

January 1st, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

The New Year, 2014, had *not* gone well for me.

I was soon about to find out *why* they left us alone.

The instructors called it 'character building' – I just called it barbaric.

However, the *Predators* called it 'Fight Club'. I had never heard the phrase 'fight club' before but I did not like the sound of it. One of the other boys explained it to me: "Four kids go into the 'ring' and they fight it out. The instructors like to see a little blood – they watch over the CCTV but don't intervene."

"What are the limits?"

"None – except one of the elder kids will usually stop any fights that turn ugly. Some of the Phase 2 kids come along to watch the blood and act as referees."

"The winner?"

"They get rewarded with special treatment for one week. Better food, no beatings . . . They also get a lot of respect from the other *Predators*."

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"Are you fucking nuts?"

Rachel was one of the Phase 2 referees and I had confided in her my intention to participate.

"Isn't everybody, in this place, nuts?" I retorted.

Rachel laughed at that.

"Maybe so – you'll get badly hurt, Jamie."

"Is that compassion, I hear?"

"Fuck damn it!" Rachel growled. "I lost my little brother and you . . . you kind of remind me of him. I don't want to see you hurt."

"Nothing to do with the fact that I'm your meal ticket to an easy life?"

"Figured that out have you? No, I genuinely care about you; but you tell anybody that and I'll take you down you little fuck."

I grinned foolishly and I went to sign up, just as foolishly.

The Present

Thursday, June 9th, 2016

Whitby

I went for a wander, once I had sorted out my kit.

The feeling of the warm sand between my toes was just what I needed after the concrete of the past few weeks. I took off my t-shirt and absorbed the sun's hot rays on my pale skin. Too much time underground had taken its toll and I desperately needed the sun's healing rays to bring me back to good health. The sea was cool as I paddled in the surf. For the first time in quite a while, I felt safe. I felt my nerves settling down. I could go from being constant alert to something approaching restfulness.

A gentle breeze blew across the beach from the east and I felt so relaxed. I walked up to Battery Parade and bought an enormous fish and chips with scampi on the side. I went back to sit on the sand while I stuffed my face and I had to admit that I felt well and truly stuffed by the time I had finished. I was the happiest I had been in . . . to be honest I had no idea when I had last been happy.

After disposing of my rubbish, I found myself dozing off.

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We all mustered in the common area between the two dormitories.

It was one of the few open areas where boys and girls could congregate together. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. Rachel thought I was off my rocker and apparently, so did one of the other Phase 1 boys. He was called Ryan and we had met in the punishment block before I had become a *Predator*.

"You are fucking certifiable, Reeman, if you think you can enter and last more than ten micro-seconds. Those other kids are out there for blood and glory. There are *no* rules, *no* instructors, just us kids. People get badly hurt and it's not unknown for people to die. Last year, a kid ended up in a coma for months after a bad knock to the head. They turned off his life support in the end – a waste of resources they said."

"I can do it."

"You'll get yourself fucking flattened. They'll partner you with some massive cunt just for the fun of it."

"I need to prove myself."

"There's better ways to prove yourself, kid. Besides, what's the point in proving yourself, if you're dead?"

"He's got a point – despite him being a doofus."

I turned to see Rachel standing behind me. Her expression did not bode well for my future.

"Thanks, Ascot. Reeman and you are an item, right?"

"Go fuck yourself, Dalton!"

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There was a lot of murmuring, not to mention some laughter as the other kids noticed me. I just glared at each one and I hoped that nobody saw my shaking legs! Six Phase 2 kids were gathered together; Rachel was one of them and she was talking animatedly with two boys who kept glancing

over at yours truly. I hated being the subject of conversation – even more, I hated it when I wasn't involved.

The first round began. Three boys and a girl were selected to go in first. The boys were all eight while the girl was nine. Each kid stood on a taped cross, located at each cardinal point of the compass. A Phase 2 boy stepped forwards and introduced himself – his name was Oscar, apparently. Something told me he thought too much of himself – but then he *was* an American! I stood to one side with Ryan and we watched as Oscar stopped prattling on and announced the '2014 Fight Club' *open* . . .

The four kids ran at each other and I heard a scream as the girl was kicked in the face – blood exploded from her broken nose.

The Present

Friday, June 10th, 2016

Whitby

The first night was shit.

The bed was shit. I slept like shit. The shower was shit. The room was shit. The building was shit. Not surprisingly, the breakfast was shit. A good start to what was to become a shit day. Okay – maybe that was too much shit, but considering I felt like . . . never mind – I'm sure you got the idea!

