

Saturday, September 17th, 2016

Northern Chicago

The assault, when it came, was silent.

The civilian guard force never knew they were under attack until the very moment of their death. The strike was made with military precision on a facility which was deemed to be 'black'. It did not feature on any publicly available records and very few who lived nearby had any idea what was stored there.

They attacked with military precision in teams of six. Four teams had been deployed. Nobody was left alive and the only evidence which remained were the shafts sticking out of the victim's bodies. The only weapons employed appeared to be arrows and knives. They left with slightly more noise as six trucks were stolen. Each eight-tonne truck was preloaded with military supplies and ready to deploy at a moment's notice. Thus, the US military lost 48-tonnes of military stores in an attack which lasted just twenty minutes.

The attack was not discovered until a failed check-in, forty minutes later.

**Training Facility Echo
Level 4**

Dave smiled as he observed the activity.

Megan, Curtis, Stephanie, and Tommy were pounding around the 400-metre track on their second lap. They were not racing - it was training and they were all keeping up a steady pace. Sweat was evident as they ran but they were all smiling, enjoying the exercise. The swimming pool was occupied by most of the younger vigilantes which included: Anne-Marie, Danny, Annabelle, Iain, Lauren, Lizzie, Leo, Abigail, and Jamie. Hailee was patrolling the pool as lifeguard and referee as the youngsters swam lengths of the fifty-metre pool. Those lengths were randomly interrupted by some good-natured fooling about. All, were competent swimmers although Abigail and Jamie both showed a marked dislike for the water.

Further around, the climbing wall featured Shannon, Marc, and Mindy part way up, with Joshua actually at the top.

Level 0

Saoirse and Morgan were sparring on a section of the mat, as were Hunter and Sarah.

Chloe was referring a sparring match between Paige and Taylor which was getting very bitchy! Patrick was instructing Abby in some self-defence techniques over in another corner of the giant mat. Marty peered out of his armoured windows as he finished off some computer

updates. He was amazed at how well things were coming along but at the back of his mind, he knew that very soon everything could come apart.

Everything that he had helped to build - it could all come crashing down.

That afternoon

Level 2

The briefing area was very full and it took a few minutes for all the gossiping and giggling to cease.

Everybody was in high spirits, which was good, however, Hit Girl had to burst everybody's happy bubble - she had no choice; it was time for the serious side of *Fusion* to come out. She had to remind everybody of what was at stake and why *Fusion* existed in the first place. As silence settled on everybody, some of the smiles faded as the grim expressions on the faces of their leaders gazed down at them.

"Three weeks!" Hit Girl almost yelled.

There were a few confused expressions.

"For those of you who do not know - *Fusion* was given a three-month ultimatum to leave Chicago. We are *not* leaving Chicago. That means we need to train and we will train and guess what? We continue to train! Chicago faces a living hell if we back down and leave the city in the hands of the most evil people in America."

"Every *Fusion* facility is being made ready. Every member of *Fusion* will need to be ready. As the team which we are, we will prevail. Until the deadline, we will protect this city, but we will not take any unnecessary risks and risk anybody being on the side lines when we really need them. All of you newbies - get with the program and learn from your mentors. We need everybody to work together. *Fusion* succeeds because it is a group of individuals who work together like nothing else.

"This is not just a pep talk - I want you all to realise the seriousness of what you are training for. *Fusion* is *not* an after-school club - it is a paramilitary organisation with a slant on vigilantism. If any of you have reservations of what you are getting involved with, then please let us know as soon as you can and we will try to resolve any problems. I have seen many of you in combat and I know how highly skilled you are. You *Predators* - I have seen how you fight and while I abhor how you came to be what you are, I am proud to have you fighting by my side.

"The next four weeks will decide the future of Chicago. The next four weeks will decide the future of *Fusion*. I just hope that in four weeks, I will be able to look upon you all, just as you are

now. I won't lie to you; people will get hurt. We do not know what is out there waiting for us - but it won't be good and it will be intent on killing us all. For my part, I will provide each one of you with the best weapons and the best defensive equipment that I can get my hands on. Your safety is of paramount importance but we have innocents to protect and that means we have to put ourselves, our bodies, in harm's way.

"That is a tall order for the younger members here but an everyday occurrence for the older and blooded ones amongst us. To put it in perspective: 2.7-million people are relying on the forty of us to protect them. As soon as we have confirmed intelligence, then we will have regular briefings to bring everybody in on the full picture. Some of the intelligence will be classified but I will not keep you in the dark."

