

Author's Note: This chapter follows on from **Chapter 52: Steeplechase** of my other story: **Vengeance**.

Saturday, November 26th, 2016

**Training Facility Echo
Chicago, USA**

"Is this wise?"

"I . . . well, I think so."

"It's like having almost two dozen mini Hit Girls and Hit Boys running about causing chaos," Dave commented dryly.

Mindy laughed as she watched the massed group of *Predators* mingle on the mat. They all wore their 'duty' uniforms. There was a round dozen US *Predators*, with half-a-dozen UK *Predators*. Though there was a fairly even mix of the dark grey uniforms of the *Fusion* members and the dark blue uniforms of the *Vengeance* junior members which included five non-*Predators*.

"You have concerns, though."

"What makes you think that?" Mindy asked.

"Every adult is carrying at least one Taser - you are carrying a pair."

Mindy's cheeks coloured slightly as she muttered a response.

"Nothing wrong with being prepared. . ."

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It was both amazing and very worrying to see so many *Predators* in one place.

Eighteen *Predators* were present - a dangerous number to have in one place, but all had promised to behave. It was also special as two wounded members were out of hospital and while nowhere near operational, at least they were with their friends. It was also a first for one of them. The list of those present was impressive.

Fusion Predators

Stephanie Lizewski AKA Psyche
Saoirse Doherty AKA Foxtail
Lucy Ford AKA Piranha
Shannon Millar AKA Stormtide
Rachel Ascot AKA Ember
Marc Ryan AKA Tempest
Sarah Hampton AKA Discord
Hunter Graves AKA Cut-Throat
James Lizewski AKA Rage
Abigail Wilde AKA Fury
Leo Graves AKA Relentless
Rebecca Wren AKA Scamp

Vengeance Predators

Craig Montgomery AKA Stripe
Harper Sharp AKA Polaris
Naomi Perrin AKA Prowl
Kaitlin Perrin AKA Glide

Electra Haig AKA Rigour
Jordan Hanley AKA Viridian

They were also accompanied by the *non-Predators* from *Vengeance*:

HRH Princess Mary AKA Belle
Jeremy Lai AKA Harrier
Olivia Kensington AKA Ajax
Jessica Kensington AKA Overrun
Christopher Collins AKA Forager

And the long-suffering *Vengeance* adults:

Cassie Perrin AKA Nemesis
Keira Sharp AKA Scorpion
Trevor Lai AKA Raptor

And of course:

Ginny Turner AKA Minder

All told, the two organisations, combined, were seventy strong - a formidable force for fighting evil across the globe.

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For Jordan Hanley, it was all a bit of a shock.

While the attention was great - and he had a temporary family - finding himself thrust into a famous, but clandestine, organisation was something he still needed to get used to. He was also not alone in being more than a little concerned to be meeting Hit Girl and Kick-Ass. He had noticed Overrun and Ajax positively fangirling over Hit Girl which was amusing. Meeting Kick-Ass had been amazing and as for Shadow - damn!

Lunch was - well - it was rowdy. *Vengeance* was joined by most of *Fusion* which just added to the increasingly rowdy behaviour. Wildcat, Fury, Nightmare, Hellcat, and Ajax were all competing for who could be the most unladylike when it came to deepthroating a hotdog.

"Ajax has been practicing that with Stripe," Overrun pointed out.

"Wildcat enjoys deepthroating Trojan," Foxtail threw in as she added two more embarrassed faces to those of Ajax and Stripe.

For the boys, it was who could burp the longest and the loudest - much to Shadow's annoyance, Jackal won that. Even the adults were getting in on the fun as Hit Girl tried to see how many cheeseburgers she could Taser from her own seat. That ended after the third cheeseburger turned out to be Rogue's left hand - Hit Girl apologised to her infuriated daughter once she had reloaded her Taser and Rogue had stopped shaking long enough. Scamp - being a scamp - was enjoying causing trouble along with her new friend, Glide.

It was Nemesis who first noticed that her youngest charge was not visible amongst the thirty-odd people present. Then Shadow sidled up to the Brit.

"You seen my Scamp?" she asked.

"You seen my Glide?" Nemesis countered.

"Two eight-year-old *Predators* are missing, huh?" Shadow contemplated as her eyes scanned the dining room before narrowing. "I spy two little bitches about to get themselves into trouble."

Nemesis followed Shadow's gaze and she chuckled.

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It had been Scamp's idea - maybe she was showing off to her new friend from the UK, or maybe she was just having some fun, either way, she knew that she was in trouble.

Glide, on the other hand, she was enjoying herself and any excuse to cause trouble just had to be taken - she liked Scamp, a fellow Brit; she was fun. The pair of them had snuck into the armoury and made a small withdrawal with the help of Shadow's ID card which Scamp had lifted, and then returned. They were a pair of training flash-bang grenades which the two girls were intending on rolling underneath the dining tables - just for some explosive fun, of course. However, what the pair did not know was that the grenades were special and multifunctional for training use. They also had no idea that they were capable of being remote-controlled. Therefore, Shadow made a swift call to Battle Guy who was able to identify the grenades which the two girls had just activated. With a swift command, he switched them from 'flash-bang' to 'electro-shock' and triggered them both at a command from Shadow.

Many eyes turned to check out the left-hand corridor from where there were two screams as Glide and Scamp fell to the dining room floor, twitching from the low-level electric shocks.

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"Okay!" Hit Girl called out. "While those two little shits finish their twitching, Scorpion and Nemesis have some announcements to make."

There was laughter as Glide and Scamp gingerly regained their seats, looking thoroughly miserable. Scamp received a hard slap on her backside from Shadow and an expression which promised so much more later on. Glide kept her head down and remained out of reach of any adult.

"Polaris," Scorpion began, "it is very good to have you with us again, and I am very glad to be back with *Vengeance*. I enjoy wearing this uniform and I am extremely proud to represent the very best that the UK has to offer. Now, back to Polaris. You, young lady, should not be in that uniform; you are no longer our Senior Trainee Operator."

