

*This night, my world was quite literally blasted apart.*

*These chapters are the account of the action which led to me losing the most important person in my life. I am broken and even now, I have no idea how I can continue.*

---

**Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**02:49**

**Off West Jackson Boulevard**

The two masked *Corsairs* approached the fallen vigilante.

However, before they could come too close, the man, whose family had almost died, pulled the SIG Sauer P250 Compact from the young vigilante's holster and he pointed it at the two attackers.

"Don't come any closer. . ."

"Or what?" the nearest *Corsair* growled back.

"I'll . . . I'll shoot you both - this young girl saved the lives of my family and I ain't about to let her be killed by you fuckers!"

"Yeah!" a burly firefighter announced in agreement as he stepped forwards.

"These vigilantes do so much for us, and thanks to you bastards, we forgot that for a moment. They are what keeps Chicago ticking and they protect us all."

An immediate swell of support echoed from the assembled crowd as many swept up improvised melee weapons. The burly firefighter seized a large metal device from his fire truck and along with a colleague, similarly armed, stepped forward to stand beside the man.

"Fuck!" Wildcat growled as she sat up with a hand to her head.

"Let me help you, young lady," the burley firefighter - the one who had previously shown her contempt - suggested as he offered his left hand to Wildcat.

"Thanks," Wildcat replied as she hauled herself to her feet.

"Ma'am?" the family man said as he offered Wildcat her pistol, butt first.

The two *Corsairs* now felt a little unsure of their status and continued safety.

"Let's fuck 'em over!" a voice called.

"My sentiments exactly," Wildcat growled as she deployed her claws with a flick of her wrists.

The two *Corsairs* began to move backwards, towards their own lines, when Wildcat attacked and went for the nearest one. The other *Corsair* thought that he might have been in the clear . . . until he saw something moving towards his head, but he had no time to dodge the business end of the three-foot, aluminium stand-pipe as it collided with his head.

"Fuck!" Battle Guy announced over the communications. "*Wildcat's incited a damn riot!*"

"I do what I can!" the young vigilante responded.

---

The Russians, the Sicilians, and the *Corsairs*, all found themselves facing further adversaries in the form of civilians, firefighters, and anybody else who fancied chipping in.

Wildcat was re-joined by Nightmare and Piranha. Together, they led the charge, pushing the evil forces back towards their own lines. A group of *Corsairs* were chased down West Jackson Boulevard and onto the bridge where they were caught between two *Fusion* teams. The *Corsairs* took refuge behind cars and buses as Wildcat, Nightmare, and Piranha caught up and pinned them down from the east end of the bridge. The west end of the bridge saw Raven, Tempest, Hellcat, and Fortune entering the fight.

Gunfire erupted around the bridge as the *Corsairs* attempted to fight their way out of a very bad situation.

---

**03:14**

### ***West Congress Parkway***

The enemy were constantly shifting their positions and making it almost impossible to maintain the safe haven for the injured cops and for the civilians who were being forced out of their places of refuge.

Dr Jennifer Staite was deep in the centre of the action, patching up wounded CPD officers. Beside her, Lynx was covering the doctor with a large armoured shield. Bullets struck the shield repeatedly as Lynx braced the carbon-fibre composite device while her back was covered by Ravage. A few feet away, Medic was seeing to a wounded firefighter, Hawk covering Medic with another shield while their backs were protected by Ravage. A few feet away, TITAN sat with the hatches guarded by Scamp toting a G36K and remaining well within the protective citadel of the vehicle.

The young girl had dug very deep for courage and bravery, but still she jumped each time a bullet slammed into TITAN's armour. While she was determined to prove her worth to *Fusion*, and despite her limited *Predator* training, all the noise and fighting had scared the little girl to her core. Each bullet, each bang and crash, it made the little girl jump and squeeze the grips of her weapon ever tighter. She was no stranger to killing and death, but that had been in self-defence only and not amidst a raging battle. She was scared for herself, she was scared for her friends, and she was scared for her new family, all of whom were fighting to the death within a very short distance of where she herself sat in relative safety.

The eight-lane parkway, usually bustling with traffic in the daytime, was devoid of moving traffic, but full of wrecked vehicles and dead bodies, with a handful of wounded screaming for help. The air wreaked of gunpowder and explosives. The coppery smell of blood was everywhere along with the stench of death.

Then, amidst all that chaos, *she* appeared.

---

FEAR in her full battle armour, resplendent with her battle sword.

Around her, a phalanx of battle-hardened *Corsairs* in red battle armour escorted their queen. She had climbed out of an armoured Humvee at the intersection of South Wacker Drive and West Van Buren Street. She had not been alone, either. Five more Humvees had pulled up around her, disgorging her personal guard of twenty *Corsairs*.

She did not immediately dive into the fight, however, but instead, she waited, and she appeared refreshed and eager to fight.

...\_...

