

Saturday, May 7th 2016

The Straits of Gibraltar

Ocean Vigilante

14nm northeast of Tangiers

Position: 35.9596° N 5.5965° W

Course: 238°, Speed: 25 knots

It was almost midnight by the time we were underway and steaming on an easterly heading into the North Atlantic Ocean.

The repairs had been completed and apparently some senior members of *HMS Sutherland* had turned to, to assist where they could. All of the weapons systems were fully operational and Abby was grinning fit to burst and it had taken Eric to explain that some unnamed RN CPO had upgraded some of the software as it was 'very similar' to what was used aboard the Type 23 frigate which had been moored astern of us.

Commander Perrin also advised me that the used fire-fighting equipment aboard had been serviced and recharged where necessary – by a pair of RN Petty Officers. Even the laundry had been done and we also had a full 'tank' of diesel. Extra food had appeared in the galley, which had included a ready-cooked meal for that evening as well as two very large bottles of Pusser's Rum. I understood that the RN had provided some other 'upgrades' which we would make use of later – I hoped.

Before we left Gibraltar, we had to wait for Eric, Cassie and the twins, plus our kit from the house, Curtis and Megan were checked over by the *Sutherland's* Petty Officer Medical Assistant. He announced that they should both take a day to rest but otherwise they had come through their near miss very much alive.

I seriously hoped that that would be the closest that anybody would come to dying.

"So, Curtis, how does it feel to be blown up by a hand grenade and survive?"

"It hurt, Uncle Ryan," Curtis replied with a smirk.

"I would expect so."

Ryan had been shocked to find that Curtis had very nearly died but he had been very impressed by what Chloe had done. He was also proud that Curtis had put his life before another's – in that case, Megan. The two eleven-year-olds had been given their space and Hailee had reported a lot of tears when she had passed their cabin.

As for the enemy, they were up ahead somewhere and we would find them. Once we had found them, then we would destroy them...

Sunday, May 8th 2016

Ocean Vigilante

56nm west of the southern tip of Portugal

Position: 36.9058° N 10.6667° W

Course: 000°, Speed: 25 knots

I received a pleasant surprise when I awoke.

Apart from a big kiss from my husband, which was always pleasant, I found a beaming Eric and Abby waiting in the Main Salon. I grabbed a bacon sandwich from Spook and sat down.

“Well?” I demanded.

“Toulouse,” Abby said.

“Toulouse?” I queried.

“Toulouse,” Eric confirmed. “It’s a city in France’s southern Midi-Pyrénées region...”

“I know!” I growled.

“That is where Vossen is headed,” Abby explained. “That is where *Urban Predator* HQ is...”

“As far as we can tell from the data so gallantly obtained from *Cummings Delight*...” Eric went on.

I blushed at that.

“...Toulouse is the last place. You saw what they did in Milan... Well, they seem to have closed down everything else and centred around the HQ in Toulouse.”

Finally, we had a destination and I hoped that it would be the *final* destination.

As usual, training was the norm, as well as time spent preparing our equipment.

Curtis insisted on fighting and Megan joined in and finally, just for some peace and quiet, I gave in. Every member had a spare combat suit aboard, so Curtis was lucky – no combat suit, no combat.

“You’re a push over, Hit Girl!” Megan grinned.

“Yeah – she’s going soft in her old age...” Stephanie agreed.

Dave cringed and both girls realised too late... Two loud piercing screams echoed around the main deck as a pair of strong hands grabbed two ankles and yanked... The two girls landed flat on their faces, on the mat, to general laughter from the others present.

“Ouch...” Megan moaned.

“Me and my big mouth...” Stephanie grimaced.

“Little girls should know their place...” Anne-Marie laughed as she stood over her aunt and big sister.

“Yeah, they should!” Danny agreed as he kicked his sister’s legs out from under her.

Anne-Marie landed on her ass with an annoyed scream.

I enjoyed the randomness of the attacks.

Anne-Marie had impressed me with her desire to defend her Mom. I was also impressed with Danny for putting his sister in her place, too. The rivalry between Wildcat, Psyche, Ravage and Rogue was healthy but they also loved each other, in fact both Wildcat and Psyche had gone so far as to show their love for Rogue by killing to rescue her.

I sat sunning myself on the Sky Deck while I watched Hailee teaching Danny some tricks with his Balisong. The boy was actually very good with the lethal blade and I hated to admit it, but he was almost as good as I was at that age... He loved that knife – his fingers betrayed that it had taken him a while to get used to the razor sharp implement – he never let it out of his sight and he had even slapped Megan for going so far as to touch it!

