

Wednesday, May 4th 2016

Ocean Vigilante

42nm southeast of Almeria

Position: 36.3764° N 1.9032° W

Course: 231°, Speed: 23 knots, 594nm logged

The atmosphere, both on the Bridge and in the Command Centre, was tense.

Despite the fact that they both had decades of training behind them and years as commanding officers, both men were very worried. Both men had daughters in harm's way and thought neither would admit it, they were both desperate to hear from them. Both men paced the Bridge and threatened to wear their way through the deck.

Cameron was at the helm and he was just as worried as the two naval officers; he also had a loved one in harm's way and being at the helm had provided him with a suitable distraction. Abby and Hailee were in the Command Centre where they both awaited some form of contact from the assault team.

"Oscar Victor, Cutlass, over..."

Abby sprang into action.

"Cutlass, Oscar Victor, we have you on a bearing of 197-degrees..." Abby responded instantly.

"Helm – alter course to 197..." Commander Perrin called out and Cameron dutifully altered course to port.

"Oscar Victor, Cutlass, altering course onto 017-degrees..." Jackal called.

Thirty minutes later

The Bridge

"Thank God!"

"My sentiments exactly, Dave..." Commander Bennett agreed as the assault boat came into view.

"One, two, three, four, five, six – all accounted for," Commander Perrin commented in a somewhat relieved tone.

"Stop engines!" Commander Bennett called.

The Bow

The moment the assault boat settled onto its chocks, a cheer arose from those who watched from the Bridge Wings.

Hit Girl pulled off her mask and she seemed to through herself over the side of the RIB and into my waiting arms. I kissed her like I had never kissed anybody before and I ignored the rush of people as they pushed past us. I broke away from my wife to grab hold of my daughter as she pulled off her own mask and wrapped her arms around my waist.

"It's so good to see you both safe."

The Bridge

"Dad!"

Cassie ran to her father and hugged him tightly. Commander Perrin hugged his daughter and silently thanked God for his daughter's safe return. Across the bridge, Chloe ran into her own father's arms.

"Chloe, one of these damn days, you're gonna give me a goddamn heart attack..."

"I know, Daddy," Chloe replied with a grin.

At the helm, Cameron hugged his twin sister and they both took a moment together.

"You stink!" Cameron commented as they separated.

"That all the appreciation I get?" Natasha growled at her brother who just laughed.

"She's not the only one," Ryan Bennett said with a grin at his fifteen-year-old-daughter.

"I love you, too, Daddy..." Chloe replied sarcastically.

"I know," Cassie said to her father, "I stink too, so no need to say anything."

"I would never comment on a young lady's potentially offensive aroma..."

"Thanks, Dad..."

"Well, stinky girl, fancy sharing a shower?" Joshua asked Chloe as he appeared on the bridge with Mindy, Stephanie and Dave.

"Oh, brother!" Stephanie moaned as Joshua began to kiss Chloe.

"Yeah..." Commander Bennett commented as he wandered off into the Command Centre.

"They kissing?" Abby asked the Commander.

"Yeah..."

Thursday, May 5th 2016

Early that morning

Master Stateroom

Main Deck, Forward

"Night, Dave..."

"Night, gorgeous..."

Dave leant over and he gently kissed me on the lips as I closed my eyes. Dave had taken it upon himself to wash me from head to toe before he tenderly dried my body and then carried me to my bed.

It had been a very busy day and I was very, very tired...

Sometime later

I came awake with a start.

Something had awoken me, but I had no idea what . . . it was still very dark, but there was an eerie, fiery glow from outside and that was when our world began to come apart.

There was an almighty, thunderous explosion and I found myself thrown violently onto the floor beside the bed. I shook my head and quickly sat up, full of confusion, and I was promptly crushed as the yacht lurched violently to port and Dave landed on top of me.

“Get the fuck off me,” I growled. “What’s going on?”

The General Alarm was sounding but then it was replaced by the much more ominous Flooding Alarm and then the Fire Alarm. In the back of my mind I hoped that the flooding would counteract the fire. Dave rolled off me and I tried to scramble towards the door as my similarly confused husband responded.