The Sicilians arrived at about the same time.

Six large SUVs appeared from the east, blasting their way through the CPD roadblocks which had cordoned off the battle zone. Each vehicle carried five or six heavies, amounting to thirty-two men spilling out onto the road at the east end of the West Harrison Street Bridge. For the first time, their leaders were out with their men. Anthony Geno, son of Carlo Genovese, son of Vito Genovese, was in command. He was not alone; his wife, Helen Geno, was also providing support. Both wore masks, but it was undeniably them as they had brought along their kids, too. Lawrence and Teri, both masked, were seen running west, across the West Harrison Street Bridge towards a low-rise building.

Lawrence was carrying a sniper rifle while his sister carried ammunition and a sighting scope.

...\_...

The final team to arrive at the party, arrived at about the same time as the Sicilians.

The Solntsevskaya Brotherhood had found some fresh soldiers for their fight and three large trucks had dutifully appeared. Forty men jumped down from the rear of the vehicles, some armed with heavy weapons. They quickly made for the West Congress Parkway intersection of South Wells Street and arranged their defences.

The final Battle for Chicago was about to begin.

---

### ***The Battle Bunker***

Battle Guy, Hal, and Ember were struggling with all the information coming in, but *Synthesis* was cutting out the crap, lessening the amount which made it through to the decision makers, but it was still a lot.

"Diamond Alpha - make for FEAR at the West Van Buren Street Bridge. Diamond Bravo - cover Alpha and guard Hit Girl's back," Battle Guy directed.

"Emerald Alpha and Bravo," Ember directed. "You've got the Sicilian bastards at West Harrison. Ruby Bravo, provide backup for Emerald. Ruby Alpha, move to intercept the Russians at South Wells Street. Opal Alpha and Bravo - you have the Russians, too."

Ember kept the status board updated, showing where each and every member of *Fusion* was at every moment - it was vital to keep track and not lose situational awareness. The three of them were all there were to provide critical assistance to the teams on the ground should they get disorientated during the heavy urban fighting. Ember was amazed by the state-of-the-art equipment and systems used by *Fusion* - she was still struggling to take it all in. For the young teenager, her life had been a train-wreck and headed directly for oblivion. Somehow, she had been in the right place at the right time, to do the right thing, much like she had been with Jamie. Now, she had saved the life of his big sister after having kept the young boy alive. She was very pleased to see that Jamie was alive and well. She had been very surprised to see Abigail, too. It seemed that Stephanie had been gathering *Predators* from around the globe. There was a strange atmosphere where she saw these *ex-Predators* who

were now friends despite having been trained to view their fellow *Predators* as competitors to be beaten at all cost - both figuratively and literally. To see all those kids smiling and laughing while they went about their lethal business of killing and maiming was weird but satisfying.

Hit Girl had successfully harnessed the skill and energy of those *Predators* and turned their deadly skills into something which could be used for good, just as they were doing at that moment across Chicago, putting their lives on the line to protect the city. Hit Girl had given Ember a choice - she could keep out of the way, or she could help fight in any way that she could, considering her injured state. Ember had shrewdly opted to assist - she had to; she wanted to prove that she was no longer Raider, that mercenary who would go out and main innocent civilians. As Raider, she had done a lot of that. She had terrorised adults, children, old people. She had extorted money from shop owners. She had stolen. She had destroyed property. She had murdered. She had hurt the innocent. Why had she done those things? She felt that she had to channel her bloodlust, just like her compatriots and FEAR had seemed to be that channel - only she had made a very bad choice, but until Stephanie had blundered across their path, she had had no way out. No way out of the life she had chosen, but no longer wanted.

She had been trapped, but now she was free, and she was going to do everything that she could to seek repentance for her actions.

Her eyes focussed on two of the dots on the giant screen before her - Rage and Fury.

---

### ***West Van Buren Street Bridge***

The two friends were in the thick of it.

They were back to back as they provided support for Diamond Alpha and principally Hit Girl who was focussing on her adversary: FEAR. Neither FEAR, nor Hit Girl, had said a word since they had laid eyes on one another. The hate and the desire to rip out the heart of the other was strong, and the extreme emotions could be literally felt by all those close by. Discord, Bane, Venom, and Tigercat were facing off against a round dozen of FEAR's personal guard. The remaining eight were ensuring the safety of their principal and watching her back as she fought Hit Girl.

For Discord, it was strange fighting alongside Venom and Bane. The twins had never had a very good reputation for playing with others and most avoided the two girls who could be vicious and spiteful without provocation or reason. Somehow, the twins attitude to others had changed dramatically and Discord enjoyed spending time with the girls - they had a vicious sense of humour which she had not previously been aware of. Discord also trusted Venom and Bane with her life and they her. The three girls fought alongside the much younger Tigercat who was very skilled and Stormtide had ensured that everybody knew who her siblings were and what might happen if anybody fucked with them. Despite Stormtide's difficult beginnings in *Urban Predator*, she had excelled against adversity. Even Venom and Bane respected the younger girl's skills and were very wary of her - the girl had a stormy temper which once unleashed was very difficult to quench.