Anne-Marie was being taken through some movements with her beautiful Butterfly swords by their supplier, Saoirse. I had to admit that it was a little strange seeing an eight-year-old girl as she wielded the deadly weapons while a fourteen-year-old girl wielded her own twin Butterfly swords as the instructor.

Whatever Anne-Marie was, she was very intelligent and in her time with Saoirse, she had learnt when to shut up and listen. At that moment, she listened and ingested every direction and her eyes missed nothing as Saoirse moved her own swords and Anne-Marie duplicated each and every action.

I seriously hoped that it would be years before she would have to put any of those actions into practice.

That evening

On my way to bed, I peeked in on the kids as I did, each and every night.

I deemed it the least that I could do to protect my charges. The twins shared the first cabin to starboard, beyond the galley. I pushed open the door and as I did so, I heard giggling as the light rapidly went out. Apparently they were both asleep...

“Not buying it!” I growled.

There was a fake snore followed by a giggle that sounded suspiciously Anne-Marie like.

“Get to sleep – we have a big day ahead of us, tomorrow.”

“Night, Mom – love you.” Came the dual response.

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I moved on to the next cabin, again to starboard. The cabin was occupied by Megan and Stephanie – the bitches from hell... They were both very much awake and in deep discussion.

“Hi, Mum!”

“Hi, Sis!”

“What are you two up to?”

“Megan’s telling me about her time in Gotham...”

“Oh, yes...”

“I did some things that I was not proud of,” Megan admitted.

“But, you also grew up fast and proved how mature you can be,” I reminded the eleven-year-old and she went very quiet.

“I think you embarrassed the Kitty Kat,” Stephanie laughed.

“Thanks, Mindy – I know I cause a lot of shit but it’s good to know that I do get some things right,” Megan finally said.

“You both cause shit, but I wouldn’t replace either of you...”

“Thanks, Mum – night.”

“Yeah, thanks, Mindy.”

“...probably.”

“Hey!”

Monday, May 9th 2016

Ocean Vigilante

55nm west of Portugal

Position: 40.9830° N 10.1899° W

Course: 005°, Speed: 25 knots

It was a little after three in the morning when I walked out onto the port bridge wing.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

It was Spook.

“I want this to be over, and soon.”

“It will be – you finally have a destination and we are well on our way there.”

“I know, but so much could still go wrong. We almost lost Curtis – Hailee is still bruised to fuck. Even my sister and my best friend’s fuck-buddy were put at risk...”

“Nobody said that being a vigilante was easy...”

I laughed at that.

“Don’t you worry about me; Petra can look after herself and believe me, I’ve had bruises before,” Hailee offered as she joined us.

“You were tortured...” I replied.

“Like somebody just said: ‘nobody said that being a vigilante was easy’...”

“I still feel guilty and I always will...”

“It’s what makes you such a great leader, Mindy,” Spook said. “You feel guilt when those you lead are hurt and you do everything that you can to protect them. Look at the weapons and armour you provide – cost no object; that shows how much you care. You are one in a million.”

“To be honest, I’m just glad that there *is* only one of you...” Chloe quipped as she came up the port ladder.

I felt seriously outnumbered.

“Chloe – you’ve known crazy bitch for the longest; apart from Dave, of course,” Hailee commented. “How have you survived so long, putting up with her moods?”

Chloe grinned nastily.

“She’s my best friend, after Abby and Josh, and I love her like a sister,” Chloe replied.

“I only make third place?” I growled.

“Josh is better in bed...” Chloe grinned. “Without Abby, I might never have survived long enough to meet you and Dave.”

I gave both girls a hug.

It had to be today.

The enemy would be only a few hours sailing from the French coast and once they were ashore... The plan was to destroy them at sea and then would come the hope that without active leadership, *Urban Predator* might fall with a limited fight. I liked a bloody fight, just as much as the next vigilante and probably more but we have all out everything into our fight across Europe and I did not want to put everybody at risk of death without good reason.

I could still see those dead kids... They would haunt my nightmares for many years to come. I had arrived too late to save them but I would do everything that I could to save those believed to be in Toulouse. I would avenge my eldest daughter and help her come to terms with her new life. A life that I hoped would be free of *Urban Predator* and everything that it stood for.

Saoirse too. Despite her happy demeanour, I knew that she was also hurting inside.

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Though I had not broached the subject with the fourteen-year-old, I had found out about her early life. Marty was busy unencrypting files that we had . . . acquired . . . from the CIA.

