

Author's Note: *This will be my Thirtieth (published) story. The story exists within my Kick-Ass Forsaken Universe and it will use characters and events from that story. Chronologically, Fusion: Los Angeles fits in after Chapter 350: Heroes of Forsaken and will follow on from events in that story. As usual, I look forward, with some trepidation, to any reviews. I promise to accept all criticism. In addition, I am still British, so my spelling and grammar may look and appear strange to some. Also, before anybody asks, there will be no 'Fusion: New Orleans'!*

A sneak-preview of the story is available in **Chapter 331: Advance Preview of Fusion Los Angeles.**

Synopsis: *Sky and Christina Abbott are sixteen-year-old twins. Their parents are dead and the two girls were the survivors of a heinous CIA program destroyed by Fusion towards the beginning of the year. After many weeks of recuperation from serious injuries inflicted at the hands of Shadow, the two girls, codenamed Bane and Venom, were then offered a new life by Hit Girl. Despite them not holding the repentant Shadow to blame for their injuries, both girls decided that they needed a completely fresh start away from the City of Chicago.*

Hit Girl jumped at the idea to broaden the scope of her organisation and thus, a new branch of Fusion was born. While Vengeance, in the UK was based on Fusion, the British organisation went its own way as far as support and operating methods were concerned. The Los Angeles 'branch' of Fusion would remain true to its mother organisation.

One member of Fusion would be going along with the girls to act as their mentor and to lead the new offshoot of Fusion. That member suffered an horrific loss in Chicago, therefore, Los Angeles was intended to be an important way for her to come to terms with that loss.

Monday, October 24th, 2016

Appian Way and Vicente Terrace

LOS ANGELES

"Fucking faggot! I hurt my damn hand on his pussy jaw."

"He should have handed over his shit - his fault, man."

"Please . . . take it, just let me go . . ."

The two male thugs standing in the semi-darkened alleyway wore hooded tops over t-shirts. Yellow for the taller one, and grey for the other man. Each also wore baggy black jeans and heavy boots. The shorter thug held a pistol, vertically, against the head of a sobbing man on his knees before them. The other thug held his pistol at his side.

"Fucking, whining, bitch . . . did you hear something?"

"Nah - just the sea, man."

Neither man saw the two slim shapes as they slid silently down the fire escape behind them. Neither man had any idea of their rapidly descending fate. Neither did either man know how famous they were about to become.

"Tell me, Bane. What about this scene troubles you?"

The voice was like nothing on earth. An electronic mish-mash of sound, it was neither male nor female. One thing was certain, though, it scared the two thugs to the core. Both men spun around to see an inverted shape on the fire escape, a mere foot from their faces.

"I see scum, Venom. Scum that preys on the innocent. Scum that needs to be taught a lesson."

The thugs spun again, and they came face to face with a black apparition that emerged from shadows created by the eerie flickering of a faulty street light. The thugs both turned in unison to run but a very similar apparition landed before them. The apparition was clad in grey armour and the thugs immediately dropped their pistols.

"Pity!" came an electronic growl.

Ten minutes later

"They hit us, man."

"Those bitches were wild, man."

"Can you describe your 'attackers'," the uniformed LAPD cop inquired without much enthusiasm.

A few yards away the almost mugged man was being tended to by a paramedic. Both thugs were in cuffs and spilling out some crazy story about two armour-clad women who kicked their asses. Officer Hanson turned as the sound of powerful motorcycle engines starting up was heard from beyond the parked ambulance.

"They was called Bane and Venom . . ."

With a beautiful roar, a pair of motorcycles, one black and the other grey, shot out of an alleyway and powered off down Ocean Avenue, shifting gears rapidly. Officer Hanson never even bothered to reach for his radio; he just grinned.

"This sucks!" both thugs moaned as a third, motorcycle - all black - moved off without anybody noticing.