Mindy's oration had been long but it had focussed the minds of everybody present as Mindy had intended.

The following afternoon
Sunday, September 18th

Training Facility Echo
Level 1

"Why are you looking like a kid who just lost her ice-cream?" Mindy asked her Lieutenant.

"She's feeling frustrated," Joshua explained.

"Huh?"

"Sexually frustrated."

"Huh?"

"We seem to have appropriated a human contraceptive."

"Huh?"

Joshua sighed before he began orating as Chloe's forehead hit the table with a bang.

"First night - she was in her own bed for ten minutes before she slipped in between us and fell asleep. Second night - I'd just got Chloe's motor going and I was just about to penetrate. . ."

Mindy growled.

". . . Well - she appeared again. 'Don't mind me,' she said as she slipped under the duvet and fell asleep between us. Third night - we'd just stripped off and climbed into bed but then Chloe felt something *in* the bed and she was there again. She wriggled up the bed and sat there smiling for a minute before she rolled over and closed her eyes. 'Your dick's not sticking out like it was last night,' she says. We haven't bothered since."

Mindy smirked but then she couldn't help herself and she giggled before regaining her composure after a minute or two. She turned to the little girl two tables over.

"Becky!"

"Yes, Mindy," Becky said as she scampered over - a big grin on her face.

"Would you like to spend the night at my place, tonight?" Mindy asked.

Becky's face lit up.

"Will Anne-Marie be there?"

"Yes, she will - no doubt she will want to have you in her room. You okay with that?"

Becky's grin was enormous as she ran off to find Anne-Marie. Chloe lifted her head off the table and she smiled at Mindy as she mouthed, 'thank you'.

"And people see me as a 'cold heartless bitch'!" Mindy laughed.

"You are a 'cold heartless bitch', honey - one day, you're going to have to face up to that," Dave chuckled.

"I have no problem being a 'cold heartless bitch'," Dave. "It makes me what I am."

Then Mindy scowled as Stephanie gave her a hug around the waist.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"I was feeling overheated so I thought I'd hug you to cool down," Stephanie replied with a cheesy grin on her face as Mindy growled.

Level 0

"I can't do it - everybody is bigger than me."

"Becky - you killed a grown man with a knife!" Shannon pointed out.

"He had no idea I was there," the girl pointed out.

"I think we can show that size isn't everything," Foxtail said as she pulled on her mask. "Rogue!"

The diminutive Rogue came out onto the mat and she faced off against the taller, larger girl. Both wore their full combat suits and at a nod from Foxtail, both girls reached behind them and drew their highly-polished, devastatingly sharp, Butterfly Swords. There was a lot of murmuring from those watching as they took in the amazing weapons held by the two girls. Very few saw the swords out during training without some form of protective cover in place as they were beyond lethal.

The girls began slowly, gauging their attacks as they circled, their blades darting out and clashing with the sound of metal upon metal. The smaller girl darted in for an attack before her strikes were parried away by the bigger girl but Rogue pushed back before catching Foxtail on her backside with the flat of one of her swords. Rogue laughed out loud as she dodged a counterstrike and with an amazing twist, she flipped on of Foxtails blades out of her gauntlet and sent in clattering to the mat.

There was a sharp intake of breath from all those present as Foxtail did not flinch as she continued the fight with only one blade. The clang of the blades resounded around the concrete box which was the Safehouse and all eyes followed the flashes of the lights which flashed off the keenly sharpened blades. Foxtail was good and she was able to push back the smaller Rogue, despite Rogue still having both of her swords to hand.

Foxtail was not losing the fight so she waited for Rogue to make a mistake which did not take long as the younger girl opened herself up too much and Foxtail parried a blade to the side and she kicked the eight-year-old in the stomach. Rogue fell backwards, her blades crossed over her chest as she crashed to the mat. Then she froze as Foxtail went down on one knee, the hyper-sharp blade to Rogue's neck.

As Foxtail pulled Rogue back to her feet, there was cheering from the dozen or so faces who were watching.

"That was bloody awesome!" Becky announced.

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Patrick studied his daughter as she patiently guided her younger siblings through their training. Patrick was impressed as he watched Iain and Annabelle watch and take in everything that their elder sister told them. It was as if they had never been parted. Patrick was amazed by how mature Shannon was and how much she had grown. He so wished that he had been able to recover Shannon while she still had her innocence, however, he knew very well that few kids retained their innocence much past five or six months as a *Predator*. By then, they were nothing better than feral - a state brought on by a combination of drugs, influence, punishment, and indoctrination.

