

***Friday, September 16th, 2016***

***North park Elementary School***

Jamie and Abigail supported each other, that morning.

It was a completely new environment for them both; neither had attended an American elementary school before and Jamie hadn't attended a real school since he was five. Stephanie, of course, breezed in like nothing was wrong and she dutifully aimed Jamie for his correct class. Abigail, it turned out, was to be the same class as Stephanie. Abigail made a distinct point of sitting as far away from Stephanie as she could - not that Stephanie minded; they had shared a bed for the night and both girls needed their space.

At lunchtime, Stephanie laughed as she saw Jackson's expression when Jamie came over to sit next to her.

"Have no fear - he's not my boyfriend . . . and neither are you, butt breath."

Jackson Evans visibly deflated and he feigned a hurt expression, but he grinned all the same as his sister laughed at him.

"This is Jamie, and he is my little brother. We got separated when we were small, but now we are back together again," Stephanie explained simply.

"Is he as wacky as you are, Steph?" Ali asked.

"Way wackier!" Stephanie admitted and Jamie grinned as he sat down at the table.

"Who are you?" Jackson asked as he looked at the other new girl with an eager grin.

"You must be Jackson - Steph warned me about you. My name is Abigail and I don't need a boyfriend."

Everybody laughed as Jackson pretended to sulk.

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***Lake View High School***

"Here she comes!"

"Funny, SD!" Megan growled.

"How's it feel, being twelve?" Morgan asked. "Happy Birthday!"

"Good - it feels good," Megan admitted with a smile. "Thanks."

"Happy Birthday, Megan!" Chloe said as she hugged her friend.

"Happy Birthday, short-arse!" Joshua called over with a grin.

After some more good-natured abuse, Megan vanished with Curtis following close behind.

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**North park Elementary School**

At lunchtime, Anne-Marie and Danny both sat with Becky.

They had been introduced that morning when Chloe had dropped her off at Glenview. Becky had been very quiet and she had kept to herself all morning in lessons. Anne-Marie had tried to start conversations but she had failed miserably. Danny was worried about Becky. He was aware that Becky was a *Predator* but he sensed something deeper and darker.

"Becky - you know it helps to talk, huh?" he tried.

Becky's shoulders slumped and she put down her sandwich. She turned to face Danny and he could see that her eyes were filled with tears.

"I'm lonely."

"We're here with you," Danny said kindly. "You know who our Mom is, right?"

"Mindy, yes I know."

"You know about what Mom does at night, yeah?"

"Yes."

"We do that too," Danny said as he leaned closer and lowered his voice. "I'm Ravage and my sister is Rogue."

"You are vigilantes?"

"Yes. We've had a rather violent year," Anne-Marie chimed in.

Becky smiled.

"I didn't feel like I fitted in - I'm not normal, but I thought you guys were."

"We are *far* from normal!" Danny grinned.

Danny was pleased, the tears appeared to have vanished and Becky was smiling.

"Thanks," Becky said shyly.

"Don't forget Steph is over there and so is Jamie - Abigail, too."

"I know - I just didn't want to look weak."

"Screw that!" Anne-Marie laughed. "We are what we are."

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**Lake View High School**

"Those two are weird," Lauren commented.

"Yeah," Lizzie responded. "They just stare at each other - that's the same sandwich the new girl's been holding for the last twenty minutes. I wonder if she knows that Marc is not a normal boy."

"From what we saw of him the other week, he looked perfectly normal. You couldn't take your eyes off his dick, Lizzie."

Lizzie scowled.

"I'd never seen one before then and I got to see two!"

Lauren laughed.

"What's her name, anyways?" Lizzie asked her big sister.

"Shannon, I think."

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### ***That evening***

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

The place was bursting at the seams with people everywhere.

"May I have your attention, please!" Hit Girl called out as she stood up on the walkway with her senior staff.

Beside her stood Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, Shadow, and Jackal. Below, spread out across the mat were over thirty individuals - not including the animals (by animals, we mean the four-legged ones - not Megan, Curtis, and Stephanie). All those with uniforms were wearing them. There were also several new faces who had never before been in the Safehouse.

"Before we get to the fresh faces amongst us, we have some promotions to get out of the way."

"Mist - front and centre, if you please!" Kick-Ass ordered.

Mist jogged up the steps to the walkway and she stopped facing Hit Girl. She grinned in eager expectation.

"Mist is receiving quite a lot, this evening - greedy, bitch! Not only is she being promoted to Sub-Commander, she is also receiving her *Fusion* Wings. Congratulations, Mist - you are our first Fusion pilot."