Kick-Ass Comics

Sunset Boulevard

The three teenage boys sat in a booth, reading the latest 'Kick-Ass' comic.

For them, it was the closest that they had ever gotten to real vigilantes. Okay, the comics were pure fiction, however, they were based on real people. For the most part, the comics portrayed Kick-Ass and Hit Girl in their former selves as first seen on TV fighting the men who worked for the mob-boss, Frank D'Amico. The wetsuit was gone, however, replaced by proper body armour. Hit Girl also retained her kilt, and purple hair just as she had been seen on TV, so long ago, however, later issues had moved onto her later costume which gave her a more adult look. The full, 'Fusion', costume appeared from time to time, as did the other characters. A firm favourite was Shadow, with Wildcat not far behind. Recent editions also featured some of the newer members, including the violent and foul-mouthed, Psyche.

"How come nobody's ever tried to be a vigilante . . . you know, in L.A.?"

"Gee, I dunno. Oh, wait, yeah, I do. 'Cos it's fucking suicidal, dickwad!"

"How come? It works in Chicago."

"That's Chicago - L.A. is way more dangerous!"

"My point, exactly; we need vigilantes."

"Nobody, in their right mind would be a vigilante in Los Angeles, period."

There was a commotion near the door and the three teenagers got up to see what was going on. A kid, around twelve-years-old, looked very excited about something.

"Hey! There's a pair of vigilantes out there, kicking the shit out of a bunch of guys; it's fucking awesome!"

The kid was right - two armour-clad, masked individuals were beating the crap out of seven men, all large and not the sort you take on at a ratio of over three to one. That being said, there was already one unconscious body, and another soon made that two. The vigilantes were obviously female which just made it so much hotter for the males watching as it was very obvious that the females were winning against the men in what was quickly turning into a very uneven brawl.

The vigilantes were clad in armoured suits, grey for one and black for the other. It was also possible to see that both were grinning as they fought the men, putting them down one by one. To those watching, it was an epic fight, one which they had only ever seen on TV, originating from Chicago. Seeing it live, was a dream come true - even if they were *not* watching the famous Hit Girl. Minutes later, it was all over.

"That fucking rocked - *who are you?*"

The two vigilantes looked up at the kid as they pulled on their helmets. The one in black growled in an electronically distorted voice.

"I'm Bane and she's Venom."

With that, they both started their engines and the awesome motorcycles accelerated up the street with the most delicious sound.

Two days earlier

Saturday, October 22nd

Los Angeles International Airport

The two sixteen-year-old girls stepped off the executive jet and they quickly donned dark sunglasses to cover their eyes from the glare of the sun.

"I could get used to this," Sky commented to her twin sister as they both set foot on the tarmac.

Both girls were tall for their age and they wore knee-length skirts and short-sleeved tops that exposed their midriffs. They turned as another girl followed them down the steps of the aircraft.

"I have to agree with you, Sky," Mindy commented with a smile aimed at Erika and Chloe who were standing waiting on the tarmac.

"Yeah - this *is* gorgeous," Chloe agreed.

OAK PASS ROAD

Beverley Hills, 90210

The twenty-mile drive up the 405 took a little under an hour, thanks to traffic.

After quite a climb into the hills, the SUV finally turned right onto Oak Pass Road and after a very short climb and a sharp left turn, the SUV stopped at a pair of gates. Mindy leaned out and punched in an eight-digit code. The gates slowly swung open and the SUV accelerated through. Sky looked behind and she noticed the gates closing automatically behind them. One hundred yards later, the SUV stopped again and Mindy cut the engine. Everybody dismounted and all, but Mindy, gazed up at the property as Erika appeared from inside the house.

"Awesome!" Sky, Chrissy, and Chloe announced together as they looked around them.

The view was amazing in every direction.

"Six bedrooms - four in the main house. Erika has the Master Suite on the second level. You two girls: you get to have a suite each on the main level. Every door is armoured, as is each and every pane of glass. The grass outback can handle a helicopter as required and . . ."