Tigercat was young but he had courage, lots of it. The fighting scared him - what *normal* person would *not* be scared by such fighting - but he had been taught by his father to bury that fear deep and only unleash it if the fear was to be an asset. The boy was learning fast. His big sister was imparting her own

knowledge and both he and his sister were taking her instructions, just as they had been taught. Despite having been apart for so long, they explicitly trusted their elder sibling and would obey any instruction without question. They had great respect for Shannon and for what she had accomplished in the face of so much horror. He was pleased to be fighting alongside such accomplished *Predators* as Discord, Venom, and Bane. He was paying attention to their movements as they moved without wasting energy or advantage. He missed fighting alongside his sister, but she was with another team, fighting another foe. He knew that she would be safe; she was older than he was and her skill level was beyond his own.

Around the entire group of *Fusion*, *Corsairs*, and FEAR, Eisenhower and her children prowled, ensuring total security, watching for interlopers hoping to cut in on the fight.

...\_...

For Fury, the fight fed her need for danger and that underlying bloodlust.

The girl, only just eleven-years-old, enjoyed the fear that danger brought to her. The emotion was like a drug to her and nothing felt better than being in harm's way. She had first felt it in the forest, years before. That feeling of being hunted generated a special type of fear in human beings and somehow Fury enjoyed that feeling of being hunted. Later, knowing that the person who was most likely to corner her was just as skilled as she was, only made the emotion more enjoyable. Okay, the girl was deeply psychotic, a trait which her handlers within *Urban Predator* had seized upon and fed to produce the ultimate assassin that the program was designed for. The girl had been groomed to become something special, as was her counterpart, Stephanie Walker. While Stephanie was also psychotic, her psychosis was not as developed as that of Abigail Wilde. Not that they had not tried to deepen Stephanie's level of psychosis - hence the improvisation in that same forest which had led an even younger girl to be hunted by Fury, producing yet another psychotic youngster now known as Rigour.

For Fury, she had only one care in the world; looking after number one: Abigail Wilde. However, that instinct was changing. She cared for somebody more than she ever thought possible. The boy, who even at that moment had his back to hers. A boy who was the brother of her most hated adversary. A boy who she loved more than anything or anyone on the planet. A boy who she would die for - and almost had. She also had a family. She had a big brother who she cared about and who cared about her. She had a mother. She had a father - at least for the moment. Her new father was in hospital and loitering at death's door. Deep inside her, she felt anger. Enormous anger. That anger fed her need for bloodlust and danger and it focussed her mind acutely, allowing her to respond to threats with a lightning response that often shocked her adversary.

Indeed, a *Corsair* came too close, seeing the diminutive youngsters as easy prey: he received two rapid slashes to his stomach from Fury's bō-staff, for his trouble, and the last thing he saw was his own entrails spilling out of his abdomen. He had dropped his own weapon and tried to gather up the masses of sausage-like intestine which steamed as it came in contact with the very cold air of the dark night. The coppery smell of the blood was another drug which all *Predators* recognised and one which all but a very few enjoyed. The smell often drove the youngsters into a rabid frenzy of fighting as they quickly became intoxicated on the metallic scent.

Fury took a brief glance at the bloody entrails and the dying man, smirked behind her mask and then quickly put the man out of her mind as she guarded Rage's back while he fought his own *Corsair*.

Despite his tender age, Rage was an accomplished fighter who was constantly striving to prove himself a better fighter.

The boy always felt that he had to do better. He always felt that he had to justify his position and within Urban Predator, considering his lowly beginnings, he had not wanted to provide any excuse for himself to be demoted back to being a *Yellow*, or worse. Thus, he had always pushed himself - with the help of his two very unlikely friends; Abigail and Rachel. Without them both, he would never have survived, let alone acquired the skills which had kept him alive when he was very much alone. The same skills had helped to keep him and Shannon alive once they had found each other and they had generated a bond between themselves which was ultimately unbreakable. Shannon was always welcome around the Lizewski home, as was Jamie at the Millar household. They regularly sparred, much to the entertainment of their friends.

The one thing he had craved for years had happened; he had his sister back. That one event had made him whole again and it had given him an edge that he had never known before. That edge was keen and very lethal. He may only have been nine-years-old, but the youngster was an accomplished fighter, something which the *Corsairs* were discovering to their cost. Rage whirled around, fighting a man more than twice his size, but Rage was quicker, and he darted left and right, avoiding the heavy sword with which the *Corsair* was armed. Rage would dart in with his own sword, striking the red armour and attempting a strike into unarmoured sections of the man's body. Naturally, the *Corsair*, being part of FEAR's personal guard, was highly skilled and he did not take kindly to being struck by a little shit in a combat suit.