Polaris' bubble of happiness suddenly popped, and she looked very worried, but then she saw the evil smirk on her sister's face.

"You should be wearing these. . ."

Scorpion held out a fresh *Vengeance* epaulette bearing two pips rather than the single pip of Polaris' current rank. Polaris' grin grew enormously as tremendous applause rang out. With uncharacteristic slowness, Polaris rose to her feet and she made for her sister. Scorpion made no attempt to make her sister's route shorter; she knew that the youngster would not thank her for it. The nine-year-old was forcing down the pain as she braced up before her big sister, standing at attention while her rank was switched out and she was presented with her new *Vengeance* ID card.

"Congratulations, Junior Operator Polaris!" Scorpion announced amid more applause and raucous noise.

Polaris took her time returning to her seat, feeling happier than she had been in weeks.

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Once the shouting and applause had died down, Scorpion then looked over at the two relative newcomers.

"Belle and Rigour - get your sorry behinds up here!" Scorpion ordered.

There was more cheering as the two girls stepped forward, Belle blushing furiously at all the attention, not that Rigour was less pink in the face.

"Rigour, in recognition of your actions while Vengeance was on the run, and especially for your actions above and beyond when it came to protecting one of those silly Royal Princesses," Belle grimaced as she recognised the sarcastic laugh of her protector, "we have decided it right to promote you to Senior Trainee Operator. As the person whose life was saved, would you like to complete the promotion, Your Royal Highness?"

Belle blushed furiously as she took the rank slide and she fitted it to the grinning Rigour's uniform amid huge applause which took a while to calm down - Psyche was the loudest when it came to the cheering for her friend.

"Rigour - would you please return the favour for Belle - our newest Trainee Operator," Scorpion directed as she held out another rank strap with a single stripe.

Belle brought herself to attention and she struggled to contain her grin as the rank was fitted and she suddenly felt very different.

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For Her Royal Highness Princess Mary AKA Belle, it had been the most fantastic trip.

It had almost taken an act of God to actually allow her, a Royal Princess, to visit the United States of America, in total secrecy as her alter ego. As she understood it, her Grandmother had intervened and authorised the trip. She was so happy to be back amongst those she called true friends. They had all fought side-by-side, quite literally, in every sense of the phrase. When on the plane, Mary had looked over at Olivia and with a grimace, she had remembered the teenager, cuffed, hooded, and naked. She could remember giving the restrained girl, who was her own age, stern orders - she felt sad for the girl, but Olivia appeared to have overcome. After reaching Chicago, the drive had been amazing - she had never been to 'the windy city', before. Then had come the rabbit hole. She had felt like Alice as she had quite literally vanished dozens of feet beneath the city into a subterranean wonderland full of vigilantes. It was a place that she had only ever visited in her dreams and even her wildest dreams had been nothing like what she had experienced. If 'Fort Fusion' was amazing - it as nothing compared to the massive facility next door.

Mary herself would readily admit that it took something really amazing to have her lost for words - but there she was, lost for words as they had toured the massive facility. She had barely said a word in over the space of forty minutes. She had finally regained her ability to speak during their meal. While *Vengeance* was very familiar with the Princess in their midst, the Americans saw her as something special. Apparently, Americans loved everything about royalty and to have a Royal Princess before them was amazing. Or as Splinter had put it: 'She's a real princess and she packs a pistol - there is nothing sexier and I am damn hard at the thought - eat your heart out Princess Leia!' Mary had not known where to put her face at that moment, but she had enjoyed the comment - sort of . . . ewww! Everybody was so friendly but a part of her showed concern for how many there were who had suffered as *Predators*. She had no idea of their stories, nor the stories of the other members of *Fusion*, but she was certain that those stories would not be pretty.

The confirmation of her status as a member of *Vengeance* along with the ID card with 'BELLE' printed on it had been amazing, not to mention being able to reward the long-suffering Electra - the poor girl was still very sore where the bullets had struck. After her promotion, she was welcomed back amongst her friends and congratulated by everybody. She felt like she only felt when she was with *Vengeance*. All the Pomp and Circumstance of her life suddenly vanished, and she was a normal human-being enjoying the camaraderie of her friends. It was a feeling that she relished and one which she had missed while she had been back at school.

At least having Electra with her was a bonus - they could talk about things that only they were privy to.

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"Okay, people," Nemesis called out. "We have a surprise for all you wretched, badly-behaved. . ."

"Don't forget: foul-mouthed, precocious, infuriating, tiresome, irksome. . ."
Hit Girl cut in.

"You swallowed a dictionary, Mummy?" Psyche interrupted.

". . .Disagreeable, antagonistic, and downright vexatious," Hit Girl finished to applause from all the adults present and some of the non-*Predators*.

"All good," Nemesis grinned as she received nasty scowls from Prowl and Glide. "Now - as I was saying; we have a surprise for you petulant little rats. Hit Girl has deigned to take you little buggers out for a night on the town. . ."

Nemesis was interrupted by a roar of approval. Scorpion had seen her sister's face drop like a lead balloon at the pronouncement.

"You, young lady, will be in the Command Centre with Foxtail. I want you to learn how to command. I understand that Psyche spent several weeks 'commanding the troops', so to speak, after her incarceration in hospital. You think you can do that?"

Polaris smiled.

"I know you want to be out there, but I'm sorry - no fucking way!"

"It's okay, sis - I understand," Polaris said as she pulled her sister down for a hug.

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"Do you think I am fucking stupid?"

Belle backed down as Hit Girl glared at her.

"No."

"Do you really think that I would allow a Royal Princess of the Realm to prance about Chicago with every chance of said Princess getting hurt? I have no desire to spend the rest of my sorry life in the Tower of London!"

"They don't put people in the. . ." Belle began.

"What are you in line to the throne?" Hit Girl went on.

"Twelfth."