"What is that?" Sky interrupted as she pointed at the base of a tree beside the house. "Was that a Claymore mine?"

"Moving on," Mindy said firmly and Sky was manoeuvred into the house.

"Oh, wow!" Chrissy announced as she entered the capacious kitchen with marble-topped units.

The house was beautifully cool inside thanks to the central air-conditioning. Sky squealed at the sight of the swimming pool and the hot tub outback.

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While everybody enjoyed some ice-cold Cokes from the fridge, Mindy continued with her introductory talk.

"We've got you set up with everything a pair of teenage girls in California might need," she said. "You each have the cars you chose, in the garage . . ."

Mindy was almost knocked flat as the two excited teens headed for the aforementioned garage. But Sky ground to a halt very quickly.

"Err, Mindy - how do we get to the garage?"

Mindy laughed as she pointed out the directions across the property. Everybody followed but were barely halfway to the garage when high-pitched screams were heard. Mindy looked over at Chloe who smiled hugely. The two girls had had nothing for years and Mindy was very glad to have been able to try and make things better for them - best thirty-five million she had ever spent, she thought.

The girls were worth it - she hoped.

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The two cars were all but identical.

Only the body colour distinguished them both. Tangerine Scream for Sky and Race Red for Chrissy. The Ford Focus ST hatchbacks were fitted with 2-litre turbo-charged engines, 6-speed manual gearboxes, and 18-inch alloy wheels. There were also one or two undocumented extras fitted to the cars, but Mindy decided that she would cover those once the two over-excited teens had calmed themselves down.

For the moment, she was just pleased that the two girls were happy.

The next morning
Sunday, October 23rd

OAK PASS ROAD

"This is the life."

Sky was all but naked, as she lay on a towel in their new back yard. Her bikini only barely covered the key essentials. Chrissy was a little more conservative with her own bikini, but not by much.

"Yeah - Chicago was fucking freezing and I need a tan to cover this deathly pallor," Chrissy replied.

"You just want to flaunt your bodies for the boys," the skimpily-clad Erika commented as she lay down on her own towel.

"Wondered when you might join us," Sky responded.

"Has Mindy gone to see Chloe?" Chrissy asked.

"Yes, she has," Erika replied.

PACIFIC PREDATOR

The mood aboard the luxury yacht was a sombre one.

Ryan Bennett had lost somebody very important to him and he had hoped that taking his immediate family away for a break would give time for healing. It had only been a few days, but the healing process was not yet begun. Chloe was being consoled by Joshua - but his calming voice was not having much of an effect. As for little Becky, she was struggling; her life had just been uprooted and turned upside down for a second time in as many months. Becky had spent many hours cuddled up with Ryan, not speaking, just wanting somebody to be close to.

Mindy came aboard mid-morning and she was very putout by the mood, so she decided to take steps.

"Right!" she growled. "Chloe - get your bikini on, now. Becky - swimsuit. Ryan, Josh - both of you, get changed."

"I'm not going anywhere, Mindy," Chloe said from her place on the couch in the main salon.

Becky sat up as Ryan turned towards Mindy.

"I know what you're trying to do, Mindy. Okay - Becky, go get changed. Chloe, Joshua - that applies to you, too."

"Daddy. . ."

"No, Chloe, you will do what you are told!"

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An hour later, the family, plus Mindy, were lying on Santa Monica Beach.

"Becky, you up for a swim?" Mindy asked.

"I suppose. . ."

Mindy took Becky's hand and they both headed for the surf.

"Chloe's not taking this well, is she?" Mindy stated.

"She told me that she was closer to her Mum than her Dad."

"Yeah - Chloe and her Dad didn't get on well, at least until she was thirteen, then he found out about what she did at night. That kind of brought them together for the first time in many years."

"I didn't know," Becky replied as she allowed the warm water to splash over her bare feet and up against her bare legs.