In fact, the *Corsair* took it personally, and he went to town on the youngster.

---

### ***West Harrison Street Bridge***

The bullets pounded into the abandoned vehicles.

Glass shattered, and metalwork pinged with the sound of high-powered rounds which flew in all directions. Three SWAT members returned fire with their AR-15 rifles while taking cover behind a panel van which was loaded with furniture - the furniture proved to be good at stopping bullets. Taking refuge behind a large Jeep SUV, four CPD officers added to the gunfire being thrown back at the Sicilian fighters. On the bridge itself, Kick-Ass, Splinter, Torment, and Petra were taking cover behind the steel barrier which ran alongside the roadway. The Sicilians themselves were occupying the corner opposite the bridge using concrete barriers for cover. Directly across the street from the Sicilians, Stormtide and Mist lay on a grassy knoll, sending accurate gunfire into the enemy from a flanking position. They were supported by Relentless, Trojan, and Piranha.

Piranha was not regretting her decision to come to Chicago and seek out Hit Girl. Okay, the first contact had not quite gone according to plan, but despite the pain and humiliation, she had been accepted by the *Predators* whom she had helped train and by extension, the *Predators* whom she had caused to have a miserable childhood. She knew that very few would have any reason not to hate her, both for what she represented, and for how she had treated them. They had worked her over, and Hit Girl had rightly seen her as a threat, however, Lucy had had an ally - two really - in Saoirse and Shannon. Why Lucy had taken to Shannon, guiding her, keeping her alive, Lucy was not certain, apart from her link to Shannon's father. As for Saoirse, they had fought many times, but

Saoirse was one of the few people who had been kind to Lucy when she had really needed a friend.

Either side of her, the two boys were taking aimed shots at the Sicilians, saving ammunition and dropping the targets slowly, but steadily.

...\_...

The Sicilians were no match for the deadly fire coming in from the well-trained vigilantes.

Men were struck by the incoming bullets, some by more than one, falling to the ground in a pool of blood, the blood congealing in the cold as it intermingled with the blood of the other dead. The wounded screamed out in agony as their wounds were tended to by their comrades. Many of the Sicilians were aware that the end was getting close, but some still held out for a rapid turn of events to bring the fight back around with *Fusion* on the losing side. Ultimately, the turning of the tide had come from the civilians aligning themselves with *Fusion* and the CPD. That single act was to bring about their downfall and many of them knew it, despite not wanting to accept it. They were very exposed, and they had civilians taking pot-shots at them from overlooking buildings. While the gunfire was not all that accurate, it was plentiful and taking its toll.

Snipers and counter-snipers were busy sending high-powered bullets at their counterparts while trying to assist their forces on the ground. Leon as Overwatch was keeping an eye on her friends as they fought. She knew that there was at least one sniper team operating out there but they were not making her task easy as she attempted to find them. However, her current targets were Anthony and Helen Geno. They would appear and disappear as they kept their troops in order and guided their gunfire. Leon knew that she would only get one good shot before they kept themselves out of sight. Leon was also aware of the Sicilian's own sniper team who had vanished into buildings at the start of the fight. They would be looking for her and the moment she took her shot, they would track her down.

Leon lined up her shot a few minutes later, just as Anthony Geno came into view, a set of binoculars to his eyes. He was scanning the area for any weaknesses in the *Fusion* lines which he could exploit. The man was highly-skilled when it came to strategic planning, hence he had appeared to lead for the front.

'Well,' Leon thought. 'He would die from the front, too.'

As she adjusted for the breeze and for the difference in relative altitude, Leon steadied her breathing and she held the final breath before squeezing the trigger.

---

### ***Northwestern Memorial Hospital***

"We need to work fast if we're going to save the lower leg - the damage to the muscles and ligaments is bad; I'm surprised the damage wasn't much worse."

"The arm is salvageable to. . ."

The voices faded in and out as Saoirse's medication flowed through her body. She had moments of lucidity where she heard words and sentences - some complete, most partial - but where she also felt pain; intense pain.

Her mind was playing tricks on her and she kept regressing to her past.

...\_...

## **March 2011**

She could remember walking the streets of Belfast one night, and then a moment's distraction while she had burrowed inside her handbag.

Her friends had moved off ahead of her and then she had felt a hand over her mouth followed by a whirlwind of activity which had resulted in her reluctantly sliding her knickers down and off before she dropped them on the pile of her freshly discarded clothing, leaving herself completely naked and sobbing while several boys examined her nine-year-old body.

"Stop snivelling, brat," a girl in black fatigues growled causing her to sob even harder. "What's your name?"

"Saoirse."

"Irish?"

"I'm from Belfast."

"An Irish slut - you'll fit in well!"