Patrick was fully aware of how his eldest daughter disagreed with what he and his wife had done with her younger brother and sister. He hoped that she might mellow over time - only time would tell. He had had second thoughts about throwing everything in with Hit Girl and *Fusion* and his initial intentions had been to keep his three kids as a team operating as *Fusion* allies. But then he had seen how *Fusion* fought with immense skill and professionalism. He had seen how the *Predators* had fought using every skill that they possessed and had learnt since their freedom had been realised. They fought because they wanted to fight rather than fighting just because some bastard was holding a big stick over them.

He knew that Mindy and Dave were very well off and financially secure for life. However, he also knew that every member of *Fusion* wanted for nothing. Mindy had obviously spent enormous sums on the best weaponry and the combat suits were way beyond state-of-the-art. The training facilities open to *Fusion* vigilantes was the best that Patrick had ever seen. Dave and Mindy were not using *Fusion* to make money - that was just a benefit - Dave and Mindy had a professional organisation headed by the famous Hit Girl and Kick-Ass team.

Patrick was familiar with the long and illustrious list of those who had taken on Kick-Ass and Hit Girl - and lost everything, if they were lucky. Most simply lost their lives and as far as Patrick was concerned, if Hit Girl was after them, then they probably deserved everything that they got. Surprisingly, Mindy had morals - of a sort. It was amazing to see that Mindy had taken a *Predator* as her own - a famous one too.

Saoirse had sat down with Patrick and brought him up to date with everything she knew since he had left the *Urban Predator* program. Saoirse had related how terrible things had got and then what had happened to the 'new girl' and her subsequent abuse. Patrick had believed in a program which rewarded the *Predators* - only, while Lucy and Leo had been rewarded with their own accommodation and better conditions, the later *Predators* were deemed undeserving of reward - except for being rewarded by slightly less abuse.

Saoirse had told him about a young girl who had been bullied to the point where the eight-year-old had killed a girl, four years her senior. Patrick knew that under his regime, Stephanie would have gained better conditions and maybe her own room. He hated how those bastards had mutilated and ultimately destroyed the vision which he had helped create. He felt responsible for all those kids who had been slaughtered in Europe. But he felt pride at knowing that many had survived and some had been able to avenge every *Predator*.

Mindy had joined them towards the end of their discussion and she had explained about *Fusion's* latest problem and the ultimatum which was rapidly approaching. Patrick had again considered keeping his kids out of it but that would not be fair - without Mindy, Shannon might . . . Shannon might be dead.

There was, however, one other more disturbing issue which he and his wife had deemed to be beyond their control: Marc. Saoirse had explained to Patrick about the demonstration which Marc and Shannon had put on before two hundred witnesses. She had also mentioned the suspected relationship which had meant that Shannon, instead of being deployed with Marc, was replaced by Sarah. Since Shannon's return and her meeting up with Marc - well, they had been 'at it' as Annabelle had put it. He knew that he could not prevent Shannon from having sex with Marc - and he was not about to try; he had caused enough heartache for the girl.

He would just have to put up with the continual squeaking of the proverbial bed springs!

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"Okay, Scamp - let's see what you can do," Hit Girl announced.

Scamp wore a pair of dark-blue shorts and a white T-shirt, both with the *Fusion* shield embroidered onto them. The eight-year-old girl was barefoot as she faced off against the identically clad Rogue. Scamp was about three inches shorter than Rogue and quite a bit thinner.

Scamp darted forwards and she kicked out at Rogue who dodged the kick kicking out herself, catching Scamp on the left shoulder. The younger girl - by one month - grimaced but otherwise ignored the strike. The idea of the sparring match was to see how skilled Scamp was and where her weaknesses lay - a custom training regime could then be worked out. Scamp was fast, darting around, using her strength which was her manoeuvrability and avoiding her liability which was her muscular strength.

Rogue had been sparring for almost a year and she was highly skilled and focussed when she fought - as two men had found to their cost, earlier in the year, when Rogue had killed them both during a European tour. The older girl did not hold back as she kicked out and sent Scamp flying backwards onto the mat. Scamp scrambled back to her feet and her face scrunched up in anger as she dove at Rogue and drove a fist into her opponent's left thigh eliciting a loud scream of pain as she did so. Rogue returned the compliment with a sharp kick to Scamp's own left thigh which she had left vulnerable.