"I know who your Grandmother is, and I know that she would not think twice about ordering an invasion of the United States of America to rescue her

granddaughter or to capture Hit Girl and imprison her as a traitor to the Crown!"

Belle gave up.

"Okay."

"But, if you are a good little Princess, then you can ride shotgun in *Critter*."

"*Critter*?"

That Afternoon

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

Stormtide pushed open the door to the female accommodation and yelled a name.

"Here!" Charlotte Grey announced as she appeared seconds later.

Stormtide grinned at the eager-looking twelve-year-old. The girl was always punctual and never caused a moment's trouble. Stormtide knew that the girl had suffered at the hands of Fury, but that was in the past - sort of.

"Time for you to see the Doc."

"Stormtide - could you find out if Fury is about, please?"

Stormtide nodded, knowing that they were friends.

"Fury, Stormtide; you got your ears on?"

"*Stormy!*" came the response a few seconds later.

"Don't call me that!" Stormtide hissed, angrily, ignoring the laughter in her earpiece. "I'm taking your friend to see the Doc - she requests your attendance."

"*I'll meet you there.*"

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"Hi, Charlotte."

"Thanks for coming, Fury."

"I'll leave her in your custody," Stormtide said.

"No problem - and thanks," Fury replied as she knocked and then pushed open the door into Surgeon's office.

After a ten-minute examination of Charlotte's wounds and a general check of her physical health, the girl redressed.

"The wounds are looking good, Charlotte," Surgeon advised as Fury looked down at the floor.

"Look, Fury - if you keep thinking you are to blame, then I will break my streak of perfect behaviour just to kick your arse," Charlotte growled.

"Don't mind me - I won't tell," Surgeon chuckled to Charlotte.

Fury pulled off her mask - she had hoped to hide her expressions with it.

"Okay - I won't say another word about it."

"Now, Charlotte," Surgeon said to get things back on track. "Should you be allowed to leave here, where do you see yourself ending up? What do you want from life?"

After only a few second's thought, Charlotte smiled.

"I want to go home. I want to return to England. I don't belong here, and the United States has too many bad memories for me. I want to be amongst my own kind - Brits. I'm sorry, Abigail, but I don't belong here."

"Okay," Surgeon responded. "Where in England? You are too young to go it alone - would you want a family?"

"Yes. I want people who care about me. I want to have a childhood - I'm only twelve, so I have a long way to go and time to enjoy being a child again. However, . . ."

"You have an urge - an itch. You want to hurt somebody. You want to hit something. You feel the urge to run, to kick, to scream. You punch the pillows. You punch the mattress. Then you punch the doors. You escalate. You need an outlet for that feeling inside of you that surges up," Abigail offered quietly.

Surgeon looked at Abigail and Charlotte nodded.

"I want to join *Vengeance* - if they'd have me."

Abigail mulled that one over.

"You think you're good enough?" Abigail asked, knowing the answer.

"I am as good as you, Fury, probably better."

"I did put you down," Abigail pointed out with a slightly pained expression.

"I was having a bad day," was Charlotte's excuse.

"Any excuse is better than none, I suppose," Abigail laughed.

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Surgeon finished off updating her patient notes after the pair of giggling girls had left her office.

Then there came a knock on the door. In came Stormtide with Dakota Warlow-Davies. Stormtide had top stay - she hated it; seeing another girl undergoing a medical examination was not exactly fun. However, it was brief as Dakota was in perfect health with nothing more than fading bruises on her skin.

"Now, Dakota," Surgeon said to the girl. "Should you be allowed to leave here, where do you see yourself ending up? What do you want from life?"

Dakota mulled that over for a bit.

"I don't belong in the US - I hate it, to be honest. No offence, Stormtide, and nothing against you Americans."

"No offence taken, Dakota," Stormtide replied with a grin.

"Can I go back to the UK?"

"That is certainly possible," Surgeon advised. "Anywhere in particular? You are still a little too young to go it alone - would you want a family, maybe?"

"I suppose. It would be nice not to be alone all the time."

"We can find something for you. We'll do everything we can, I promise you that."

"Thanks, Doc."

"Keep up the good behaviour, Dakota; you are doing really well."

The fourteen-year-old beamed as she stood up.

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"You're not a bad person, Dakota," Stormtide said in support as they walked back to the *Marauder* accommodation.

"You're a good person, Shannon - you always were," Dakota replied. "I'm sorry about what happened to you - it sucked. I always liked your Dad; he was kind to us - is he okay?"

"He is, thanks for asking," Shannon replied.

"Stormtide - am I going to survive this, really?"

"Yes. You keep your nose clean and you'll be out of here. Just because you were a *Predator* does not mean that you are a bad person. You made a stupid decision and became a *Marauder*, but that is not you, Dakota."

"Thank you for talking to me - stay safe, Shannon."

"You too, Dakota."

That evening

The Battle Bunker

It was a new experience for Polaris.

Normally, she was in the thick of the action, but not while she was so fragile that a two-year-old could put her down, permanently. It was not a nice feeling being so vulnerable, but events had taken their course and there was nothing that she could do to change things. The same applied to Foxtail, to a certain extent. The girl was hurting, that was evident, but she was also just as immobile as Polaris was. Neither girl had really spent much time taking in what went on behind the scenes. Foxtail had received command training during her Phase 3 training. For Polaris, she knew little about actual command, but she knew the basics. There was another *Predator* who appeared to be allocated to the Command Centre - Ember. Between Hal and Ember, Polaris and Foxtail were shown the key systems and how to monitor the teams who were going out. Battle Guy kept overall watch as they were going to have a lot of people out on the streets of Chicago.

On the monitors, CCTV images showed the teams preparing equipment and themselves for the night out.

Training Facility Echo

Level 2

There was one amongst them who was struggling to prepare herself.

It appeared that Olivia was getting her own back on the girl - or so it seemed. Olivia, Harper, and Mary were in one of the cabins with the door firmly locked. Mary was standing naked before both girls and feeling more than a little stupid. Olivia was smirking, and it had occurred to the girl that the tables had turned.