"Chloe is very special to me, as is Joshua. Cathy was like a mother to me and while I struggle to process emotions - Cathy's loss has hit me, too."

"I know," Becky replied. "Cathy told me that you were like a daughter to her. She loved you very much and she said . . . she said that, without you, Chloe might have been killed, years ago."

"Chloe can be a little impulsive," Mindy replied.

Mindy felt more than a little uncomfortable with the discussion, but it had to be done. Then Mindy's own bare foot nudged up against something part-buried in the sand. Mindy reached down, and she pulled something out of the sand and she grinned. She passed the item to Becky who frowned. Mindy tipped her head back towards Chloe and Joshua.

Becky grinned.

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Chloe had followed 'orders' and she was lying on a towel, in her bikini, *not* enjoying the sun, sea, and sand.

Beside Chloe, Joshua was gazing up into the clear blue sky, emotions clouding his mind as he struggled to cope with losing a woman who was the closest thing to a mother that Joshua had known in many years. He missed. . .

There was an almighty scream from Chloe and Joshua sat bolt upright to see Chloe also sitting up with water running down her body. Her face was one of anger and she glared up at the grinning Becky who held an empty plastic bucket. Joshua couldn't help it, he grinned too, ignoring Chloe's fiery temper which was building. Ryan, sitting on the other side of Chloe was chuckling.

"If either of you laugh. . ." Chloe growled.

Joshua burst out laughing at Chloe's hurt expression. He was closely followed by Ryan whose chuckle had quickly changed to laughter. It was the first time that either of them had laughed in days. Chloe raised a finger and she pointed it at Becky.

"Peanut. . . I . . . I am going to get you!"

Becky screamed, and she dropped the bucket, running for the perceived safety of the sea and Mindy. Chloe ran after her wayward daughter, her face changing into a reluctant smile - her first in days.

"That's it - I'm getting Mindy; bet it was her idea to disturb my moping," Joshua growled. "Coming, old man?"

Ryan just laughed as he jumped up and ran after Joshua and his daughter who were in hot pursuit of Mindy and Becky respectively. It was not long before all five were laughing and giggling as Joshua caught Mindy and tickled her before Mindy fought back. Chloe easily caught Becky, but the little girl wriggled so much that Chloe lost her grip on the wet youngster and the chase began again.

Needless to say, they all returned to the yacht for a late lunch feeling much happier than when they had left a few short hours before. The conversation was animated and cheerful as they ate Ryan's steaks and corn.

The following morning

Monday, October 24th

SAFEHOUSE A

The property was commercial but had been empty for a few months.

Sky and Chrissy did not seem all that impressed by what they saw and they scathingly said as much. Mindy just laughed as she let them in the backdoor.

"That is kinda the point of a Safehouse. This is Safehouse A and it is intended as a combined storage and emergency bolthole. The primary Safehouse is not yet completed but should be in another couple of weeks - I hope."

"It's a new cutting-edge, modular Safehouse and it's taking some integration, I gather," Chloe attempted to explain.

"Uh huh," Chrissy commented and she mirrored her twin's confused expression.

The interior of the Safehouse looked as much of a dump as the outside. Mindy strolled casually over to a rusty old door and she punched a code into a very dirty-looking number-pad. The door clicked and the two girls gasped as Chloe pulled it open. The interior of the space beyond was pristine and could not have been cleaner. To the right, were weapons of every kind. To the left, in racks, were boxes of loose rounds and other ammunition. Straight ahead were the combat suits.

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Mist's was subtly different to that which she had worn in Chicago.

As was normal, Mist's suit had evolved with her, just as her fighting skill and methodology had evolved. There was a newer, lighter-weight undersuit which combined ultra-flexible armour with a breathable membrane. The same mix of light blue, azure blue, and slate grey was present, as before. The composite armour panels which made up the top layer of the combat suit were lighter but they provided the same Type IIIA level of protection as before via flexible panels.