There was cheering and applause as Mist received her new ID card, the new insignia on her collar, and the patch for her flight suit. The patch consisted of **FUSION** and **MIST** above and below the gold wings of a *Fusion* pilot.

"Next, on the list is somebody who I see as a key member of Fusion. With Mist departing soon for sunnier shores, we find ourselves in need of another Senior Operator to join Petra. After not all that much deliberation, we selected a worthy candidate."

"Foxtail!" Kick-Ass bellowed and the girl in question could be seen to almost faint.

Foxtail looked very bemused as she made her way to stand before Hit Girl.

"Let me get this straight," Psyche called out from below. "She tries to kill me, three times, and then gets promoted?"

"I've tried to kill you," Fury pointed out. "Maybe I should be promoted."

Hit Girl laughed.

"If we rewarded everybody who tried to kill Psyche, we'd have way too many Senior Operators!" Hit Girl quipped and she received an icy glare from Psyche.

Hit Girl replaced Foxtail's twin vertical bars with the gold oakleaf of a Senior Operator.

"You've earned this, Foxtail - not least for putting up with Psyche!"

"Thank you," Foxtail said quietly as she meekly accepted her new ID card.

The fifteen-year-old girl couldn't help smirking as she headed back down below. There she received a hefty pat on the back from her best-friend.

"Next, comes a young girl who needs *no* introduction!"

"Psyche!" Kick-Ass called out to simultaneous cheers.

The girl bolted up the steps and stood grinning before her parents, resplendent in her uniform. Hit Girl took her time swapping the existing insignia to the twin vertical bars of an Operator.

"Well done," she whispered as she handed over a new ID card.

"Thanks, Mum!" Psyche grinned before she ran back down the steps to make way for the next victim.

"Splinter!"

The twelve-year-old boy smirked as he headed up to the walkway where he received his own promotion to Operator. He grinned down at his father, Ares, as he hastily rejoined Psyche on the mat.

"Nightmare and Torment!"

The two girls looked very surprised as they both glanced over at their grinning mother, Athena, before running up to stand before Kick-Ass and Hit Girl.

"You two have impressed us all. Nightmare, while you have lived up to your name, you still have a lot to learn, however, you deserve a promotion to Junior Operator. It will be on a provisional basis to

ensure that you are up to it but I am sure you will be. Torment - you are now *the* Senior Trainee Operator and you will be in charge of our training squad which, as you will learn, now numbers seven."

"Seven?"

"Seven."

Once the newly promoted sisters had received their new ID cards, they both ran below eagerly to show their mother.

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"Now, the more observant of you will have noticed one or two new faces in the Safehouse, tonight. I think some introductions are in order. Could the Millar kids come up, please?"

Three faces cringed as their parents pushed them forwards. The two youngsters looked up in awe as they faced Hit Girl and Kick-Ass. The younger girl actually giggled as she comprehended where she was and who she was with. All three youngsters wore Fusion uniforms but with no visible rank. The two youngest had only met the unmasked Hit Girl and Kick-Ass an hour before and they were both still reeling from being so close to their idols.

"The tall young lady, here, is Shannon," Hit Girl announced and the tall young lady blushed as all eyes fell on her. "Beside Shannon are Annabelle and Iain. Alternatively, they are Stormtide, Hellcat, and Tigercat."

There were some surprised looks - Wildcat for one. For most, it was good to know who the two new vigilantes on the streets of Chicago were.

"Stormtide is a *Predator* who was rescued just a few days ago. Please treat her well as I know you all will - Tempest, it appears, already is!"

There was laughter at that and both Stormtide and Tempest had very pink faces.

"Stormtide, you are being made an Operator. Tigercat and Hellcat, you are both to be Senior Trainee Operators and you will operate alongside Torment in Training Squad - your ranks will be provisional as you train, but from what *Fusion* members have already seen, neither of you will have any problems. *Fusion* would also like to welcome the parents of these three youngsters, Patrick and Taylor - we will know them as Astute and Audacious."

After a brief round of cheering and applause, the embarrassed youngsters ran back to their parents - and Marc.

"Next, we have five more *Predators* - Jamie, Abigail, Hunter, Leo, and Becky. Please come up, all of you."

Jamie needed a shove from his big sister before Abigail seized his hand and pulled him up the steps. Becky received a similar shove from Cathy. The two Graves brothers hesitated but followed on.