Saoirse yelped as she was back-handed across her right buttock. Next, came the indignities of a shower with boys, watched by adult males. Saoirse thought that that might be the end of it, but then she was seized, and her hair was shaved off.

She could not believe what was happening to her and she was in a state of borderline hysterics by the time she was finally left alone, and she sank onto her bed where she cried and cried.

...\_...

## **June 2013**

"Hey, look - Doherty's got pubes!"

"Nice!"

For Saoirse, it was the start of another shitty day in hell. It was getting too much for the eleven-year-old Phase 2 *Predator*. She hated the humiliation of showering with boys. She hated the humiliation of being pushed around. She wanted control of her life back. So, after breakfast, she made her way to the vehicle garage and she found herself standing by the controls for the main door.

"This is not the way, Saoirse."

"Fuck off, Lucy."

"Saoirse - you don't want to do this. I don't want to have to come after you and kill you."

"I hate it. I hate it all."

"You've survived more than two years of shit, Saoirse. It can only get easier and I know that you're made of sterner shit than you let on."

"Why do you care, Lucy?"

"I don't know - maybe there are some of you that are worth it."

...\_...

## **October 2017**



The building was coming down.

She twisted the throttle, her motorcycle responding instantly but not instantly enough as the collapsing wall outpaced her machine and she found her world turning upside down and her body being struck by large objects which pummelled her into the roadway.

Then darkness as something struck her helmet and she felt nothing more.

...\_...

Consciousness returned, and the vigilante found herself staring at the underside of . . . *Titan*?

Foxtail pulled herself along the hull, towards the rear. The pain was extreme, but she fought through the pain, just as she had been taught, all those years ago. She banged on the rear hatch until it opened.

Then she passed out.

---

### ***West Harrison Street Bridge***

The bullet flew straight and true.

The breeze nudged it slightly to the right, but Leon had accounted for that and every other possible factor affecting the bullet's trajectory through the Chicago night.

Anthony Geno's hearing caught the sound of the bullet as it cut through the air, but by the time his brain had processed the information, the bullet was just carving its way into his right temporal bone before burrowing into the man's brain, turning the meaty substance into mush as it continued through and out the opposite temporal bone and on into the forehead of his lieutenant, killing both men instantly.

"A twofer!" Leon grinned excitedly as she chambered her next round.

...\_...

Helen Geno froze as her husband's blood and brains splattered across her face.

The gooey substance was hot against her skin in the early morning chill. She turned to see her husband of fourteen years slumping on the ground, his head all but destroyed by the large-calibre bullet. She screamed out in anger and loss as she surveyed his rapidly cooling corpse.

Her anger was quickly translated into action as she martialled her troops and she planned a counterstrike.

...\_...

Lawrence and Teri froze in shock as they heard the bullet and they saw it strike their father.

"Find that damn sniper, Teri!" Lawrence growled as the young teenager fought back the tears and he focussed on the task of taking down the sniper who had deprived them of their father.

Teri used her spotting scope to scan the nearby buildings and further afield for suitable sniper perches. There were a lot of windows and dark areas to be searched by her scope which had night capabilities.

---

## ***West Congress Parkway and South Wells Street***

The Russians held a good position, overlooking the battles from the elevated, multi-lane roadway.

They were disciplined and skilled. Their gunfire was very accurate as it plunged bullet after bullet into the vehicles behind which Shadow, Hellcat, and Fortune took cover. Beyond the three girls, Jackal, Tempest, and Cut-Throat were providing covering fire in an attempt to allow the girls to move forward in a flanking manoeuvre. So far, the manoeuvre was going nowhere. Whilst two large groups of Russian fighters took on Fusion, others were busy raining down hell on anybody close by and to hell with collateral damage. The bastards were targeting the paramedics directly as they worked, and one was already dead and two more were wounded on the streets below the parkway. Despite the direct attack, the paramedics bravely continued to work, despite their own wounds.

Wildcat, Nightmare, and Raven were tasked with paramedic protection and they had dropped down from the parkway and were using their armour and shields to protect the paramedics and their patients as they worked.

...\_...

For Hellcat, it was a dream come true.

She was fighting alongside her heroine: Shadow. The twelve-year-old ignored the bullets, planning ways out of their predicament. Despite her tender age, she was a seasoned vigilante, although all out battle was something new and very scary to the youngster. She knew that her brother was fighting not too far away, along with her sister. They were both at the back of her mind where she was dreading something happening to either one of them.

She felt Fortune's hand on her shoulder and she nodded to say that she was okay.

...\_...

Fortune was scared out of her wits.

Nothing that her sister had taught her could have prepared her for such chaos. She knew that her sister was a few streets over, fighting Hit Girl. She wanted to confront her sister and try to put a stop to the fighting before things went too far. In fact, she had discussed that with Hit Girl but things had taken a different turn and a carefully planned confrontation was no longer a possibility. They had all been awake for many hours and Fortune was struggling to keep her awareness in check. She knew full well that any lapse could mean certain death for her and her colleagues who were depending on her.