“Damned if I know, but I think we might just be sinking!”

I had a bad feeling that Dave’s comment was about to become the understatement of the century.

..._...

There was a very bright and a rather ominous glow visible beyond the stateroom windows on the port side, but before I could contemplate more, I fell against the bulkhead as the yacht lurched again, almost as violently as before. Dave threw me a lifejacket and I pulled it over my head and secured it around my waist, but for the moment, I did not inflate it. Dave did the same with his own and once we were both ready, I pulled open the stateroom door and Dave followed me down the passageway that led aft from our stateroom.

As I approached the port and starboard staterooms, I called out for Chloe and Joshua and I banged hard on the bulkhead but before I could call out for Hailee and Cassie in the opposite stateroom, a torrent of cold, salty water flooded down the corridor and it swept Dave and me back into our stateroom.

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I gagged on the water as I swallowed a large mouthful; it tasted foul and I coughed it back up again. I felt a hand seize my lifejacket harness and I was dragged against the then slackening flow of water as Dave hauled us both out of the stateroom. I was very relieved as I saw Joshua and Chloe ahead of us; Joshua pushed through the water, clinging onto both Chloe and the railing that ran down the corridor. The flow of water was lessening which made our advance easier – although the lessening flow just indicated that the yacht was steadily filling with water.

Once Dave and I had made it to the staircase, I found a hand as it reached out for me and Joshua used his considerable strength to heave me out of the water and onto the stairs beside Chloe. I immediately turned and ran up to the Upper Deck where I turned immediately right for the Bridge.

As I reached for the handle on the door that led to the Bridge Corridor, I heard the tannoy come to life – it was Commander Perrin.

“All hands, abandon ship! All hands, abandon ship!”

His announcement was followed by seven short blasts and one long blast on the ship's siren. I had no idea what disaster had befallen *Ocean Vigilante*, but whatever it was, she was terminal, at least to the eyes of an experienced naval officer. However, if I thought that it could not get any worse, I was very, very wrong...

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There was carnage on the Bridge.

"NO!" I exclaimed as I took in the sight before me.

A bloody Cassie looked up at me with anguish spread across her face.

"I'm so sorry Mindy – she was thrown by the explosion; her neck's broken," Cassie explained as she knelt on the deck and hugged the lifeless body of a young girl.

Wildcat would never fight again. I felt the anger rise from deep inside me and then came the sadness...

"Place Megan on the upper deck and inflate her lifejacket – her body can then be recovered. For now, we need to pay attention to the living..."

It was harsh and it was cold, but it was the reality of the situation.

..._...

"What was it?" I demanded as I turned to Commander Perrin.

"An explosion amidships – no idea what... I am sorry, Mindy, I really am... This'll be the second vessel that I'll have swum from..."

I pulled Cassie to her feet and helped her with my younger sister. She was literally a deadweight as we carried her out onto the Upper Deck. I took a moment and held Megan's limp, but still warm hand tightly before I yanked the lanyard which would inflate her lifejacket once we were out on the Upper Deck and we had placed the body down gently.

I found Dave in the act of heaving a liferaft over the side. I could see he was mad and I saw his expression harden even further at the sight of Megan's lifeless body. I saw the sadness in his eyes as he grabbed another liferaft and checked below before he then heaved it over the stern. I was having great difficulty keeping my footing as *Ocean Vigilante* listed to port, so I made my way below and with great joy, I saw the twins in the water; their lifejackets already inflated.

When I turned my attentions back inboard, I found a stunned Stephanie as she lay against the portside railings; she had blood coming from a nasty-looking head wound, but there was no time to see to the wound as *Ocean Vigilante* entered her death throes with yet another violent lurch. I grabbed my daughter and dived overboard.