Scamp screamed out as she fell to the mat and Hit Girl saw Jackal bolt forwards but he stopped as Shadow rested a hand on his lower arm. His expression was grim as he watched Scamp regain her feet, tears running down her cheeks. The girl was very brave and despite the pain in her thigh, she was game enough to continue the sparring. Hit Girl was in two minds about stopping the fight then and there - not least because Jackal was about to kill somebody to protect his Scamp. Nonetheless, she allowed the fight to continue.

Scamp glared up at Rogue who frowned at her opponent. She was worried that she might have gone too far and she was fully expecting Jackal to come over and flatten her. Hit Girl nodded and Rogue darted forward but she found Scamp doing the same thing and she was shocked as she felt considerable pain in her abdomen as Scamp drove both fists into Rogue's stomach knocking the air from her lungs. Rogue fell to her knees gasping for breath as Scamp kicked Rogue in the side sending the gasping girl over onto her side.

Then Scamp brought back her right foot and she drove it forwards towards Rogue's face.

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Hit Girl grabbed hold of Scamp just before her foot came into contact with the cringing face of Rogue.

"Easy there, girl!" Hit Girl said as she brought the angry young girl back down onto her feet.

Rogue stood back up and she held out her right hand to Scamp as she smiled at the younger girl. Scamp was seething with anger as tears of frustration flooded down her face.

"I'm sorry, Scamp," Rogue offered. "Well done."

Scamp began to control her breathing and the tears stopped. Shadow and Jackal ran forwards but Hit Girl waved them back, giving Scamp time to sort herself out, by herself. With supreme effort, Scamp controlled her temper and she held out her hand, forcing a smile. Rogue gripped the proffered hand and they both shook.

"Thanks, Rogue."

Both girls were dripping with sweat after their sparring match and both received a cold bottle of water from a grinning Ravage.

"Wow! That was awesome, sis - you too, Scamp; ice cold!"

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"Mindy - that went too far!" Joshua growled

"Josh - she could handle it. Diving in would have given her cause to doubt herself. I needed to see how she could handle herself and you know that. Believe me, Josh, I know what it is like to worry about somebody you love and I am very proud of you for your reactions towards Becky. She's a wonderful little girl and she has a lot of hard-learned skills that we can build on. She's safe and I promise to look after her, tonight, okay?"

"Josh; Mindy's right," Chloe said as she looked up into her boyfriend's anger-filled eyes. "God, you made me proud today - and so did Becky."

Joshua relented and he smiled at Chloe before looking at Mindy.

"I know you'll look after her, Mindy - I just saw red when Anne-Marie hurt Becky."

"You remember what Mindy was like that day Anne-Marie had her nose punched by a boy accidentally?" Chloe asked.

"I thought she was going to go all Hit Girl on the poor kid," Joshua replied with a laugh.

"I never knew that bringing up kids was so hard," Mindy said. "It is damn hard but it is also the best thing ever to see them smile at you and to feel their love."

"I'm looking forward to that," Joshua said as he hugged Chloe.

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"Anne-Marie?"

Anne-Marie was busy soaping herself in the showers when she saw Becky hang up her towel and grab a bottle of shower gel from the shelf at the entrance to the showers. Anne-Marie winced as she saw

the vicious red marks on Becky's body - they were healing but it had barely been five days since they had been inflicted. The bruise on the little girl's face was slowly healing too but it showed that the girl had been through a lot.

"Hi, Becky."

"I'm sorry I went to kick you in the face - it was just instinct and I was angry."

"I'm sorry as well, Becky. I went a bit far."

"I think Mindy wanted you to go to town on me just to see how I reacted."

"Mindy can be very tough but she means well and . . . well, I wouldn't be alive today without the training which Mindy has provided me. We may be little kids but we are training to fight in a nasty world full of people who want to fuck over people like you and me . . . what's the scowl for?"

"I don't like swearing."

"Sorry - I've picked up some bad habits from Steph . . . and Mindy!"

"Thank you for making me so welcome. I can't believe that it was only Tuesday when I was being strapped for helping Shannon escape. I've killed four people - two I killed on Tuesday."

"I killed two men, back in May - they tried to kill me and my brother and Hailee. Danny took down one man, too. I hated doing it and I still get nightmares; it was the first time that I had used my beautiful swords."

"You two going to finish showering or what?" Megan asked as she walked into the shower area and began to wash. "I think Mindy is looking for you both."

"Oops!" Anne-Marie muttered as she quickly rinsed off the last of the shampoo from her hair and Becky finished off her own.

The two younger girls quickly left the showers to get dressed, grabbing their towels as they went. Stephanie, Lauren, and Abigail soon joined Megan in the showers. They were all chatting when Saoirse and Shannon appeared.