The girl had been born in Belfast as Saoirse Kaitlin McBride during 2002. Her mother, Shauna McBride, along with Saoirse’s father, Liam McBride, had been IRA sympathisers. They had been targeted by the British security services during The Troubles and were seen as a suitable target when kids were being recruited into *Urban Predator*.

As far as the British Government were concerned, Shauna and Liam McBride would not be missed. Therefore, a blind eye was turned to their abduction along with their then, eight-year-old daughter on April 30th, 2010. We had most of Saoirse’s file and she had struggled, much as Stephanie had before she had properly settled into her new life and then excelled as Foxtail.

Yes, she had shot her parents in cold blood.

While we had discovered some of Stephanie’s former life; her former name for instance, her time with *Urban Predator* was a mystery for the most and before that was a blank in her mind. The young girl had enough on her plate without me dredging up all that shit for her.

I focussed my mind on the present as both former *Urban Predator* killers entered the salon for breakfast. As usual, they were laughing and joking. The language between them was crude and the

sexual innuendo extreme. Considering that only a few short months ago, Saoirse had been fanatical about destroying Stephanie, the fact that they were now inseparable as friends seemed strange but it was their strange and disturbing upbringing that was their bond.

“Morning, girls!” I called out.

Stephanie ran over and gave me a hug. Saoirse smiled and waved. Another day was beginning as Spook appeared with a tray piled high with bacon, eggs and sausages.

I just had to hope that it would end well.

Ocean Vigilante

148nm west-northwest of Biarritz, France

Position: 44.0089° N 4.9093° W

Course: 102°, Speed: 25 knots

It was just after five in the afternoon.

All hands had closed up to Action Stations and on the foredeck, ahead of the Bridge, Dave was preparing to launch one of our pair of Spike-ER missiles. The target had been visible on radar for the past hour as we closed the range.

We had another hour to go before we crossed the 8,000-metre mark and we could fire the missile. We were about 80% certain of our target, but the advantage of the ER missile was that it had a brilliant camera embedded and we could be able to identify the target before the missile struck.

It was an expensive way to determine the target and we only had two rounds but if we could just slow them down...

Seventy minutes later

Dave bore-sighted the launcher dead ahead and pressed the ‘FIRE’ button.

The thirty-kilogramme missile left the launch-tube with a loud bang and a small cloud of smoke before it accelerated to three-hundred knots and headed north. Flight time was fifty-two seconds and the clock seemed to go *so fucking slow!*

The range had dropped to a little over four nautical miles, but it was difficult to make out the small, grey-painted, missile in the bright sunlight. The TV screen in the Command Centre clearly showed the yacht as the missile closed.

“Positive target identification!” Abby intoned.

“Make them eat the fucking missile!” I growled over the comms to Dave.

Dave did just that and as I watched, entranced, I saw the same view that I had seen several nights previously – the stern of the mega-yacht was easily recognisable before the missile bore into the port quarter and the screen went blank.

Cummings Delight

I awoke to alarms and I could smell smoke.

The yacht was shaking as it turned hard in the water. I scrambled out of the bed and ran down the staircase to the Upper Deck.

“What the hell is going on?” I demanded.

“We’re under attack, ma’am,” a worried yachtsman replied.

I made my way the Bridge where I found a hectic scene before me.

“Captain, report!”

“A missile has struck us aft. The Boat Garage took most of the explosion and the engines are intact and undamaged. We have a minor fire aft which is being contained as we speak.”

“Who...?”

“They are a little over three and a half nautical miles aft of us and are closing.”

“Why was I not awoken?”

“The radar has been acting up and we never saw them approaching – we had thick mist aft of us, an hour ago.”

Ocean Vigilante

It was obvious that while we had struck the yacht, we had not impaired her propulsion, which had kicked into full power soon after the missile had struck.

I had to give the bitch credit – she had built her yacht well!

It took another hour of rapid manoeuvring for the two thoroughbred yachts to close. The Commanders were using every trick in the book, and many that were not, to gain precious yards to bring our arsenal into range.

At 2,400-yards range, the forward Mk19 grenade-launchers began to spit out rounds with a muzzle velocity of 790 feet-per-second. Each belt held thirty-two rounds and they were being pumped out at forty rounds-per-minute.

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The forty-millimetre grenades flew through the air and exploded, sending fragments flying into the yacht. Annoyingly, there must have been armour in the superstructure, which was not a surprise, just an annoyance.

The radio on the bridge came to life.”

“That the best you got, Hit Girl?”

I grabbed the microphone and squeezed the transmit key.