"Hunter Graves is Cut-Throat and he will join Nightmare as a Junior Operator. His younger brother, Leo, will join the younger Millar kids as a Senior Trainee operator - he is known as Relentless. That just leaves three. We have the latest - and last - addition to the Lizewski household, Jamie - Stephanie's younger brother, known as Rage. He will become a Junior Operator, as will his friend, Abigail Wilde, who many will learn the hard way, that she suits both her surname and her codename: Fury! That just leaves a new member for the Bennett clan: Becky Wren, also known as Scamp. Don't be fooled by the cute little British girl routine - Stormtide owes the little girl her life."

Scamp grinned enormously and Stormtide nodded her approval. The youngsters each received their coveted Fusion ID Cards and rank before re-joining the crowd below.

"The final changes are Tempest and Discord who are finally becoming active as Operators. Discord will also be running Safehouse Q for us."

Tempest gave Stormtide a longing glance before he ran up the steps with Discord and they both received their rank and their ID cards.

"Due to the large size of *Fusion* - we number over forty, now - we will be splitting the Operations Section into two eight-person squads. The squads will be known as Leopard Squad and Jaguar Squad," Hit Girl explained. "Each Squad will have a commander, a second-in-command, four Operators, and two Junior Operators. Leopard Squad will be commanded by Shadow with Foxtail as second-in-command. They will be joined by Stormtide, Wildcat, Tempest, Trojan, Cut-Throat, and Nightmare. Jaguar Squad will be commanded by Jackal with Petra as second-in-command. They will be joined by Raven, Psyche, Splinter, Discord, Rage, and Fury."

"We will also operate a training squad which for now consists of Torment in command. She will be joined by Tigercat, Relentless, Hellcat, Ravage, Rogue, and Scamp. That Squad will be called Panther Squad. As required, members of Panther Squad will join Leopard and Jaguar on operations. We are also very pleased to have Audacious joining Medic to bolster our medical support - I hate to say this, but we have some dark times ahead of us and we will need them both. Thank you for your time," Hit Girl finished.

"There is just one more thing," Kick-Ass interceded. "Who in their right mind gave the dogs insignia and a uniform?"

The crowd parted slightly as everybody turned to look at the eight animals who sat patiently. Each wore a dark grey harness which was adorned with their name on either side and their rank. Eisenhower bore the insignia of a Senior Operator. Loki bore the insignia of a

Senior Trainee Operator while the other animals each bore the inverted stripe of a Trainee Operator.

All eyes turned on Hit Girl.

"It seemed a good idea at the time. . ."

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**A little later. . .**

"Where the hell, are you taking us?"

"All will become clear, my dear daughter," Hit Girl responded cryptically as they walked down a corridor into Safehouse E and then. . .

"A lift?" Psyche asked. "To where?"

"Down," Hit Girl replied as she swiped her access card and the doors opened.

The lift car was enormous - three metres by five metres - which allowed everybody onboard in two runs. The trip down was quick and they soon stopped at 'LEVEL 0'. The doors opened onto a large open area that appeared to be a massive training mat surrounded by a raised walkway about a metre above. Directly ahead, overlooking the mat, was a massive concrete structure with recessed windows.

"Welcome to Training Facility Echo!" Hit Girl announced once the second party had arrived and everybody had spread out around the walkway. "Directly before you all is the Primary Training Area. This is where you will train from now on. Safehouse F is way too small for all of us. That steel-reinforced concrete structure extends down four levels. On this level, you will find the Command Bunker. Beneath is the Server Facility spread over two levels with the Main Armoury on Level 3. The walls are up to three feet thick and the windows are armoured. Behind the Command Bunker are changing rooms and showers plus a store for training equipment. There is a second elevator in the far corner. Only this elevator connects with Safehouse F."

"Awesome!" Wildcat exclaimed as she set foot on the enormous five-hundred-square-metre mat.

"Let's head down to Level 1," Kick-Ass directed.

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This time, when the elevator doors opened, the first group exited into a three-metre wide corridor which extended ahead to a set of double doors.

"Level 1!" Hit Girl announced proudly. "To the left is the Medical Centre with beds for eight and a complete trauma theatre. To the right is the Medical Store. Straight ahead is the Dining Room with the Kitchen off to the right."

"Wow!" Trojan exclaimed as they all swept into the Dining Room which had tables and chairs arranged in a dozen separate groups which seated six in each group.

The same concrete edifice extended floor to ceiling. Steps on each side of the structure allowed access to a corridor.

"Behind the Server Facility - Upper Level, is the Computer Room and the Kitchen Store with larder and freezers. Onwards!"

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"Level 2!"

"Bloody hell!" Tempest exclaimed and Mindy grinned.

"Living quarters. This is the main Recreational and Briefing Space."