"Put these on," Harper insisted. "You look ridiculous!"

Mary happily took the black boy-shorts and black sports bra from the smirking nine-year-old and she quickly pulled them on, regaining a smidgen of dignity. Arrayed on the bed beside Harper was a pile of garments in various yellow hues. Next, Mary was handed a two-part under-suit. She pulled on the bottoms which came to her waist and included 'feet'. The top pulled on just like a jacket, although the zipper ran from bottom left to top right. Both sections were a dark grey in colour and made of a soft material which cocooned Mary's body as well as providing basic armour protection for her body - a first layer if you will. Next, there came actual body armour which felt slinky to the touch but was also very light. Each section clipped onto the under-suit and interconnected with the next section forming a complete covering for the thirteen-year-old's body. The body armour had a dull yellow hue with a gold trim accentuating Mary's developing curves. A pair of armoured gauntlets protected her hands and came partway up her wrists and secured to the lower arm body armour. The gauntlets were black with medium yellow and gold highlights. On her feet, she gained a pair of lightweight, armoured boots which were the same dull yellow as her body armour and which came up past her calves.

Around her waist, a utility belt in medium yellow carried communications, spare magazines, and various other accoutrements. Hanging from the utility belt, and strapped to her right thigh, there was a holster for her Glock 26 Gen4 pistol. On her left thigh, were mounts for a pair of Nanchuka. Each boot carried a mounting for her Tonfa on the outside. Also attached to the utility belt was a yellow and black mini-kilt. On top of the ensemble, a lightweight, calf-length coat with a high collar was pulled on. The coat was black on the outer, with a canary yellow trim. On the inner-side, the reversible coat was a canary yellow. The coat was also bullet-proof and flame retardant. There was one thing missing, Mary thought, until Olivia revealed an all in one mask and wig. The wig was of dark brown hair which hung in a single pony tail, reaching to the middle of Mary's back. The mask covered her real hair completely and completely covered her face. Around the eyes and the bridge of her nose, a gold masquerade ball mask with black highlights gave her a look of menace. The eyes glowed yellow in varying intensities. Harper handed Mary her pistol, Nanchuka, and Tonfas. Each was checked and placed securely in their mountings.

Belle was complete.

Safehouse D

Belle was amazed as she came face-to-face with *CRITTER*.

It was black - matte black - and it had massive tyres providing enormous ground clearance. The vehicle was over 6-metres long and 2.5-metres wide. It weighed in at almost nine tonnes and was armoured to resist armour-piercing rounds of up to 7.62-millimetre calibre. It had the highest armour rating available for standard vehicles - the next level up was basically a fucking tank. There was seating for five, including the driver - six at a pinch. The rear load bay was open and there was a roof hatch. Multiple lights adorned the roof above the windshield.

Belle jumped as the massive 6.8-litre V8 turbo diesel rumbled to life, revving as it produced over three-hundred horsepower, ready to thrust the giant vehicle into action.

"Get in!" Kick-Ass directed as he opened the front passenger door for Belle. "We don't stand on ceremony here, Princess!"

As she climbed into the leather seat, she looked behind her to see three of her friends: Prowl, Glide, and Rigour. They were each strapped in and ready to go, all in their body armour and fully armed.

"Maybe we should have got this in pink!" Kick-Ass complained sarcastically as he surveyed his female cargo.

"It would look really cool," Glide confirmed.

Kick-Ass growled as he shifted the vehicle into gear.

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A few yards away was IRON HIDE.

Piranha gunned the huge engine as she slipped the transmission into Drive - it was her first time driving the giant pickup truck, but she was up to the task. Beside her, Stripe sat watching out the armoured windshield, excited for what lay in wait for them. In the rear seats, a happy Psyche, an apprehensive Viridian, and a pensive Tempest sat awaiting their imminent fates on the streets of Chicago. The fully refurbished *TITAN* was being driven by Lynx who, for some reason, wanted some action. She was joined by Stormtide in the passenger seat beside her, and then by Surgeon, Discord, Cut-Throat, and Relentless in the back. The balance of *Vengeance* piled into a virtual twin to *TITAN*, another Pit Bull VX which was known as *HERCULES*. That vehicle was being driven by Raptor with Minder beside him. They were joined by Ajax, Overrun, Harrier, and Forager.

As everybody signalled their readiness, Battle Guy checked everybody off, before issuing the final order: "*Predators* - roll out!"

With a roar, the vehicles departed Safehouse D.

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As the convoy of four heavy vehicles took a left onto South California Avenue, they were joined by five motorcycles and the final pair of *Predators*.

Hit Girl on her Ducati Superbike 1199 Panigale R, with Rage riding behind her, raced past. She was followed by Scorpion, on a borrowed Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R - actually borrowed from Jackal who rode his Triumph Tiger 800 XCA motorcycle. Alongside Jackal, was Shadow on her Ducati Superbike 899 Panigale with Scamp clamped around her waist. The final machine was Shadow's Suzuki V-Strom 1000 ABS being ridden by Nemesis with Fury behind her.

The motorcade headed north for the industrial zone to the east of Douglas Park.

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Hit Girl, being Hit Girl, had decided not to leave anything to chance.

She wanted the *Predators* to 'have some fun' and be able to 'kick some ass' without having to hunt for some cunt hiding down a darkened back alleyway. As such, she had paid a visit to Worm who had 'arranged' for some low life scum to be 'available' by spreading a rumour, via an untrustworthy third-party to keep himself out of trouble, of course. The rumour? Drugs, money . . . whatever was necessary to get the cunts out of the woodwork and onto the streets around Douglas Park.

Hit Girl had asked for a 'target-rich' environment, and that was what she was going to get.

Western and 16th Street

The metal-clad building was 500-feet long and currently occupied by eight men. Those eight men were busy preparing the night's cache of drugs. They hoped to make a killing, figuratively, at least. As far as they were concerned, the building was secure, and nobody knew that they were there.

The boss - Jay - looked around for his lieutenant.