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As I surfaced, I quickly swam away from the towering superstructure of the yacht as she threatened to capsize on top of us both. Our lifejackets had burst to life on contact with the water and for no Stephanie's head remained above water despite her feeble attempts at swimming. Then I heard two loud explosions as Dave yanked the lanyards on the two floating fibre-glass canisters which promptly came apart and the rubber liferafts inside inflated, rapidly took shape and within seconds they became ready for boarding.

I saw Joshua; he was swimming towards me.

“Get in the raft; you can help others board,” I ordered and Joshua nodded.

Without delay, Joshua climbed into the raft, with some difficulty in the rising swell, and he fell inside. He reappeared a few seconds later and I passed up a shivering Stephanie who was almost unresponsive. Joshua placed her gently against an inflated thwart and then he returned to the doorway to pull in the twins, both of whom were heaved aboard in one go and told to sit with their sister.

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The other liferaft was being boarded by Hailee and Abby. They were joined by Spook, Eric and Mathilda. Ryan and Natasha climbed in after me. Cassie and her father added to the complement of the other raft. There was no sign of Cameron, despite his twin sister’s desperate yells for him. It appeared that two would never reach land alive again.

I looked at the dishevelled, bloody form of Stephanie and for a moment I considered raising that number to three...

Dave and Spook fought to secure the two liferafts with a painter to stop them drifting apart. Joshua was issuing orders as it was imperative that we secure the liferafts from the elements and maintain as much heat as possible so that we might survive the night and be rescued. I took a brief moment to stare out of the opening that formed the liferaft’s doorway. I could see *Ocean Vigilante*, her stern rose into the air as the bow went under, the entire vessel at a fifty-degree angle to port. I could hear equipment as it broke free and crashed around inside the vessel.

Then there was a large explosion from amidships as the yacht blew up. The last thing I saw was a chunk of purple superstructure as it flew towards me and then I felt pain like I had never felt before and...

..._...

I heard a voice talking to me.

“This is not the way, Child – you can change this... It comes from the right...”

Master Stateroom

Main Deck, Forward

I came awake with a start.

Something had awoken me, but I had no idea what . . . it was still very dark, then it all came flooding back to me... I nudged Dave.

“Wake up – we’re under attack!”

Dave came instantly awake as I stabbed the button on the phone for the Bridge.

“Mindy...” It was Commander Perrin in his usual cheery tone despite the early hour.

“Sound Action Stations, General Threat Warning Red!”

The man did not hesitate. Almost before the phone had cut off, I heard the General Alarm as it pulsed throughout *Ocean Vigilante* and then cut off six seconds later.

“Hands to Action Stations! Hands to Action Stations!”

It was the perpetually calm voice of Commander Perrin.

“Mindy?” Dave asked as he grabbed his lifejacket and weapons, mirroring my own actions.

“I’ll explain later...”

..._...

I ran out of the cabin and down the passageway. I took the stairs to the Upper Deck, two at a time, before I burst through two more doors and finally onto the bridge.

‘...It comes from the right...’

“Hard-a-starboard!” I yelled out and Cassie dived for the rudder controls while a shocked Megan just stared at my sudden appearance.

As *Ocean Vigilante* came around to the right, there was an eerie, fiery glow and then a bright orange flash and an unguided rocket flew out of the darkness and straight down the portside, parallel to the vessel’s new course. Everybody on the Bridge looked stunned, however, it was Cassie who voiced everyone’s thoughts.

“If we had not turned...”

Commander Perrin snapped us all out of it.

“Let’s show the bastards what happens when they miss...” He reached for the tannoy. “All guns – weapons free! Threat Axis red four-five to green four-five.”

That axis put the enemy somewhere off our bow as we were then pointed very roughly towards where the rocket had originated from.

Bridge Deck, Forward

On the deck above and just abaft the Bridge, the operators of the forward gun mounts jumped into action. The anti-flash clad Mathilda and Hailee had been in position for mere seconds. Their weapons were already mounted and ready, so all they needed to do was lift the red cover that protected the arming switches and they then each flicked their switch beneath, upwards. Each crewmember covered their own arc; Mathilda to port and Hailee to starboard, each girl depressed the ‘Low Rate’ trigger with their right thumbs and the forward M134 mini-guns ripped out into the night and a vivid stream of tracers arced out towards the area from where the rocket had originated.