The upper armour was azure blue with a slate grey trim. The lower armour was the same, however, the armour on the lower-left leg bore a one-inch, deep red horizontal stripe. Her dark blue utility belt held the usual array of spare magazines and other equipment which included a pair of Walther P99C pistols in cross-draw holsters that were chambered for nine-millimetre Parabellum and each pistol was fitted with twelve-round extended-capacity magazines.

Mist also carried a pair of black steel Sais, one on each thigh. Each Sai was a little over nineteen inches in length, thirteen inches of which was a sharp pointed blade. The leather wrapped handles were octagonal in shape. Mounted on the right side of her utility belt was a pouch that held a four-foot long, seven-section chain whip with switchable tips, much like the trick arrows employed by certain others in *Fusion*.

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As for the girls, their suits matched in design only. Each suit was of a skin-tight design and was made up of an ultra-flexible and ultra-light composite armour which covered every inch of the body from the ankles to the neck. Lightweight, high-strength, stab-resistant boots matched the suit colour. For the hands, armoured gloves extended up past the wrist. A mask covered their entire head and eyes down to the bridge of their nose leaving only the lower half of their faces exposed. Around the waist, a utility belt supported a holster on the right hip for an FN Five-sevenN Mk2 pistol.

A pouch on the left hip supported the unique weapon for Bane. That pouch held a four-foot long, seven-section chain whip with switchable tips, just like that used by Mist. Instead of the pouch, Venom bore a scabbard for three, six-inch titanium throwing knives.

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The two girls examined each other and both agreed that the suits were 'totally awesome'.

"They're the best available, girls - treat them well, and they may very well save your lives," Mindy commented. "The weapons are virgin, as you would expect."

"Get acquainted with your new suits and weaponry," Mist chuckled as she watched the two girls checking each other out.

"The four-wheel vehicles are still on their way - but we *do* have the two-wheeled variety . . ." Mindy went on as she made a show of cutting the restraining straps on an enormous shipping crate.

The four sides crashed to the ground leaving just the four uprights and the top in place. Four fabulous machines were revealed. Two were of the same type, but with differing colour schemes. The twins positively leapt at the Aprilia RSV4 RR motorcycles. Bane's machine matched her combat suit and was Ascari Black. For Venom, her machine was Bucine Grey. Each motorcycle was customised for its rider including a helmet filled with electronics that matched the wearer's combat suits.

Mist headed for her own mount. The Ducati SuperSport S, in a striking red, oozed power and sophistication. A new helmet added to the technological aspects of the powerful machine. Chloe grinned as Mindy almost tiptoed over to the remaining machine. It was the epitome of Hit Girl. The machine was a highly-polished jet black from end to end. The only marking on the perfect machine was a matt 'HG' on either side of the motorcycle just behind the headlights.

The Ducati 1299 Panigale S Anniversario, of which only 500 were built, was simply sex on two-wheels. Somehow, Mindy had acquired one of the first few off the production line. Hers was inscribed on the frame: '1299 PANIGALE S ANNIVERSARIO No 004/500'.

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"While I will be out on the streets, with you, I will *not* intervene unless required to do so. You girls are on your own. I will watch your backs for the first couple of times out until you fully have your bearings and we make sure that all your kit works. Shadow and Mist will remain here at the Safehouse to monitor things along with Hal back home in Chicago."

Mindy was not dressed as Hit Girl, *per se*, instead she wore figure-hugging black motorcycle leathers from head to toe. Even her helmet was black. However, you could not keep Mindy and Hit Girl apart, therefore there were subtle purple highlights in the suit which also carried slimline armour and hidden weapons.

"Okay, you bitches, let's see what you can do now!" Hit Girl growled as she accelerated out of the Safehouse.