"Stand by," Shadow shouted out as she gripped her P90 tightly.

...\_...

Shadow moved out from behind the wrecked truck with her team behind her.

All three sent automatic gunfire into the Russian barricades as they ran forwards. Fortune and Hellcat dived down behind a badly damaged Ford, but Shadow was caught out as two bullets struck her chest armour in rapid succession and the vigilante was shoved over backwards, crashing down onto her upper back before rolling off to one side and into cover underneath a bullet-ridden police car.

Shadow struggled with her breathing and the pain of the bullet strikes as she lay on her front.

...\_...

Jackal saw his girl flipped over by the bullets and he feared the worst, but he saw her moving and breathed a sigh of relief.

Nonetheless, he poured accurate fire from his P90 into the Russian barricades seeing at least one cloud of red bloom into the air. Tempest and Cut-Throat followed suit, angry at seeing one of their colleagues struck down. Without warning, something blazed past Jackal and exploded behind them, shoving him into the back of a panel van with enough force to make him yell out in pain. The RPG had powered in and struck a long-abandoned patrol car. The car had, in turn, exploded, sending red-hot shrapnel in all directions. The shrapnel tore through anything which got in its way as physics guided the ragged projectiles on a parabolic arc. Then there was a scream and Jackal turned to find Tempest writhing on the ground behind them, his left side was smoking where there was a large gash in his armour. The shrapnel had dug into his armoured back and burnt through the armour.

"Medic!" Jackal radioed.

It was a war zone; there was no better description.

---

*BRUTE* drove fast down West Harrison Street.

Audacious was keen to get to the where her skills were required. Beside her, Rogue was wide-eyed at the bright explosions and gun fire. Silently, the eight-year-old was very scared about entering the battle zone, but she knew that it was her duty. Her sister was there, as was her elder brother. She had spent most of the night assisting Audacious with walking wounded left over from the earlier attacks. Audacious took a right at South Financial Place to avoid the Sicilians before turning left on the parkway and making for where she could see black smoke pouring from a destroyed vehicle.

Rogue's keen eyesight was drawn to a bright light to her right and she turned to see something very bright heading in their direction.

...\_...

Fifty yards to the east, *TITAN* was approaching the battle with Lynx at the wheel.

Behind her, Hawk, Ravage and Scamp were preparing to provide protection for Medic when they arrived onsite. Then, they were stunned to see a bright light streak from the right and terminate very close to *BRUTE* which was thrown forwards. The rear end of the armoured Range Rover Sentinel left the roadway as the vehicle was flipped over onto its roof, crashing down in a shower of sparks before cannoning sideways into the onramp from Lower Wacker Drive, just yards from where Jackal was tending to the screaming Tempest while Cut-Throat provided covering fire. Lynx brought *TITAN* to a halt close by Tempest with the rear hatch away from the Russians as much as was possible. Astute was pouring accurate gunfire from his sniper rifle into the location of the RPG launches from his position on a building across the river. Hawk and Medic dived out, Medic making for Tempest, while Hawk made for the crashed *BRUTE* closely followed by Lynx and Scamp.

Ravage went after Medic with a shield on one arm.

...\_...

Rogue had found her world turning over and then upside down as the vehicle had crashed onto its roof before crashing into something with a resounding crash.

"You okay, Rogue?" Audacious demanded as she hung upside down from her harness.

Rogue hung from her own harness as she replied.

"That was fun for a moment," she commented as she willed back the tears. She also felt comforting warmth in her groin where her bladder had let go at the moment of becoming airborne.

Audacious released her harness, falling down onto the roof of the SUV. The armour had prevented the roof from collapsing, although the roof was not designed to support the entire vehicle, so Audacious knew a quick exit was required. Rogue followed the example and she released her harness, landing like a cat on the roof. They both heard banging from the left side of the vehicle and a door was heaved open just enough for Hawk to stick her head in.

"You guys okay?"

"Never better, Hawk!" Rogue reported.

"Like she said," Audacious added as she pushed Rogue out, through the opening. "Let's move."

Hawk yanked Rogue out and passed her towards Lynx who pulled her down behind another abandoned vehicle where Scamp provided cover with her G36K. Audacious squeezed out, reaching back in for her own G36C and also Rogue's G36K.

...\_...

With the injured having been ferried out of harm's way, Wildcat, Nightmare, and Raven had returned to the Parkway, providing covering fire for the medical teams as they worked.