After several short bursts there was an explosion as something was struck repeatedly – the target appeared small and was probably an inflatable of some kind, which would explain why it had never appeared on the radar and therefore provided advanced warning of the attack.

“Check fire! Check fire!” Came the order and the two girls instantly released their triggers. “Target destroyed!”

The Bridge

“Contact – contact to starboard, range fourteen nautical miles, just coming over the radar horizon!”

Our radar, mounted ten-metres above the ocean could see two miles further than our mark one eyeballs. The only problem? We had no idea what the contact was. It could be a cruise ship with two-thousand souls aboard. That was the unreal dilemma understood by many a naval mariner during war at sea over the centuries.

I dived into the Command Centre abaft the Bridge

The Command Centre

“Contact is heading in our direction...” Abby confirmed as she studied the symbols on the large computer screen before her.

The contact was currently marked as a yellow cross, which indicated an unknown vessel. We had to make a decision *before* we came under attack again. Thankfully, Marty was still awake and he, along with Eric in the Main Salon, was collating information on every merchant vessel that was currently plying their trade in the western Mediterranean.

It took sixteen excruciating minutes as we logged five nautical miles before Marty was able to give us an eighty-eight percent chance that the target was *not* an innocent civilian vessel.

“Range: eighteen thousand yards...” Abby announced.

“What do we do?” I asked and I looked to the two Commanding Officers for help. “Those odds suck...”

“Damned if we do and damned if we don’t,” Ryan chuckled. “That’s why they pay us COs the big bucks!”

“You get the big bucks?” Commander Perrin inquired with a grin.

“Maybe not big...”

“You two geniuses are *not* helping!” I grouched.

“Give it... what, another minute?” Ryan asked his opposite number from the Royal Navy as he studied the radar screen.

“Yeah...” The Royal Navy Commander agreed.

“What?” I demanded as I watched the two very calm men as they nonchalantly drank their coffee – I was *anything* but calm; I was very much outside of my usual comfort zone.

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One very long and excruciating minute later...

“Jamming: green eight-five... Contact is classified as hostile!” Abby exclaimed. “Designate contact as Tango One.”

I scowled at the two grinning Naval Officers as the symbol on the display changed from the yellow cross to a red diamond, which indicated a hostile vessel. The radar now automatically switched to a

frequency-agile mode as it continued to track the target and ignored all the attempts to jam the outgoing signal.

I was annoyed at the Commanders' antics but I greatly valued their experience.

Bridge Deck, Forward

"Range: fifty-four-hundred yards... Bearing: green one-eight"

On the foredeck, directly ahead of the Bridge and between the two forward M134 mini-guns, Dave was readying a Spike missile for launch and he aimed the missile at the indicated bearing of the target. Aft, on the Sun Deck above, Joshua was doing the same, however, his firing point was masked by the superstructure. Dave would get the first shot and he activated the Command Unit, powered up the missile and the associated targeting systems. He pressed the 'LASE' button to activate the missile's seeker and he quickly found the approaching target and hit the 'LASE' button once again. The targeting system quickly indicated a lock on the approaching vessel.

"Range: forty-two-hundred yards..."

The approaching vessel was in range... Dave hit the 'FIRE' button and with a puff of smoke and a loud bang, the missile was on its way through the air and it trailed the thin guidance wire behind it. Dave would keep his eye to the sight and therefore ensure that the weapon hit home.

Our first ever, live warshot missile had been fired!

Cummings Delight

Bridge

"They've responded, ma'am – their radar has shifted to frequency-agile mode; jamming is having no effect."

"*Fusion* seem to have access to some highly specialised equipment," Susan Cummings commented to nobody in particular. "Well, I think..."

Cummings was interrupted as one of her crew yelled out a warning.

"Missile inbound!"

Bridge Deck

Command Centre

"Tango One is manoeuvring . . . speed increasing to twenty-eight knots . . . course change to one-eight-zero... She detected the launch."

