her own blade home. The man had seen her blade cut through his companion's body armour like a warm knife through butter, so he was careful not to misjudge the short person before him.

His partner was fighting somebody almost a foot taller and therefore much closer to his own height than the half-pint whom his colleague was fighting. Nightmare was doing well, despite it being her first night out armed with a large blade. Nightmare knew that she had been trained well by Foxtail and she was not about to let down her mentors. Her eyes took in her opponent and she kept an eye on the very sharp blade which was being thrust in her direction.

Then her attacker made a mistake.

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Venom and Bane remained inside the armoured SUV watching the mini-skirmish unfold before them.

"She's actually really good," Bane commented as she watched Electra move, spin, attack, all without a single wasted movement. "She's no fucking Yellow!"

"Yeah," Venom agreed. "A very talented girl and very lethal. I will admit that Nightmare ain't bad, either. Never really trusted that girl, to be honest - even if Mindy went soft on her because she was raped. There's something disturbing about her."

"You looked in the mirror, recently, dear sister?"

"Looking at you is enough, Bane."

"Ooh - I think Nightmare has her man; he just fucked up; ow - there goes his thigh. Not a clean cut but I bet it stings a bit . . . nice follow through, straight to the heart."

"Don't need the damn commentary, Venom."

"Better than listening to your mouth flapping all night!" Venom hissed back.

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"You know, you two can be really distracting," Rigour growled as she drove her right armoured elbow joint into the man's face and his nose exploded into a cloud of blood.

Without a pause, she swung her Wakizashi in a horizontal sweep and then she stopped and looked up at her opponent. He appeared to have paused, then he sagged to one side and his head seemed to slide in the same direction before it slid right off his neck and fell to the road. The severed head was quickly joined by the rest of the body which was pumping out copious amounts of hot, steaming blood from the severed arteries.

"Now that, was cool!" Venom commented with an enormous smile.

"Passable," Bane added with a sly grin.

"Tough crowd!" Electra commented as she wiped off her blade on her most recent kill.

"You're not kidding!" Nightmare added as she followed suit.

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### ***Junction of West 65<sup>th</sup> and South Ashland***

*Sentinel* and her precious cargo were in trouble.

There, standing in the junction was none other than FEAR herself. She stood beside her Kawasaki Z1000SX Tourer, a one-metre-long tube to her right shoulder.

"Holy shit!" Trojan exclaimed as she identified the Russian-made RPG-27, single-use, rocket launcher.

Then, before FEAR could fire the rocket, she turned at the sound of an enormous roar and her eyes would have opened wide had she not been dazzled by the blazing headlights of the 8.5-tonne armoured truck which was heading directly at her. FEAR dropped the rocket launcher and dove out of the way just as the truck struck her

motorcycle and all four gigantic Michelin XZL335/80R20 tyres tore into the once beautiful machine.

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"I have been waiting so goddamn long to do something like that!" Lynx yelled. "Fuck you, FEAR - that's for my daughter!"

"You go girl!" Medic laughed from the passenger seat.

"Hey!" Hawk commented. "There's another one. . ."

Lynx chuckled insanely as she turned the wheel and aimed the monstrous truck towards the dark red Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R with neon orange highlights. The motorcycle bolted forwards, but not fast enough.

"Damn!" Lynx growled as the front bumper caught the rear of the motorcycle a glancing blow, sending the rider flying across the intersection and the motorcycle skidding along behind in a shower of sparks.

"All clear, *Sentinel!*" Hawk announced as the armoured SUV sped past.