Soft couches and a massive wall-mounted screen dominated the space. Around the walls were workspaces and a small area for making drinks and snacks. The layout was similar to the previous level with the same concrete edifice and steps either side. Hit Girl took the left set of steps and followed a corridor, at the end of which was another elevator. Psyche followed directions and she pushed open a set of double doors to the right and she stopped dead.

"Six cabins, three per side - each of which can sleep eight in bunks with four more on the floor. Bathrooms are beyond - unisex."

"Nice seats!" Foxtail commented as she tested out one of the couches outside the cabins.

"Onwards again!"

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Earlier, that evening, Hit Girl had taken Rage and Fury on a tour of Safehouse F which had included the armoury.

"It's not much of an armoury, really," Rage had commented. "I've seen better."

He had looked up at Hit Girl who had smirked. "You want to see inside the armoury that feeds this one?"

"Try me!" had been Rage's challenge.

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"Level 3! This level is basically storage with the Main Armoury and lots of equipment."

Psyche saw Hit Girl smirking as she walked through the Equipment Storage Area and then up a central set of steps before she turned left along a raised walkway and then right down a corridor. Ever since they had entered Safehouse E, Psyche had been concerned that Hit Girl might decide to have some fun. True to form, she just *had* to go and open her big gob.



"Has Steph told you about the time she ran through the Safehouse butt naked?" she asked Rage conversationally.

Rage turned and he smiled at his sister whose face turned a pleasant shade of pink with a hint of red.

"No, she has not."

"Now, ain't the damn time!" Psyche growled as the group stopped outside the door labelled, **MAIN ARMOURY**. She swiped her access card but nothing happened. "Huh?"

"Only Senior Operators, Psyche," Mindy chuckled as she swiped her own access card.

"Foxy has access to here?" Psyche demanded.

"Of course," Hit Girl grinned as she pushed open the heavy steel door.

Psyche muttered obscenities under her breath which had Scamp blushing as she pushed past Hit Girl into the armoury.

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"Oh, wow!" Rage exclaimed.

The place was enormous - over 360 square-metres and a little over three metres in height. While the Equipment Storage Area had consisted of rack upon rack loaded with combat gear, body armour, boots, webbing, and God only knew what else, the Main Armoury held everything which was explosive. Over to the left was a large caged area with warning signs and a locked gate. Through the mesh, Rage could make out many blocks of C4, crates of hand grenades, stacks of M81 Claymore mines, LAW rockets, dynamite, and . . . was that the business end of a torpedo?

Hit Girl led Psyche and Rage over to the right where the smaller weapons were stored. Everything had its place. Rage recognised several M2 Browning .50-calibre machine guns, at least two M134 mini-guns, several M60E4 and M60E6 machine guns, four L7A2 GPMGs and an entire rack of FN Minimi L110A2 light machine guns. There were many racks filled with a selection of almost every pistol he could think of. It was apparent that Hit Girl obviously preferred to buy Glock and SIG weapons, although H&K was well featured too.

Rage loved the array of shotguns, including the monster AA-12 automatic-shotgun, one of which had green and yellow highlights - it obviously belonged to Kick-Ass. Next, came the assault rifles, submachine guns and PDWs; there must have been hundreds of them - Hit Girl liked to buy in bulk it seemed! M16s, M4s, MPXs, MP5s, MP7s, and P90s were visible among many.

Rage turned to Hit Girl and he grinned.

"You win!"

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"Level 4!"

Nobody said a word as they emerged into a giant cavern which extended 105-metres into the distance and was forty metres wide. The concrete ceiling towered five metres above them and was supported by a dozen two-metre diameter concrete pillars.

"Is that a running track?" Stormtide asked.

"Yes, it is - four-hundred-metres and four lanes," Hit Girl replied proudly.

"A pool!" Rogue yelled as she bolted forwards and she was quickly joined by some of the other members as they stopped to admire the Olympic-sized swimming pool with curved ends.

"You have outdone yourself, this time, girl!" Medic chuckled as she stood beside the eighteen-year-old vigilante. Then she gazed down toward the far end of the cavern "What is *that*?"

"Oh, you've seen the climbing wall. . ."

The climbing wall was double-sided and built over a hollow frame. It was 8-metres wide and a metre deep. It extended all the way to the ceiling which towered ten-metres above them.

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### ***Training Facility Echo***

#### ***Dining Room***

"How's it going, Scamp?"

"Fine, thanks, Steph."

Becky was sitting at a table, a bottle of Pepsi in her left hand and her brand-new *Fusion* ID card in her right. She was smiling.

"You look happy," Abigail pointed out.