The Spike missile cut through the air at over 300 knots and with the distance that separated the two vessels, the flight time was a little over twenty seconds. A fiery explosion ripped out in the darkness as 3.6kg of HEAT explosive detonated, a little over two nautical miles distant. There was a cheer from all those on deck and within the Bridge.

"Hit – Tango One!"

“Tango One is still moving – speed decreasing but she is still under command.”

“She is a big bitch, Mindy – maybe another round...” Commander Perrin offered.

“Helm, alter course ten degrees to port – unmask the aft Spike launcher...” Ryan ordered.

Cummings Delight

Bridge

The yacht was shaking from the impact.

“Fire back at them, you bastards!”

The missile had struck low on the hull and there was a fire raging below. Those *Fusion* people had wrecked my yacht and they would pay for that; they would pay dearly – I would see to that...

The Sun Deck, Aft

Ocean Vigilante responded instantly and Joshua proceeded to target the other vessel as his sights were unmasked by our own superstructure.

The target manoeuvred hard and as such, targeting was difficult but very soon a solid lock was made on the target... Joshua hit the ‘FIRE’ button and with a puff of smoke and a loud bang, the missile was on its way, just as before and it trailed the thin guidance wire behind it. Joshua kept his eye to the sight to ensure that the weapon would hit his intended target.

“Almost there . . . looking good . . . what the bloody hell?”

Ocean Vigilante suddenly lurched into a violent turn and the control wire broke...

The Bridge

“Missile launch!”

All heads turned to the port bridge wing and Mathilda who had a large pair of Zeiss 7x50 marine binoculars glued to her eyes. Commander Perrin gave some urgent rudder and engine orders to Cameron at the wheel but they were not enough, neither was there enough time; the ranges were far too short. I dived for the tannoy...

“Take Cover! Brace! Brace! Brace!”

Cummings Delight

Bridge

“Finally!”

“Both rounds have struck the target, ma’am.”

“Well keep firing...”

Ocean Vigilante

The Bridge

Ocean Vigilante shook as first one, then two projectiles struck the port side, slightly aft of amidships, and at least one of the projectiles exploded on contact . . . the night sky was lit up by a ball of fire which blossomed out of the starboard side. The General Alarm sounded automatically and entire sections of the Damage Control Board turned red and orange – red indicated fire and orange indicated flooding – disconcertingly, certain sections showed both colours.

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“Fire, fire, fire – fire in the Tender Garage!”

It was Dave’s voice and it had originated from the tannoy; he and Joshua would be aft, putting on their firefighting equipment. The computer schematic of *Ocean Vigilante* showed the entire Tender Garage in red, along with the port side corridor that ran past the Tender Garage from aft and towards the Engine Room.

“Port generator has dropped offline!” Abby called from the Command Centre. “Power transfer relays have failed; starboard generator not picking up the load.”

“What does that mean?” I demanded and I dreaded the explanation.

“We’ve lost 240-volt and 24-volt circuits for everything above the Main Deck and aft of amidships on the Lower Deck. All weapons systems are down... We’ve also lost the main radar, ESM, and ECM.”

“Crap!”

Great, just fucking great! There we were, less than four-thousand yards from an enemy vessel and we had lost our ability to fight, see, and detect . . . the only positive thing about it all was that the enemy were in roughly the same position – we had just seen all electrical power go out on *their* vessel and smoke was pouring from the wound that the first Spike missile had created in their hull.

The second, unguided, Spike had struck higher up on the superstructure and it had caused a fire but I doubted it had caused much else in the way of major damage.

Lower Deck, Aft

I had seen the rocket exhaust, just as the projectile struck us and the yacht shook.

As I picked myself up off the deck I was sure that I had seen another projectile erupt from the starboard side and vanish into the darkness. I ran aft and almost collided with Joshua coming down from the Sun Deck. We barrelled past the Main Deck and once on the Lower Deck, we saw smoke billowing from the passageway that led to the Engine Room.

I grabbed a phone: “Fire, fire, fire – fire in the Tender Garage!”