The previous afternoon, I had awoken on the beach and I had felt really good. I had headed back up onto the Battery Parade and then bought myself a very large liquorice flavoured ice-cream – I was in heaven! The rest of the afternoon and evening had been good; the chance to relax and be a kid for a few hours had rejuvenated me and I truly felt like a different eight-year-old.

I had gone to bed happy.

I just wish I'd awoken happy.

I had taken perhaps three steps outside the B&B from hell when my senses began to talk to me. My training was telling me that potential enemies were abound and that I should take extra care. However, I chose to revisit the beach and enjoy the sun – what eight-year-old would not. Other families were out enjoying themselves and apart from a pang of sadness as I watched each family unit, I felt in good company for the first time in years.

Lunch was fish and chips, once again.

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I was wide-eyed and very unsure of my future as the girl was knocked unconscious by one of the boys who then punched another boy in the face. The third boy took the opportunity to seize the heads of both boys before smashing them together. There was a collective 'oooh' from the excited audience as both boys fell with a yell of pain, holding their heads.

The triumphant boy – his name was Raymond – smirked and he went to put his feet up till the semi-final was called. The girl was coming around and she was helped off to one side where she was

dumped onto a chair to recover. The two boys nursed their aching heads as they headed back to their dormitory. All four kids had blood on them and none had come out unscathed, not even Raymond. To say that I was having second thoughts was a major understatement – maybe Rachel as right!

The second group were called: ‘Baker, Wilkinson, Wilde . . . Reeman’.

Oh, shit!

The Present

Friday, June 10th, 2016

Whitby

Everything went to shit from about two that afternoon.

That giggling voice at the back of my brain had finally battered its way through my enjoyment and I suddenly began firing on all cylinders. As my senses came back online, I instinctively reached into the small daypack I carried and brought my H&K P30SK Compact to readiness. I was on the eastern side of Whitby Harbour, on the side of the Abbey. I noticed two men and a woman. Something about them began to sound alarms in my brain.

Then the woman looked directly at me, then down to her phone. I saw the recognition in her face.

That evening

Vengeance Command Centre, Scotland

“Nats? Come look at this.”

“What you got, Eric?”

“A YouTube video from earlier this afternoon. The computers flagged the content as of interest – look at the title.”

Natasha King looked up at the large wall-mounted screen: ‘Young boy shoots man on Whitby street’. As the two vigilantes watched, they saw an image of the Yorkshire fishing town on the west coast of England. The sun was shining and it looked like a typical family video. Until . . . A young boy could be seen looking down the street, then he dived flat to the floor and several pistol shots were heard. The boy reached into his pack and produced a small pistol. He came up into a kneeling stance and he began to return fire. His smaller pistol issuing sharp cracks compared to the heavier booms of the opposition.

The camera had moved to show three adults, each with large pistols in their hands. One, a woman dived into cover behind a parked van. A man followed suit but the third member received two bullets to his chest and he went down hard. The boy showed no fear as he emptied his magazine at the adults before calmly reloading and running towards the swing-bridge across the water. He just made it to the other side before the bridge began to open for an approaching boat.

Screams and sirens could be heard as people dove for cover. The young boy was last seen running into the narrow streets of Whitby.

“Holy, shit!” Natasha breathed.

“Remind you of anybody?” Eric asked.

“Yes. He’s a male version of Stephanie.”

Earlier that afternoon

Whitby

I was breathing heavily when I finally stopped and dived behind some large wheelie bins to rest. My mind raced like a super computer on steroids.

What the hell was the CIA doing in Whitby?

Were they after me?

Had it been a coincidence?

I had opened fire in plain sight of hundreds of people . . . was my cover blown?

There were so many questions to be answered that I had no idea where to start – being alone sucked! I checked that my pistol was loaded and ready for action. I stayed where I was for another twenty minutes before I moved off slowly and headed deeper into the back alleys of Whitby with my pistol concealed in the back of my trousers.

I had made it maybe a hundred yards when I felt something. I turned. Then I felt something grab me and I was held tightly against a body as an arm wrapped around my neck and began to squeeze.

“Don’t fight it, kid . . . don’t fight it.”

The voice was American and it sounded evil. The pressure on my carotid artery was increasing and I began to feel weak.

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I had never felt so scared as I did at that moment.

There were jeers as I moved to the cross opposite the girl, Wilde. The other two boys on either side were smirking. I looked around and saw many expression – none of them particularly friendly.

‘You can do this!’ I thought.