"I am - this is the best thing that could ever have happened to me. I have Chloe and Josh. I also have you guys."

Stephanie smiled.

"We are all here for each other, aren't we Abigail?"

"I suppose," Abigail replied.

The ten-year-old was still struggling to handle her new relationship with Stephanie. There was a deep-seated hatred for what Stephanie had done to her - not to mention the humiliation at her hands - but she owed it to Jamie to try and be civil to his newly-discovered sister. Stephanie grinned - she knew that Abigail was unhappy living with her and Stephanie wasn't exactly over the moon about it either. She also knew that her brother had a deep-seated affection for Abigail and she had no desire to spoil that for him.

"You two really hate each other, don't you?" Becky stated.

Abigail laughed.

"Yes, we do," Stephanie replied. "Only we are trying to get past it."

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"Hi, Shannon."

Shannon looked up as two identical girls sat down across from her and Marc.

"Can't say I'm happy to see the 'Bitch Twins'!" Shannon growled.

"Shannon!" Marc growled.

"Sorry," Shannon said quickly. "I'm still trying to get used to all of this. I know that was uncalled for."

"It was a lifetime ago and we had no choice - we apologise for what we did to you," Sky said and her sister nodded.

"I accept that - but it was bad," Shannon said with some reluctance.

"Yeah, it was," Chrissy admitted with a pained look.

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"So, what do you guys think?" Saoirse asked the Graves brothers at another table.

"Awesome!" Hunter grinned.

"Out of this world!" Leo added.

"It's going to be hard work - I won't lie about that. Hit Girl can be really hard; she can be a complete bitch, too."

"I've noticed," Hunter commented.

"How's the move coming along?"

"Really good - we should be moving by the end of the month."

"Glad to hear it. Now, remember to keep things secret. None of what you are wearing is to leave here - the ID card stays in your locker, understand?"

"Believe me, you *don't* want to take that card outta here!" Anne-Marie commented as she strolled past with a pained expression.

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"So, we finally meet."

Annabelle and Iain looked up at the young girl who then sat down across from them with a boy of similar age.

"I am Wildcat, and this is Trojan - but you can call us Megan and Curtis."

"Hi," Annabelle said with a smile.

"Good to meet you, at last," Iain added.

"You, too - you fight well and I am looking forwards to fighting alongside you both," Trojan said.

"This must be the 'Kitty Table'," Joshua laughed as he sat down beside Trojan.

"You always did like to play with kitties, cousin!" Chloe chuckled as she sat down beside Annabelle.

Curtis glared at his elder cousin.

"You are so funny, Shadow!" Megan growled. "You too, *Jack!*"

"Sorry - just having a bit of fun at my little friend's expense!" Joshua said as he ruffled Wildcat's hair.

"You lot are mad," Annabelle commented with a grin.

"You can talk!" Iain said as he nudged his sister.

"So, Megan - what did Curtis get you for your birthday?" Chloe asked.

Megan's cheeks turned pink and she rubbed her neck. Chloe laughed and she smiled knowingly.

"I see. . ." she said. "Don't forget to agree a safe word!"

Megan's mouth dropped open and she glared at her friend. Curtis' face was a deep red and he had slunk down in his chair.

"Megan likes to wear a kitty-collar," Chloe explained with an evil smirk. "Long story, but she borrowed a spare from Sophia and they have fun with it. She's twelve today, by the way."

Annabelle giggled and Iain looked very embarrassed - not as much as Megan, though.

"You two having fun?"

Annabelle and Iain looked up into the smiling face of their big sister, but before she could say anymore. . .

"Hi, Stormy!"

"Jamie!" Shannon growled as the boy came up behind her and then stood beside Joshua. "Don't call me that!"

Iain laughed and Annabelle giggled.

"Either of you call me that and I'll kick your fucking asses!" Shannon growled.

"Yes, Stormy!" her siblings said together and then they both laughed.

Shannon screamed.

"Now, look what you've done; you little cunt!"

Jamie laughed out loud and he grinned, then he yelled out in pain.

"Stop that, Jamie!" Abigail growled as she slapped him on the back of the head.

"Just having a little fun. . ."

"Learn to respect your elders!" Abigail persisted.

Jamie swore violently as Shannon laughed.

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"She's a wonderful young girl."

Several sets of eyes had watched ten-year-old Abigail Wilde throughout the evening.

"She has a furious temper when provoked," Mindy commented.

"She will be hard work," Dave added.

"You go first, partner; Rachel always wanted a daughter - a sister for Brad," Sam Fellowes offered.

"We'd love to," Paul Murphy replied. "If you are sure."

"Go for it."