"Hey! Where's Frank?"

"He went out back, I think."

"Well, go find the fucker!"

One of the men vanished to find Frank. The man was back a few seconds later - his face full of fear.

"Run!" he yelled, just as the entire side of the building exploded inwards and the rear of an armoured vehicle suddenly appeared a few feet from Jay.

The rear hatch burst open and four armour-clad individuals leapt out. Jay was not stupid - he knew that he was the proverbial 'dead man walking'. However, it was not a *Fusion* vigilante which took him down, it was another armoured vehicle smashing through the wall a few yards down the building and quite literally squishing Jay against a steel pillar.

"Sorry!" Lynx yelled out.

"You are fucking cleaning *that* when we get back!" Stormtide growled as she stared at the red mush on her side of the windshield. "I'm not fucking touching it!"

"Just get the fuck out there, Stormy!" Lynx growled.

The fourteen-year-old assassin scowled behind her mask, but she dutifully jumped out of her seat and ran towards the rear door.

"Move you little assholes!" she growled at Relentless and Cut-Throat.

Stormtide, the two boys, and Discord jumped out of *TITAN* and they joined their *Vengeance* colleagues from *HERCULES* as they all attacked the drug dealers.

The Battle Bunker

For young Polaris, it was a viewpoint which she had never seen.

She was on the sidelines, which she hated, but she was professional enough to know that she had no choice. However, she was amazed by everything which went on behind the scenes to coordinate the attacks and to keep the vigilantes safe. While Polaris, like the other operators, saw the likes of Eric, Abby, and Marty as uber-geeks and at times unworthy of being acknowledged as equals, her mindset was permanently changed as she saw with her own eyes how crucial their technical support was to ongoing operations. Her mind also drifted for a few moments and told her that if *Vengeance* had had that kind of support while they had been on the run, then so many things might have been different. She took a moment to study her bandaged left hand and she winced at the painful memories attached to those injuries. They had lost their technical support and they had paid dearly for it.

"You okay?"

Polaris looked up into the surprisingly caring eyes of Foxtail. The paths of the two *Predators* had crossed a few times in the past, but neither had spoken – the *Urban Predator* hierarchy had forbidden it at the time.

“Just some painful thoughts,” Polaris admitted.

“Tell me about it,” Foxtail grimaced.

Both girls went back to watching Hal, Battle Guy, and Ember as they each controlled a sector of the fighting.

Western and 16th Street

“Okay – this looks like fun,” Kick-Ass commented from *CRITTER*.

“It does?” Belle queried as she watched four large black SUVs pull up and each vehicle divulged four rather large men.

“I think Worm’s invitations went a little bit viral,” he added dryly.

“Can we go kick some arse?” Rigour asked.

“*Iron Hide* – let’s deploy,” Kick-Ass directed, and he ignored the cheers from behind him. “And you, Belle – you stay in car.”

“Woof!” Belle responded despondently as everybody dashed towards the fight.

Belle watched as Hit Girl skidded to a halt a few yards off. Rage jumped off the motorcycle and he dived into the fight. Hit Girl followed seconds later while Scorpion raced past as she went after a runner. Jackal and Shadow dived into the action as the sixteen recent arrivals found the tables turned on them in rather a spectacular fashion. Belle thought that Scamp looked very sweet as the little girl fought men more than twice her size, width, strength etc. Amazingly, she fought very well, wielding a short double-ended bō-staff with wicked blades at each end. She had never seen such fighting, nor so much blood as Scamp emptied the abdominal cavity of a man before stabbing him in the chest and probably chopping his heart in two. She was amazed by the teamwork as the vigilantes fought alongside one another with no distinction between the British and American vigilantes.

However, as she scanned the fighters, she saw two missing.

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A significant distance away from the action, Nemesis and Fury observed the fighting from a raised vantage point.

As they watched, they saw two men bug out of the long building and race through the darkness on foot, heading directly for them. Nemesis and Fury dismounted from their motorcycle and removed their helmets.

“You ready for this?” Nemesis asked.

“I am,” Fury replied confidently.

Fury had insisted on riding with Nemesis. Part of Abigail would always be British, and she would forever be grateful for everything which Cassie had done for her after she had been recovered by *Vengeance*. As such, she remained at Nemesis’ side as they both took cover behind an empty railroad container flat-car. The two men came closer and it was obvious that both were armed. It was also very obvious that neither one of them expected to be attacked, considering

that they were almost three-hundred yards from the intensive and bloody fighting.

"Evening, gentlemen - have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight?"

Both men started as a shape stepped out into the pale moonlight wearing a combat suit which was full body and, as far as the two men could see, no skin was visible although they could both see some ample feminine curves which were very obvious through the armour. The men took in the pistol on her right thigh, the 18-inch Tanto on the outer side of her left boot, and the 42-inch Katana Saya angled over to her right shoulder.

"Hey, honey," the first man drawled. "You might not be the best at math, but there are two of us and just one of you."

Nemesis chuckled.

"Well, in that case, say hello to my little friend."

Another shape appeared to stand beside the first. The frame was slim but was covered from head to toe in flexible body armour. She too bore a pistol on her right hip but her primary weapon was a double-ended bō-staff.

"What's with the kid?" the second man asked.

"The kid, really?" the kid demanded.

"You're a short girl," the man pointed out helpfully.

"Short!" Fury growled.

With a flurry of activity, Fury span and twirled before coming back to face the man. The man's smirk had vanished, and he found himself lying on the ballast beside the railroad tracks.

"Now, I think you're a damn sight shorter than me!" Fury pointed out. "You might want to get somebody to look at those wounds."

The man barely had time to register his own severed legs lying beside him before he passed out from the blood loss. The first man never had a chance to react to the dismemberment of his partner as he shuddered violently. He looked down to see the hilt of a Tanto extending out from his chest. Nemesis watched without emotion as the man sank to the railroad tracks beside his colleague.

Both turned at the sound of running feet coming from behind them.

..._...