Rogue and Audacious were both checked out with no major problems found, releasing them both to assist. Tempest was the major problem. With the help of Lynx and Wildcat, Medic was able to force the writhing Tempest flat onto the ground and pin him face down. After deactivating his mask's safety measures, Medic injected the boy with morphine sulphate to calm him down and to dull the pain as she pulled up the top of his combat suit to expose the wound. The area sizzling with the piece of hot shrapnel partially embedded in the small of his back, just a few inches to the left of his backbone. The boy's movements eased as the morphine took hold and very carefully, Medic eased the jagged piece of metal out of the boy's back, dumping it on the blacktop before spraying a sterilised water solution into the wound. The water sizzled and steamed for a moment before the last of the shrapnel was washed out of the wound and the burning ceased.

Bullets clanged against the nearest vehicle while more dug into the blacktop, but Medic was more concerned with her patient who was in a bad way. Beside her, Scamp assisted with supplies while supporting a heavy armoured shield. Ravage stood over Scamp, firing off individual rounds at the Russians while Jackal and Cut-Throat tried to move closer to Shadow who was still lying beneath the police car. She had reported in that she was okay, but Jackal was worried as she had not emerged.

Scamp too was fully aware that Shadow was lying hurt, only a short distance away from where she knelt beside Medic as they tended to Tempest.

...\_...

Four hundred metres to the southwest, Astute focussed his sniper scope on two men reloading an RPG.

He fired off a succession of rounds, all striking the sheltered position, the heavy bullets bringing down masonry onto the man with the rocket launcher. The loader fell as a bullet struck him full in the chest. Then Astute lined up on the remaining man, firing his bullet, just a second before the man squeezed his own trigger.

The man died as his head exploded, just half a second after the rocket projectile had left the launcher.

...\_...

"RPG inbound!"

The radio call had everybody diving for cover as the projectile roared in, striking the overhead gantry, bringing the structure crashing down onto the police car beneath which Shadow had taken shelter. There were screams from some of the Russians who had been struck by debris and shrapnel, the RPG warhead having sent its devastating load, out ahead of it, carving through the gantry and sending pieces of aluminium scything through the air. The crash of the gantry had suspended the firefight for a few precious minutes, allowing Jackal to run forwards in search of Shadow. Raven went after Nightmare who had screamed out and fallen to the roadway. Nightmare gritted her teeth against the pain of the jagged piece of metal that jutted out of her left thigh. The pain was extreme, and it was all she could do not to pass out.

Audacious ran forwards, escorted by Rogue. They stopped at Nightmare, Audacious administering morphine sulphate to the girl to ease the pain while she lay on her right side, tears flooding the inside of her mask. Rogue was horrified by the sight of the blood and the trauma that she was witnessing. Her friends were hurting. She thought that while they might get banged up, she never thought that they could be hurt so badly in their seemingly impregnable body armour. The shouting, the screaming, Rogue was struggling to cope with it all. The eight-year-old beneath the armour was frightened, very frightened.

Minutes later, the bleeding was under control and the teenage vigilante had passed out from the pain and the shot of morphine sulphate.

...\_...

The police car with Shadow beneath it was squished under a large amount of structural steel and aluminium.

Shadow was stuck - she had not been crushed, but she could not move and no matter what she tried, she could not get out of her predicament. She could hear the sounds of explosions, gunfire, yells, and screams. Then she heard scrabbling and she could hear the sounds of somebody moving towards her. She turned her head to find someone family squirming beneath the car.

"Hi, Mum, err Shadow."

Shadow chuckled.

"Hello, Scamp, fancy meeting you here."

"Are you alright?"

"Yes - I'm just a little bit stuck."

"Jackal is working on that - with Wildcat."

"Oh," Shadow growled. "I bet Wildcat is just loving this."

"Huh?"

"Wildcat and I have a history."

"I see," Scamp responded, not really seeing anything.

"*Shadow, Wildcat, you receiving me, over?*"

"Hello, my little kitty?"

"*We're about to lift the cop car - then you can slide your big old ass out of there, 'cause it ain't your tits keeping you under there!*"

"So fucking funny, bitch!" Shadow chuckled.

"She's being nasty," Scamp pointed out.

"Nah - she's just trying to keep my spirits up."

"You feeling unhappy?"

"Honey, I'm jammed under a cop car after taking two bullets in the chest at close range - what the fuck do you think?"

"Cranky!"

Shadow chuckled again.

"I'm sorry, honey - I'm just not feeling myself, okay?"

"*Scamp! Stand clear!*"

Scamp scrambled out of the small space and Shadow could hear metalwork groaning and then she could feel the police car moving slightly. Then she felt herself being moved and she realised that Scamp had attached a line to the carabiner in her combat suit. And as the police car lifted up further, she was yanked out and she found herself looking up into the mask of Jackal.

"Enjoyed your little siesta, Shadow?" he asked.

"Just what I needed!" Shadow growled as she held up the thumb of her right hand before Jackal hauled his woman to her feet.

Scamp ran up and disconnected the line for Shadow's carabiner before throwing the line into *TITAN*. Shadow took in the enormous vehicle with a triangular frame attached to the front bumper and the winch cable which was gently lowering the police car back to the ground. All around, bullets flew from Fusion weapons into the Russian barricade which was steadily weakening, not least when Raven fired off several 40-millimetre grenades in the Russians' direction. Wildcat held up Shadow's P90.