ABC7 Eyewitness News

Los Angeles appears to have gained its own true vigilantes. Two armour-clad females were spotted on the streets of Santa Monica, late last night. Eagle-eyed vigilante spotters noticed that the women were equipped in a very similar and professional manner to those vigilantes

known to exist in the City of Chicago. A select few observers obtained a much closer look at the two vigilantes. Those observers identified the symbol which was visible on the left chest of each woman. The symbol was identical to that worn by those very same Chicago vigilantes that make up the organisation known as Fusion. Fusion, of course, is the organisation whose leaders are the viciously violent, purple vigilante known as Hit Girl and her partner, Kick-Ass.

The next morning
Tuesday, October 25th

Office of the CEO
The Tomahawk Group

CENTRAL LOS ANGELES

"What the fuck is this?" The tall bald man was more than a little perturbed as he glared at the TV report. "Who the fuck do they think they are, coming into my fucking city and causing fucking trouble? Rosa!"

"Yes, sir!" the tall woman, in her mid-thirties, called out as she entered the room.

"I want them dealt with before they can get settled into L.A. - I will not have any of that vigilante bullshit here in my city! The fucking arrogance of those bastards!"

"We'll get right out there, sir," Rosa Müller advised her boss.

"Kill them and I want their dead bodies so that I can display them as a warning to any other fucking wannabe vigilantes. Do not fuck up like that dead bastard, D'Amico!"

"No, sir!"

OAK PASS ROAD

"You seem to have made an impact," Mindy commented as she sat eating breakfast with the Erika and the twins.

"It was very enjoyable," Chrissy commented. "The motorbikes were awesome, Mindy, thanks."

"I'm glad you like them."

"I felt really safe in the combat suit," Sky said. "Don't worry, I won't get complacent . . . but it feels good to know we have protection."

"I always carry protection," Chrissy stated.

"Not that kind, you sex-crazed hussy!" Sky retorted.

"Okay, while you two make out - I've got some things to do," Erika commented with a grin.

The twins giggled as they continued eating their cereal.

That evening

South San Pedro Street

Between East 9th Street
and East 11th Street

The two vigilantes cruised side by side down the road, heading south.

Strangely, despite their attire, they did not attract all that much attention. Maybe it was due to Los Angeles generally being full of strange sights or maybe it was just that people ignored what was going on around them. It was dark, but the evening was pleasant and as far as the twins were concerned, perfect riding conditions. They both missed riding free on two wheels - both had excelled during basic training when they were eleven. At East 9th Place, Bane's keen eyes caught something, and she quickly slammed on the brakes with a curt warning to her partner, Venom.

They both turned down the street, side by side, stopping almost immediately. There, over to the left, at the kerb a drug deal was going down. Bane quickly accelerated past the two cars, stopping a few yards behind them. She parked her motorcycle and climbed off, removing her helmet. A dozen yards behind Bane, her partner was doing the same. The drug dealers had paused in their activities, unsure of what was happening around them. The two cars, a Ford and a Chevrolet, were parked at the kerb and four men stood around the hood of the Ford where several items were visible.

The moment the two vigilantes each pulled a double-ended bō-staff from their respective motorcycles and began their advance, the drug dealers instantly produced pistols while two produced vicious machetes. Bane and Venom were not fazed by the belated show of force. Instead, they strode directly at the dealers, fearless, and determined. That alone gave the dealers pause for thought - nobody stood against them . . . unless they had a death wish.

"You know who we work for, bitches?" the obvious leader tried - his usual tactic to make do-gooders back off.

"Should we care?" Venom growled back.

"Yeah, man - he'll slaughter you."

"Bring it on. . ."

SAFEHOUSE A

"What are the L.A. Bitches up to now?"

Chloe turned to look at Joshua.

"They've engaged four druggies and they seem to be enjoying themselves."

"Where is our purple queen?"

"She would be two blocks west of the girls - Mist is two blocks to the south," Chloe replied.

"Any signs of trouble coming towards Bane and Venom."