"Hold it!" Saoirse said as she caught sight of Stephanie. "The last time I saw Stephanie in a communal shower, she was killing somebody. Are we safe, Steph?"

Stephanie laughed at her friend's expression and she went back to her shower without rising to the bait.

Glenview

The house was pandemonium!

Mindy was making a vain attempt at sitting quietly so that she could read her 160-page Guns and Ammo magazine which had recently arrived. Unfortunately, a combination of four-legged and two-legged hyperactivity was preventing Mindy from concentrating despite her best efforts. The ginger kitty landing with claws extended on her magazine with a pair of large German-Shepherd dogs in hot pursuit, not to mention the two eight-year-old girls who were screaming as they chased the dogs, was just a little too much for Mindy and she growled.

Stephanie heard the growl and sensing an explosion with the potential to go nuclear, she grabbed both girls and quickly dragged them out of the living room and shoved them both towards the stairs.

"Go play upstairs," Stephanie suggested.

Becky and Anne-Marie giggled as they ran up the stairs while the two dogs sat staring up at Stephanie, tongues hanging out and panting heavily.

"You two look so stupid!" Stephanie told Kiara and Razor

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"Sorry, Mum."

"Don't be silly, Steph - they're just letting off some steam," Mindy chuckled as she glared at the ginger menace which lay across her legs, purring happily as he looked up at Mindy, his eyes half closed.

"I thought that they were about to be slaughtered," Abigail commented as she looked up from another one of Mindy's Guns and Ammo magazines.

"My thoughts exactly," Stephanie commented.

"Those two really look dumb," Abigail pointed out as the two canine trainee vigilantes stared at the girl, their tongues lolling out the sides of their mouths.

"They do that - I think their brains sometimes get disconnected, or something," Stephanie replied as she stroked Razor while Abigail concentrated on Kiara.

Mindy smirked as she went back to her magazine. She was pleased that Stephanie and Abigail could get some quality time together without ripping each other's throats out. Fifteen minutes later, Jamie ambled into the living room with Danny beside him.

"Do I want to hear this," Mindy asked as she read the boy's expressions.

"We've not done anything," Jamie offered with a sly grin.

"The two girls, however. . ." Danny grinned.

Mindy sunk her head into her hands for a moment. She had worried that it would have been Stephanie and Abigail killing each other which would have upset the evening.

"Where's Dave?"

"He's taking a shower."

Mindy listened hard and from somewhere upstairs, she could hear giggling - loud giggling - and . . . was that water splashing?

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Mindy had no idea what she was going to find as she climbed the stairs, followed by Stephanie, Jamie, Danny, Abigail . . . and the two dogs - Horatio remained stretched out on the couch in kitty heaven. The giggling got louder, as did the sound of splashing. Mindy made her way down the corridor and then into Danny's room. She pushed open the door into the shared bathroom and she froze as she felt her socks suddenly feeling very damp.

"Holy, fuck!" Stephanie exclaimed as she splashed into the bathroom beside Mindy. "You two are so dead!"

The two in question, Scamp and Rogue, were pretty-much naked and what clothing they wore was soaked. Scattered around the bathroom were sodden lumps which were evidently the girls' discarded clothing. The bath was full and overflowing. The shower was running and water was streaming from the stall across the floor. Even more surprising was who was in the shower stall.

"Sophia!" Mindy exclaimed as the dog whined and looked a little sheepish.

Stephanie pushed past and she shut off the shower while Abigail reached into the bath and she yanked out the plug. The water gurgled as it flooded down the plughole.

"You hear that noise, girls - that's your freedom going down the drain!" Mindy stated and both girls groaned. "Anne-Marie - go find towels for you and Rebecca. Rebecca, I am going to be speaking to Chloe about this."

Becky knew that she was in big trouble as soon as she saw Mindy appear in the flooded bathroom. The use of her full first name just reinforced the fact. She was also unhappy about disappointing Chloe. Jamie and Danny just shook their heads as their sister reappeared with towels for Becky and herself.

"Steph, Abigail - please escort Sophia downstairs to the basement and get her dried off."

The unhappy looking Sophia headed off downstairs in the custody of Abigail and Stephanie. Mindy smirked as the dog vanished - the animal could kill if she so desired but as Sophia, she was soft as a rag and she loved to play with the kids. Then Mindy's expression went cold.

"Anne-Marie - you and your friend get to bed, now!"

"So immature!" Danny exclaimed as the two girls vanished from sight.

"Okay, Mr Mature - go get a bloody mop!" Mindy growled.