"Locked and loaded, Shadow!" the youngster growled.

"You just going to stand there looking like a chump?" Shadow retorted as she grabbed the weapon from her friend.

"Lead on, my master," Wildcat responded with a wave.

"Ruby Alpha . . . let's move!" Shadow called out as Hellcat and Fortune formed up on her.

...\_...

Ruby Alpha moved to the left while the remnants of Opal Alpha and Bravo moved to the right.

The flanking movements overpowered the Russian defences which were recovering from the grenade bombardment. The remaining men chose to die rather than surrender as they entered into hand-to-hand combat with the *Fusion* vigilantes. Shadow had a personal score to settle as she expertly punched the living daylight out of a man twice her size while kicking out at anybody who came to his aid. A few feet away, Wildcat was allowing another Russian to experience her claws at close range as she plunged them into his neck, severing arteries and various other important features before she ripped the blades clean out of the man's neck. The blood had barely splattered across the Parkway before the wild Wildcat had buried her other set of blades into the chest of a large Russian, chopping his heart into three pieces, killing the man instantly. Raven dived after the marauding Wildcat, covering her back and dealing out her own form of justice to the Russians. Her razor-sharp bō-staff cut through limbs and torsos as she whirled around, avoiding knives and bullets alike.

The final Russian fell to Fortune as she thrust a blade into his throat, leaving the man to gurgle out the rest of his life as he sank to the ground.

---

### **West Van Buren Street Bridge**

With the Russians gone, Ruby Alpha moved to assist Diamond while Opal formed into one team and they headed to support Emerald and Ruby Bravo with the Sicilians.

Fortune found herself moving closer to the fight between Hit Girl and FEAR. It was a big fight, too. While Diamond kept the *Corsairs* at bay, Hit Girl and FEAR whirled around clashing blades, neither backing down. No quarter was being given in the winner-takes-all fight for the city of Chicago. For Hit Girl it was the fight of her life. She had everything to lose and so much to gain. The weight of an entire city sat squarely on her shoulders along with the lives of almost fifty vigilantes who fought under her command. The veteran vigilante had no choice but to allow the weight of *Fusion* to rest on other shoulders so that she could put everything into fighting FEAR. She trusted her team explicitly and she knew that they would guard her back.

Fortune passed easily through the canine lines, watching with interest as Razor hauled an errant *Corsair* to the ground, but she ignored his pleading as the dog attacked the man's armour with gusto.

---

### **West Harrison Street Bridge**

The Sicilians were beyond angry.

Their leader was dead, and they wanted blood. Helen Geno had them riled up with her rallying call and they were ready to move out of their defensive positions. They had a target in mind, too. They caught *Fusion* on the hop as they fired off a dozen smoke grenades towards both groups of vigilantes, totally obscuring the already dark street. A dozen men erupted out of the concrete protection and they took advantage of the swirling smoke as they took off towards the east and South Wells Street where fate had placed a most unwelcome target directly in the path of the armed men who were hellbent on gaining revenge for their fallen boss.

The outflanked *Fusion* had no idea where the enemy were headed as they lost sight of their quarry in the swirling mists.

*TITAN* was parked immediately to the north of the intersection and Medic was treating a firefighter who had received a bullet to his left leg.

Beside *TITAN*, an ambulance sat, ready to whisk the firefighter to hospital. Her own paramedics were occupied with two other firefighters who were injured. It was Ravage who sounded the alarm as the smoke drifted towards them and seconds later, armed men burst out of the smoke and began shooting at anything and everything. Medic literally shoved the injured firefighter into the ambulance and she slammed the rear doors while one of the paramedics scrambled into the driver's seat and she accelerated away as bullets struck the escaping vehicle.

With the ambulance gone, the Sicilians turned their attentions to *TITAN*. Ravage took out a pissed off fighter with his Walther P22 pistol while Medic drew her own Beretta firearm and she fired into the mass of anger which ran towards them. Scamp, guarding the rear hatch drew her own Walther P22 and she levelled it at a giant who ran at her. A brief squeeze of the trigger and her bullet struck the target, centre mass - only the man continued coming. Scamp continued firing off rounds at the man until the ten-round magazine was exhausted, by which time, the bull of a man had crashed to the ground at her feet, very dead.

Scamp ejected the empty magazine and she inserted the full replacement, only not fast enough as another man came at her. With a scream, Scamp was struck across the chest and thrown bodily against the side of *TITAN*. The young girl slid to the ground as the Sicilian strode towards her, a large machete raised to strike. No vigilante was close enough to defend the fallen girl. A dozen yards away, Jackal roared with anger as he bolted for his daughter.

Only, the machete was a lot closer to his daughter than he was.