During the fighting, Hit Girl glanced over towards *CRITTER* - then she looked closer and her eyes registered the empty front passenger seat.

"Where the hell is Belle!" Hit Girl exclaimed.

Kick-Ass quickly drove his fist into a man's face before looking around, his towering bulk giving him a look over the heads of most of those present. His eyes focussed on a running form a few hundred yards distant. He pointed.

"Fucking bitch!" Hit Girl growled before adding rhetorically. "What do they call it when you kill royalty?"

"That would be regicide," Scamp called out as she scampered past. "Read it somewhere. . ." she yelled over her shoulder.

Hit Girl shook her head and chuckled as she bolted for *CRITTER*.

..._...

Four men were heading up the slight incline towards the railroad tracks.

Neither vigilante flinched as they brandished their weapons and ran directly at the men. Nemesis raised her Katana while Fury had her double-ended bō-staff. The men were large and they each produced wicked-looking machetes. It was two-on-one - not very sporting, but neither girl flinched as they fought. Steel clashed on steel and the men realised that despite the two female vigilantes having limited statures, they were no pushovers. However, Nemesis was fighting three of the men while Fury was facing one. The man attacking Fury was strong, and Fury was struggling against his heavy strikes which pushed her away from Nemesis. The man was intending on using his strength to defeat the slight vigilante before him. Fury span and she used every trick she knew to get ahead of the machete-wielding arsehole.

Nemesis was keeping them at bay with her sword, but it was hard work and energy-sapping to be constantly aware of her three attackers and where they were in relation to herself. The first fell to a strike in the abdomen, spilling his guts. One of his colleagues slipped on the squishy, bloody intestines and fell to one knee. He never regained his feet as his head sailed through the air. The fight was rapidly one-on-one, but Nemesis could see that Fury was struggling against her own attacker and that she would need help - and soon. Fury was holding out and she knew that Nemesis would come to help her in due course, but then Fate intervened as Fury tripped on a steel rail and she fell down, catching herself, but not before her attacker closed and he brought his machete down towards her chest.

Fury brought her bō-staff up, but she knew that it would not be in time.

..._...

Hit Girl raced towards the railroad.

She could see a fight underway and she recognised Nemesis and Fury fighting. Then, the veteran vigilante got the shock of her life as a severed head bounced off the hood directly ahead of her and bounced off into the darkness. Then she saw a form down on one knee - shit, Belle was hurt! Then there was a double flash and the double crack as two bullets were fired off. Belle was not injured, she was taking up a stable position from which to fire off aimed shots. Hit Girl saw a man about to slice and dice Fury with his machete, but then he faltered as two bullets entered his chest cavity, tearing apart his windpipe and his heart. Blood gurgled from his mouth as he fell atop Fury. At almost the same moment, the distraction of the pistol shots had allowed Nemesis to drive her katana into the stomach of her opponent. He sank to his knees, his face grimacing with the pain. Nemesis drew her Tanto and she drove the blade deep into the man's chest. As she withdrew both blades, the man was dead before he hit the ground.

"You two okay?" Belle asked as Fury shoved the dead body off of her, so she could stand.

Nemesis nodded as did Fury.

"They're fine," Hit Girl growled. "However, *you* are not!"

Belle gulped involuntarily.

..._...

As everybody remounted the vehicles, Stripe and Ajax were dragged off and shoved into the newly arrived *BRUTE* being driven by Leon.

"What's happening?" Ajax demanded.

"We need you and lover-boy," Leon responded, somewhat cryptically. "Get changed!"

Stripe and Ajax exchanged a worried look as they were each handed a bag containing their own normal clothing.

West Grand Avenue and North Sacramento Avenue

"You want me to do *what!*?" Olivia demanded, astounded by the very suggestion of what she was being asked to do.

"It's not like you haven't been seen naked before," Craig pointed out.

"True, but that was with friends - which actually made it worse, in hindsight - and just because every member of *Vengeance* knows what I have between my legs does not mean that I want all of Chicago to know!"

Mathilda laughed at Olivia's indignation at the task she had been saddled with. Then Mathilda tapped her watch, indicating that it was time to go. Olivia groaned as she pushed open the door and stepped out into the alleyway. Without being told, she began sliding her jeans down her shapely legs, followed by her knickers.

Craig just grinned as he followed suit.

Safehouse E

The two girls were very unnerved by their situation.

Without any warning, they had been ordered to dress in warm clothing - joggers and a sweatshirt - and then they were led through the maze-like concrete structure which incarcerated them and finally, after taking various staircases, they had emerged into a large warehouse-type structure. There, they were handed off by Petra to a man that they both recognised. Though Charlotte had never met the man, Dakota had, and both knew that he was trustworthy and on their side.

"Hello, Dakota, it's good to see well," Patrick Millar grinned.

"Hello, Instructor."

"Call me Patrick, please."

"You're Shannon's Dad?" Charlotte asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Why are we here?" Dakota asked.

"We're going for a ride - mount up."

The two girls were waved into an ordinary-looking Jeep SUV with tinted windows.

West Grand Avenue and North Sacramento Avenue

Thirty minutes later, Patrick pulled over and he turned to the two confused young girls in the backseat.

"You two stay here," Patrick announced as he jumped out and ran off down the street.

"What the . . .?" Dakota asked no one in particular.

Both girls sat in their seats and they looked around, taking in their surroundings, their Predator training taking over as they monitored anything and everything. Dakota saw it first, a movement in the alleyway adjacent to them. She pointed it out to her friend.

"We were told not to leave the car, 'kota."

"Yes . . . but are we really going to let something so heinous happen before our very eyes?" Dakota responded.

"We can't, I agree . . . but . . ."

"Well, I'm going to help," Dakota said as she slipped out of the SUV.

"For fuck's sake!" Charlotte growled as she quickly followed.

..._...

The girl began screaming as she was shoved against the wall of a building.