"Not yet - their presence in L.A. is still spreading and people are trying to figure them out. The news has linked the girls to *Fusion*, only for now, that is still speculation. As far as the criminal fraternity in L.A. is concerned, they could be vigilante wannabes and therefore dead by Christmas," Chloe explained.

"Nice thoughts, honey - thanks for that."

East 9th Street

Mindy watched the fight, catching each and every move that the two girls used to take down the four drug dealers.

She was impressed with the girls' maturity and skill when operating alone. There had been moments in the past when Mindy had had second thoughts about allowing the 'twins from hell' to front a *Fusion* expansion. A whole city, if not the world, would see the vigilantes cropping up in a new city and once it became widely known that they were linked with *Fusion*, then the girls would have to keep to the high standards already set out in Chicago. Mindy trusted the girls and she had had lengthy chats with them, both casual and more structured. Mindy had delved into their inner workings and learnt what made them tick. Both had excelled during their *Urban Predator* training, supporting each other through their darkest times.

The girls were fanatical over most things they did, however, since being rescued, both had relaxed their fanatical regime in favour of a peaceful life doing exactly what they wanted, when they wanted. Mindy could see the appeal of life spent sunbathing, but it just wasn't her - Mindy needed activity; she hated to be sitting still for even a moment - something which Marcus had always complained about and something which Dave thought was 'cute'. Whilst Mindy liked to be seen as cute, at least as far as her husband was concerned, she preferred it to be kept under wraps in general as she had an image to uphold.

Mindy grinned to herself as the two girls cleaned off their blades and remounted their motorcycles before speeding off.

SAFEHOUSE A

By the time Mindy returned to the Safehouse, Chrissy and Sky were showering.

"I think they did well," Mindy mused.

"They did really well," Joshua commented.

"I can work with them," Erika confirmed. "A bit more work required, but they'll work out fine, Mindy."

"I agree," Chloe added. "We need to get back to the boat - I dread to think what Daddy and Becky are getting up to."

The next morning

Wednesday, October 26th

Office of the CEO

The Tomahawk Group

CENTRAL LOS ANGELES

"Rosa?"

"Sir?"

"Why are they still alive? They took out Rodriguez, last night."

"They won't last the week, sir."

"I do hope not."

That night

***Southbound on Griffith Street
approaching the Santa Monica Freeway***

For Mindy, as she cruised down the street on her Ducati 1299 Panigale S Anniversario, something felt off.

Many years of vigilante action had taught her to respect her sixth-sense which had more than once kept her alive against all the odds. Venom and Bane were a hundred yards ahead of her with Mist cruising a block over. Their movements were being monitored from Safehouse A by Chloe with the assistance of Abby, all the way back in Chicago, deep under the city in the Battle Bunker.

"We have a drug deal going down," Abby reported. "Parking lot, under the Santa Monica Freeway - off East 16th Street."

"Copy that," Venom announced as she slowed to take the turn as indicated by the electronic map projected onto the inside of her helmet's visor.

Both girls took the turn with Mist closing on Paloma street. After pulling over beside the curb, Venom and Bane moved across the street and they peered under the freeway. There, they saw activity conducive to a drug deal.

"You two ready?" Mist asked as she came up beside Bane.

Venom brought her bō-staff around and she waved her leader forward. Mist just shook her head as she unsheathed her Sais.

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Mindy watched the image on her own visor.

It was a combination of CCTV cameras which Abby had used to identify the drug deal in the first place. Mindy could make out about six or seven men, three of whom were obviously there to protect the deal - they were physically large and covertly armed. From the angle of the camera, Mindy could make out Mist moving in from the left flank while Bane took the right flank. That left Venom to move around behind the men. It was a good attack, Mindy thought, but then, just before the image in her visor vanished, she was certain that she had seen something.

"Where's the damn image?" Mindy growled.

There was no response.

"Hal - where the fuck, are you?"

There was still no response.