Joshua yanked up the cushions on the settee and threw out the fire-fighting equipment before he ripped off his anti-flash hood and gloves. We had trained on the fire-fighting equipment twice so far and we hoped that we would never need to use any of it. We each pulled on a PBI Gold suit – a fireproof suit very similar to that which most firefighters wore – jacket, trousers and boots. Next

came the BASCCA – Breathing Apparatus, Self-Contained, Compressed Air – a single tank with a face mask attached.

Finally, we both pulled on a yellow helmet.

I was shitting myself as I geared up.

Once we were both ready, we grabbed a hose each and I setup a water-wall which protected us from the heat as we advanced. The onboard sprinkler system in the Tender Garage was holding the fire at bay but not extinguishing it. As I moved closer to the fire, Dave came behind armed with his own hose which began to erupt Aqueous Film-Forming Foam (AFFF) in copious amounts that covered the remnants of the tender *Warrior*, the surrounding deck and equipment.

It did not take long before the flames began to subside as the fire was starved of the oxygen that it craved more than a heroin junkie craved their heroin. We were very thankful that there had been nobody based in the Tender Garage and hence no bodies to search for...

We were just breathing a joint sigh of relief and I had shut off the water-wall and Dave the AFFF foam when we heard an alarm rattler which indicated a fire in the Engine Room.

The Bridge

At least it couldn't get much worse...

“Starboard generator offline, main engines offline... Fire in the Engine Room!”

What went through my mind at that moment would have necessitated a very large wad of cash being stuffed into the proverbial swear jar! I looked up at the inclinometer that was mounted on the forward bulkhead and I noticed that we were listing to port by about three degrees and the list was increasing; we had obviously taken on plenty of water.

The automated bilge pumps were hard at work as they expelled the water over the side, but for now, there was far too much water aboard; both from the battle damage and from the copious amounts that were being used to put out the fire below decks.

The wait seemed interminable

The Lower Deck, Aft

The alarm rattler grated as we turned towards the Engine Room hatch.

Then worse – an alternating monotone alarm sounded in time with a flashing light above the hatch. There was an ominous sign on the Engine Room hatch:

**WHEN ALARM SOUNDS
VACATE AT ONCE
FIRE SUPPRESSANT
BEING RELEASED**

The flashing light and alternating monotone alarm warned that the Engine Room was about to be flooded with HFC-125. HFC-125 has a technical name, pentafluoroethane, and suppresses the fire by absorbing heat energy – thus removing one of the three requirements for combustion; in this case heat, leaving just fuel and air. The alarm is required as the gas produces other gases during the processes that can be harmful if breathed in.

The alternating monotone alarm changed to a continuous tone as the gas was released under pressure into the Engine Room.

The Bridge

The wait seemed interminable but within four minutes the call came from the Lower Deck.

“Fire is out – fire watch is set!”

“Engine Room fire is out – HFC-125 discharge secured,” Abby announced.

“This sucks!” I groaned to nobody in particular.

“Welcome to the world of naval warfare, Hit Girl!” Commander Bennett commented dryly.

Lower Deck, Forward

I would freely admit to having almost pissed myself...

I had been rudely awakened by the General Alarm and once I had been able to get my brain into gear, I had grabbed my lifejacket, pulled it on and strapped it around my waist – I could do it easily after all the training. Beside me in the cabin, my brother was doing the same. As was required, we had both slept with our combat suits on – it was uncomfortable but tiredness had helped us to sleep.

Was I scared? Definitely – and from the look on my brother’s face as he pulled on his anti-flash gear, so was he. I had seen danger but he had not and all the noise scared him. I was not exactly used to it – not by any stretch of the imagination but I had had way more exposure to it all, so naturally, I saw myself as being a veteran (don’t tell Steph; she’d just laugh). I was about to reach for the door when it burst open and our big sister stuck her anti-flash hooded head into our cabin.

“Move it, squirts!”

..._...