Her jeans and underwear were around her ankles and her top had been raised to expose a bare pair of breasts. Those same breasts were being manhandled by a youth, who also had his jeans and underwear around his ankles. His dick was sticking out and it was very close to the pubic hair of the girl who fought him off with decreasing vigour. Neither saw the two girls racing down the alleyway at top speed and both were very shocked as the boy was attacked without warning. The almost naked girl could only stare in amazement as her boyfriend found himself thrown to the ground and then kicked into submission, all with his dick out and waving around. However, Craig was not going down without a fight, and he used all his strength to push both girls off him and haul up his trousers. Once he was no longer impeded by his trousers, he bolted off into the darkness.

By the time Dakota and Charlotte turned to the girl, she was struggling to cover herself by pulling down her top and trying to pull up her trousers. Charlotte knelt down, and she assisted Olivia with her trousers. Olivia was doing everything she could not to laugh, but she played her part to the best of her ability as she allowed the younger girl to help her dress. In her mind, she hoped that Craig was okay. Once she was decent, she muttered her thanks to her 'saviours' and then bolted in the same direction as Craig while the two girls returned to the Jeep and climbed back in.

A few moments later, Patrick reappeared, and he climbed back into his seat.

"Hi, girls - all okay?" he asked with a grin.

"Yeah - kind of weird," Dakota commented.

"You think?" Charlotte added.

Training Facility Echo

It had been a very successful evening, and all had returned safely to the Safehouse.

Everybody vanished to change and shower. Abigail had sought out Mary, but the Princess was not readily visible. After asking around, Olivia waved for Abigail and she pointed into the showers. A miserable-looking Mary was huddled in a corner where it was steamy with the hot water streaming down. Olivia wondered

what was wrong with her friend as she sat down to one side, with Abigail on the other.

"Hi," Olivia said. "Penny for your thoughts."

"I fucked up," Belle admitted.

"You saved my life," Abigail pointed out.

"But you broke the bloody rules, Mary!" Electra growled as she sat down to join the group. "Mindy told me what you did, and I am just as angry as she is."

Abigail scowled at the sight of Electra naked - the scars scared her.

"What happened?" Olivia asked.

"The Princess was told to remain in *Critter*, but she ran off to fight," Electra elaborated.

"That was stupid, Mary," Olivia admitted.

"What is she going to do to me?" Mary asked dejectedly.

"Well, technically, you are *Vengeance*, so Mindy will leave punishment to Cameron and Natasha, back home," Electra stated.

..._...

After a light supper of sandwiches and some hot chocolate, everybody went to bed.

That was not so easy with a couple dozen *Predators*, but they eventually calmed down after a few threats from Dave and Mindy. Keira was left to prowl the cabins and ensure that the giggling youngsters kept out of any major trouble. After half an hour, Mindy, Cassie, and Ginny slipped into the cabin where Mary, Electra, Saoirse, and Stephanie were staying.

"Mary, would you please come with us?" Ginny asked.

Mary looked thoroughly miserable as she slipped out from under her duvet and followed the three women. They walked around the server facility's concrete edifice and into the recreational area.

"Shannon, Mark - go fuck somewhere else!" Mindy barked and the two kids rapidly unravelled and vanished just as quickly. "Mary, sit down."

"What the blood hell did you think you were doing?" Ginny roared at the girl. "Did you stop to think for even one damn second?"

"Did you stop for one moment to think of the consequences of your actions, Mary, or was this just the self-centred Princess coming to the fore," Cassie continued. "You could have been hurt, or even killed! Is your memory so short, that you forgot about what happened to Harper? She was highly skilled, better than you, but she got taken. Could you have prevented yourself from being taken? WELL?"

Mary was shaking as she stammered out excuses.

"I saw those men going towards you and Abigail. I wanted to help."

"You could have called it in," Mindy said. "Maybe I would have let you go up there - but with escort. We shall never know now. You have let me down, Mary. You have let everybody down. I have discussed this with Cassie, and she will speak with Cameron and Natasha to discuss your punishment. Unless of course, you want to kick *Vengeance* into touch. . ."

"No! Never!" Mary blurted through her tears.

"Your punishment will be difficult. Your punishment will be painful. You will suffer embarrassment, but I am certain that you will pull through as a better person. You are a tough young lady and your friends will help you through this," Mindy explained.

"I am really sorry . . . I . . ."

"We all make mistakes," Ginny said calmly. "But while you had good intentions, you potentially put many people at risk. You helped save Abigail from serious injury, and I know that she is grateful for that, but that does not excuse you from what you did."

"I'm sorry and I will take my punishment."

"Go to bed, please," Ginny directed. "You can enjoy the rest of your visit here, and we will talk about this again when we get back to blighty."

..._...

Saoirse was asleep when Mary returned to meekly clamber into her bed.

Neither Stephanie nor Electra said a word, but they both exchanged dark looks, knowing that Mary had not enjoyed her time with Mindy, Cassie, and Ginny. They both knew very well the consequences of breaking the rules, and while *Fusion* and *Vengeance* tended to use more benign punishments compared to those used by *Urban Predator*, the punishments were still severe. The consequences of making mistakes, no matter how small, could spiral into something so much bigger - just as *Vengeance* had discovered to their cost . . . and Harper's.

Mary cried herself to sleep for the first time in many years.

The following morning
Sunday, November 27th

Safehouse E
Level 8 - Detention Level

They were used to Hit Girl visiting - to a point.

It still unnerved most of them to have the arch-vigilante visiting. However, she was not alone on the current visit. In a contrasting uniform, another female stood beside Hit Girl. Her uniform was a dark blue and the nametape read: NEMESIS while another nametape read: VENGEANCE. It was obvious who she was, and that fact simply unnerved the *Marauders* even more. That just got worse as Hit Girl read out some names.

"Grey, Warlow-Davies, Fincham, Campbell, Wistrum - outside, now!"

The three girls and two boys showed real fear as they got to their feet and headed out of the door, followed by Hit Girl and Nemesis. They were walked around a corner before Hit Girl motioned for them to line up against the concrete wall of the corridor.