"It looks like we've lost the link back to Chicago," Chloe cut in. "I'm trying to reroute the signal . . . shit; I don't know what to do!"

Then there was a crackling sound followed by Hal's voice.

"We've had a breakdown in the communications - somewhere in the Midwest," Hal explained. "I'm rerouting the packets via a different switching centre, but I can't get the video back up and Shadow's not geeky enough to do it from that end."

"Sorry. . ." Shadow muttered.

"I'll move in closer to keep an eye on them," Mindy said as she started her engine.

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By the time Mindy arrived beneath the freeway, she found that things were unfolding very quickly.

Venom and Bane were fighting two large goons while Mist was fighting the dealers - only they did not seem to be typical dealers. Then Mindy caught sight of something in the shadows, beyond Mist - it was just what she had seen before the video image had cut out.

"It's a trap!" Mindy yelled into the communications channel. "Fighters in the shadows!"

Venom and Bane reacted instantly, covering each other as they broke off from the fighting and moved back a short distance to reassess the situation. Mist followed suit, closing on her team. Mindy moved forward to provide tactical support but after two steps she spun around to find herself facing two men armed with baseball bats. Despite the motorcycle helmet on her head, she made very short work of both men, leaving them both unconscious on the sidewalk. By the time she had turned her attention back to the fight, the trap had been sprung and the three vigilantes were fighting almost a dozen men. Mindy desperately wanted to intervene, to assist her friends, but it was essential that Mist, along with Venom and Bane, could handle anything which was thrown at them.

Once Mindy and Chloe had returned to Chicago, they would be on their own with support an entire continent away. They had to be able to command respect within the city, just as *Fusion* commanded in Chicago. With respect, the criminal fraternity would bend to the new team's will and the rule of law would quickly spread across the city.

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"Who the fuck were they?" Bane demanded.

"That, would be Dieter flexing his muscles," Mist replied.

"Who?" Venom queried.

"Fucking hell!" Mist growled.

"What?" Bane asked defensively.

"Hit Girl. Did she, or did she not, give each of you a folder of research two weeks ago?"

"You mean that big six-inch thing?" Bane commented.

"That would be it."

"It was a little heavy, so we thought we'd look at it once we arrived," Venom explained. "We just haven't got around to it yet. . ."

"Oh, God - please save me from incompetent amateurs! Fucking idiots!" Mist swore.

"We are *not* amateurs, Mist!" Bane pointed out angrily.

"When we get back, we *will* talk," Mist finished.

Forty minutes later

SAFEHOUSE A

The twins were simmering with rage as they showered, and they pointedly ignored Erika even though she was showering just a few feet away from them both.

"When you two decide to grow up, let me know," Erika growled as she glared at the two girls before turning, grabbing a towel, and leaving the showers.

"Dammit!" Sky muttered to herself.

"I think we blew it, sis," Chrissy admitted.

"Yeah - we should have read the file cover to cover - we damn-well know better; we just slacked off. We owe Erika an apology; we could have gotten her killed."

"You've both got that fucking right!" Chloe growled as she stared at the two naked girls in the shower. "Move it - debrief in two minutes, butt naked or otherwise!"

..._...

The two sixteen-year-old girls felt very stupid as they joined Erika, Mindy, and Chloe in the briefing room.

"Before we start," Sky announced. "Erika - we are very sorry for letting you down and we promise never to do it again."

"We got caught up in the sun, the sea, and the sand," Chrissy chipped in. "We promise to grow up . . . Mindy, Chloe: we're sorry."

"Thank you," Erika said. "You've proven to me that you can be mature. You're both young but I know what your skills are. There was no real harm done, so let's just take this as a warning, okay?"

Both girls nodded.

"This is Erika's team, so I won't be involved in any discipline," Mindy stated. "You both fought well, and I am happy for you to continue as *Fusion* vigilantes."

"I have to agree with Mindy and Erika - you've got my vote," Chloe grinned. "Now, let's go through tonight's actions."