Danny and I ran out of our cabin and I shut the door behind us. I saw that Megan was behind Stephanie and my Aunt grinned at me as she pulled on her anti-flash hood. Eric burst out of his cabin and pushed past us, heading aft. Danny and I were pushed into the Galley and around behind the cupboards just as the yacht lurched to port and it turned tightly before the deck levelled out again.

Minutes later, we heard the tearing sound of the Gatling guns as they opened fire and then came the thunder of an explosion from somewhere beyond the hull.

“Check fire! Check fire! Target destroyed!” Came the announcement over the tannoy and the four of us cheered.

A short while later, we heard a bang and then a bit later, another cheer.

..._...

We were chatting wildly when *Ocean Vigilante* began to manoeuvre hard and we all fell to one side where we sat on the floor in the Galley – it was our Action Station. I grabbed hold of Megan, while Danny seized hold of Stephanie. We knew very little about what was actually going on above but we had been able to feel the yacht as it manoeuvred roughly and then there had been a large explosion from further aft and the whole yacht had been shaken violently enough for us all to be thrown apart.

I had screamed as the lights had flickered for a moment and plunged us into darkness but then they had come back on again. An alarm blared out and I heard Dave announce the fire further aft but on our deck. I was relieved that there were two cabins and the Engine Room between us and the fire.

“We’re safe here, Anne-Marie; Mindy said so.”

Stephanie was right but I hated being in a place where I might be trapped. Fire scared me more than just about anything else and on a boat there was nowhere to run to. It was a few very tense minutes before we all heard Dave’s reassuring voice again.

“Fire is out – fire watch is set!”

Then a minute or so later, I heard feet thundering on the stairs and Dave appeared in the Galley.

“Is everybody okay?” he demanded.

“Yeah,” Megan replied for us all. “We’re fine, Dave.”

Eighteen minutes later

Bridge Deck

Control Centre

“What we got, sailor!”

Abby looked up at Ryan Bennett and grinned.

“I’m a bit young for enlisting, Commander . . . the fire has caused some damage to the electrical systems but I have been able to bypass certain damaged systems and bring main power back online for the primary systems. Lighting is still on battery, the SCANTER 4100 radar is coming up now – we should have full detection capability in about ninety seconds. Scorpion ESM will come up once the SCANTER is online.

“The port generator is operating at full capacity but according to Eric, the starboard one has shrapnel damage. It’s shutdown for now but we can use it if we have to; but it will probably fail completely within minutes. Power has been restored to the forward mini-guns and the forward Spike launcher. The after cabling is a bit of a mess, so we only have the port-quarter mini-gun online.

“Main engines are available – they both tripped due to the shock and the fire; you can crank ‘em both when you’re ready, Cap’n... I would recommend under ten knots, considering that we have a large hole in our starboard side and a smaller one in our port side. All pumps are operating at reduced speed, but they *are* keeping up with the ingress of water.”

“A very concise report, sailor...” Ryan grinned as Abigail smiled.

“We having fun yet?” Dave asked as he appeared in the Bridge, still in his fire-fighting rig.

“Smoky...” I commented.

Cummings Delight

Bridge

The second missile had caused minimal but critical damage.

“We must withdraw, ma’am...”

“Like hell, we will!” Susan Cummings responded.

“We have no choice, ma’am, – the power grid is badly damaged and it has affected the radar and other systems.”

“So you say we should let them go?” Cummings demanded incredulously.

“They are badly damaged, Susan,” Vossen interjected as he appeared on the Bridge. “We can make port – say Gibraltar – and make repairs. He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.”

Susan Cummings stormed off the bridge.

The Bridge

Within minutes, the muted roar of the vessel’s twin MTU 12V 4000 series M93L 51.7-litre marine diesels, as they came to life, filled the air and five minutes later, they were providing their full 3,460bhp at 2,100rpm each.

Ocean Vigilante began to move through the waves; we angled away from the other vessel which was still in partial darkness but she had moved away from us while we had struggled to restore power and she was still moving away. She was also well out of Spike range.

Just when I had thought we were in the clear, we met our next challenge.