"Sound off with your ages! Charlotte Grey!"

"Twelve, Hit Girl!"

"Dakota Warlow-Davies!"

"Fourteen, Hit Girl!"

"Kate Fincham!"

"Sixteen, Hit Girl!"

"Ewan Campbell!"

"Fourteen, Hit Girl!"

"Jake Wistrum!"

"Twelve, Hit Girl, ma'am!"

Hit Girl could not resist a chuckle at the twelve-year-old boy's exuberance.

"You are all British, right?" Nemesis asked.

There were nods from each of the youngsters.

"You have all indicated a desire to return to the UK, yes?" she continued

The nods were repeated.

"I have been sharing your behaviour with Nemesis," Hit Girl explained. "I will be keeping her informed of your behaviour. Nemesis takes the security of the United Kingdom very seriously. If you are deemed a threat to her homeland, then she will deny you access and you will remain here, in America. If you should be allowed access to the U.K., and you are then deemed a threat, Nemesis will not think twice about slitting your throats. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, ma'am!" came five voices.

"Keep your noses clean and I promise that I will find each one of you a home in the U.K.," Nemesis advised the youngsters. "But I will not hesitate to take all necessary steps to protect my country from little bastards like the five of you - mark my words, I am not fucking about. I will put myself out for five children who have had a rough time, but I will *not* put myself out if you just want to cause trouble back in blighty. Do you each understand?"

"Yes, ma'am!" came the responses.

"Thank you - off you go," Hit Girl directed, and she watched as each of them returned to their accommodation. "So?"

"Jake is a little shit!" Nemesis chuckled "But I like him - he's very much a male Glide."

"You think you can rehome them?" Hit Girl asked.

"Definitely - I can see three of them fitting in perfectly."

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Abigail saw the false leg over breakfast that morning and she looked very closely at the boy's face.

"Shit!" she breathed.

"Problem?" Stephanie asked.

"My past just caught up with me."

"Story of my life!" Stephanie muttered.

"You remember the forest?"

"Hard not to," Electra admitted, and Stephanie grimaced.

"That boy - Viridian - I caused him to lose his leg. You think he knows that I am the one who did it to him?"

Abigail looked wretched. Stephanie went over to Jordan and she whispered in his ear. The boy nodded, and he followed Stephanie back over to the table. He immediately saw Abigail's expression, but he said nothing as Abigail's cheeks were covered with tears.

"I'm sorry, Jordan."

"I wondered if you recognised me," Jordan replied. "I promised to kill the girl who made me lose my leg - only you are not that girl anymore."

"What?" Abigail asked.

"You are not that cold bitch who would do anything to win. Since I've been with *Vengeance*, I've learnt a few things about what happened in the past. We had no choice, but now we do, and you are a very different girl. Also, if you could sit at the same table as the magnificent Psyche without killing her. . ."

"We've had the odd set-to since," Stephanie commented.

"But they kissed and made up," Jamie commented as he came over to sit down.

"They did?" Jordan replied.

"They were butt naked when they kissed, too!" Jamie grinned.

"Not the best thought out plan, but we are the best of friends," Abigail conceded.

Jordan held out his hand and Abigail took it.

"Friends?" he asked.

"Friends!" Abigail replied with a grin as she shook his hand.

Safehouse E

Level 8 - Detention Level

For the two girls, it was business as usual.

No one had explained the previous evening. Instructor Millar had simply bought them a McDonalds before returning them back to their accommodation. Neither girl had spoken about what had happened, worried about their fate should anybody find out that they had disobeyed orders. Dakota figured that it might have all been some sort of test, but it wasn't as if you could just summon up a rape . . . could you? Hit Girl had not said a word during their meeting with the *Vengeance* vigilante, earlier that morning. They both so desperately wanted to leave their dungeon and they both wanted to earn their freedom and hopefully return to their homeland. Both regretted their hasty decisions which had led them to fight for FEAR, and now they hoped that their decision to help that girl would not backfire on them.

Only time would tell.

Safehouse F

The goodbyes were never easy.

It was very rare for a *Predator* to cry and they usually sucked it up very quickly when they did. However, goodbyes were something everybody hated, no matter what you were inside. There were hugs. There were tears. There were giggles and laughter. There were soft, cuddly words exchanged which would normally never pass a *Predator's* lips, but their friendships were something very special and something to be treasured. They all knew that one day, a goodbye may be the last time that they saw one another - their lives were that dangerous. Even lifelong sworn enemies hugged. Electra was mobbed by Stephanie and Abigail who almost fought over their little friend. Even Cassie had tears running down her cheeks as she hugged Mindy goodbye.

"I'll be in touch," Mindy said to her friend from across the pond.

"You do that. Take care and look after your family," Cassie replied.

"You look after yours," Mindy said as she eyed Kaitlin and Naomi who were talking with Anne-Marie and Rebecca.

"Harper's healing well," Jennifer commented to Keira. "By Easter she'll be back to normal, I'm certain of it."

"I know. This trip has been like a breath of fresh air for her. She's seen all her friends, and she's got to wear her uniform again," Keira replied as she watched her little sister like a hawk.

Harper was talking with Saoirse and Rachel.

"Thanks to both of you for helping me and teaching me a bit about command - it was an eye-opener, and it was fun."

"You're welcome, Harper," Saoirse replied. "You heal up, and fast, okay?"

"I promise to behave."

"Like a *Predator's* promise is worth shit!" Olivia grinned.

For the non-*Predators*, the trip had been amazing, and they had been amazed at what operated beneath the streets of America's windy city. For one, in particular, while she was going back home to face an uncertain punishment, she was going home with a real combat suit, not her half-arsed concoction - it kind of made the punishment worth it. For young Jordan Hanley, seeing so many of his kin alive had given him a different outlook on life, even to the extent of forgiving the girl who had caused him to lose his leg.

"Okay, mount up, Vengeance!" Cassie called out. "Queen and County awaits!"