I had an advantage over the other three. Though most were aware of my being trained. Most saw me as an annoying six-year-old. I was three inches under four-foot tall, so I was not exactly an imposing threat – my opponents towered over me with over a foot of height advantage. Even the girl, Wilde, had muscles way bigger than my own. My trump card was that nobody other than Rachel knew what I had been trained in and how well.

Okay – three weeks ago, she had taught me how to fight somebody bigger and taller than myself; she had figured it might come in handy. Thank you, Rachel! Her teachings ran through my mind.

Rule 1: Don't fight unless you must. *Fuck that; I had no choice!*

Rule 2: Keep your guard up. *I could do that – but against three?*

Rule 3: Dodge strikes rather than blocking them. *That, I could do; I'd been doing it ever since I had arrived in the God forsaken place!*

Rule 4: Don't wrestle with your opponent. *I had no intention of doing that, but choice might not be involved!*

Rule 5: Be prepared to take a punch. As per Rule 3; *I'd been doing it ever since I had arrived.*

Those were the first set of rules. As I began to think about the second set of rules, that doofus, Oscar announced the fight and . . .

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I had kinda hoped that they might all come straight for me and put me out of my misery – one fist to the face and goodnight, Jamie Reeman! The two boys, Andrews and Bellamy, had gone for Wilde. She fought back hard and I had to admit, she was good. The two boys turned their backs on me as they fought the eight-year-old girl. That gave me a few precious seconds to work out a strategy.

Rule 6: Use evasive tactics. *Rachel had taught me to 'dance' and keep outside of my opponents reach. I had also learnt to kick – my legs were, like most people, longer than my arms.*

Rule 7: Get in close. *I would need to neutralise my opponents reach advantage – that would require impeccable timing.*

Rule 8: Tire them out. *I hoped that my youthful 'younger kid' energy could out do that of the older kids – they, after all, had a bigger body to carry about, by about five or six kilos.*

Rule 9: Use the element of surprise. *That was my biggest trump card I could play.*

Rule 10: Take your time and wait for an opening. *Time was not to be my friend, but I would see what I could do.*

Rule 11: Aim for sensitive targets. *Rachel had hammered this in, time and time again – at least until I had punched her in her left boob; apparently, that hurts! Wilde had no boobs – but she had other sensitive points while the boys had the same kit I did.*

Rule 12: Go for submission, if on the ground. *If I ended up on the floor, I was good as dead!*

Rule 13: Fight dirty. *I had no qualms about doing whatever it took to succeed.*

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Those rules ran in and out of my mind as I mentally ordered them and decided on who to attack and how to attack them. I decided that Rule 9 would be a good place as any to start. There was no point waiting for them to attack me on *their* terms – I was going to attack on *my* terms.

All eyes were on the two boys and the girl – nobody was looking at the scrappy little boy who was advancing up behind Andrews and Bellamy. It was time to level the playing field so I mixed up Rule 11 and 13 along with my already intended Rule 9. I ran up behind the two boys while their attention was firmly on Wilde. First, I aimed for the sensitive targets and I rammed my bare foot into each boy's groin from behind. As the two eight-year-old boys screamed bloody murder, I followed up with Rule 13 and kicked both in the backs of the knees to put them on the ground.

I looked up and saw Rachel. She motioned me urgently to follow through. I did so, and I kicked both boys in the face which sent them recoiling backwards, incapacitated. I thought I had done well – only I had forgotten Rule 2 and I quickly experienced Rule 5 as Wilde took advantage of my attack to attack the short six-year-old.

Fuck me! Her punch hurt, way more than Rachel's punches, and that was saying something.

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"Thanks, you little fuck – never knew you had anything in you," Wilde growled in my ear as she spun me around. "I'm gonna win this and your little Brit ass is gonna get kicked from one side of this space to the other."

I went back to Rule 11 and I reached back with my right hand and grabbed her between the legs and dug my nails in. The girl screamed in pain and released me. I heard the crowd roar in appreciation at the attack by a small boy on a bigger kid. I also got the impression that the boys enjoyed seeing a girl humiliated.

Wilde – well, she did *not* take it well! Once she was happy that I had not damaged her girl parts, she advanced on me. The unfortunate Andrews was just struggling to his knees as she passed and she kicked him hard in the face. I cringed when I heard his head collide with the wall as he fell. However, I had no time to consider Andrews' health as a very angry eight-year-old girl kicked me to the ground.

She went down on one knee and wrapped her right arm around my neck. She pulled back and I felt pressure on my neck. The yelling around me began to fade. I could hear my heart pounding in my head. I'd run out of rules; there was nothing that I could do – it was the end.

I was starting to lose consciousness as I fumbled for a better hold on Wilde.