“I have not yet begun to fight...” I growled and I received an approving grin from Ryan. “Are you going to surrender?”

“Only when you pry the final weapon from my dead hands...” Susan Cummings shot back.

“Looking forward to it – surrender is *not* an option for you; to the death!”

“Then, I’ll see you in hell...”

I slammed down the microphone and turned to Commander Perrin. There was no option but to use Spike missiles to sink the yacht before it reached its destination.

“Standby, fore and aft batteries, for a broadside to port!”

“Now you’re talking *my* language, Hit Girl!” Perrin chuckled.

We closed into an optimum position, about 1,400 yards from the shattered yacht.

“Engage!” I ordered.

The mega-yacht came apart under the onslaught of the port-side pair of mini-guns and the twin Spike launchers. We circled the yacht as we pounded her to pieces. The damage was almost total as the third and fourth Spike missile flew into the superstructure.

The magnificent vessel’s mast toppled into the flames that billowed from the Owner’s Cabin near the top of the superstructure. Alarms could be heard amidst the screams and yells as the yacht began to settle in the water – that was when I wondered if he was insured against ‘Acts of Hit Girl’! The crew were attempting to launch the ship’s boats and it looked like they might succeed in their actions.

“Weapons hold!” I ordered – there was to be no senseless slaughter; I was beyond that and our immediate task was complete.

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Over the next fifteen minutes, we stood a mile off, and we watched through binoculars as two twelve-metre RIBs were launched from the amidships garage. A rainstorm began and the visibility closed down, but as we watched, the RIBs were loaded with just eight people each – sixteen out of over forty people who had been aboard. I shrugged; life at sea was dangerous . . . note to self: buy more Spike missiles – or maybe something bigger...

“Mindy!”

I turned to see a very worried Stephanie as she ran towards me . . . she seemed very agitated as she jumped up and down.

“Out there; I just saw them throw somebody off a RIB – it looked like a kid...”

Those fucking bastards – nothing was beneath them! Commander Perrin was at the tannoy before I could move a muscle.

“Away seaboat!”

“Mindy?” Stephanie wailed.

“Go, Steph – but be careful, please.”

I watched the girl dash forward towards where Dave and Joshua were readying the *Cutlass* on the bow. I took a moment to grab a radio and then to advise Dave that Stephanie was on her way to join them – and why.

Cutlass

The VI-BTD RIB sped away from the mothership and we headed for the burning wreckage.

Josh was driving, while Dave was in the stern and I kept a keen lookout from the bow. There was a steady sea running, not to mention the rain which caused limited visibility, plus the smoke and flames from the wreckage were not helping. We stopped for a moment to listen and that was when I heard it...

"Help me!" Came a very faint voice.

I waved my arm out to port. Josh gunned the engines and we flew forwards in a tight turn to port – I raised a set of binoculars to my eyes and I tried not to look at the flames which hurt my eyes. Dave shouted from amidships where he had been studying the FLIR display and Josh spun the wheel again. As we came around, I thought I saw something and indicated the direction with my arm raised.

I was right; it was the boy and he struggled to stay afloat in the waves without any lifejacket or other buoyancy device – those bastards.

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Josh brought us to a stop just a few feet from the boy.

"Ahoy, there – you need a hand?" I shouted.

The idiot raised a hand from under the water and he pointed a pistol at me. Dave raised a G36 and pointed it back at the scared boy.

"Easy!" I cautioned, with a look at Dave.

I turned back to the boy.

"Are you stupid? We're here to help you after your 'friends' threw you to the sharks..."

"I'm no fucking traitor..."

"Fuck that shit – you are on your own and only *your* decisions matter now and I'm sorry to say that what you decide will see you sink or swim, quite literally."

"I..."

The boy came to a very rapid decision and he dropped the pistol into the water before he swam towards the RIB. He reached up with one hand and Joshua reached down, grabbed hold of the boy and he dragged him bodily into the boat. He was promptly pinned down by Dave and Josh while I searched him from head to toe. Apart from a small knife and an empty pistol holster, he had nothing on him – both went in the water.

"He's clean..."

Dave and Josh released the boy and they allowed him to sit up.

"Joshua – get us back aboard!" I ordered; the boy shivered with cold.

"Yes, ma'am!" Josh replied with a grin.

“So, what do we call you?”

“My name’s Aiden, Aiden Maxwell.”

“Good to meet you, Aiden – I’m Stephanie, as you have probably guessed, and this is Dave – the Brit over there is my good friend, Joshua.”

“Hi...”

I wrapped Aiden in a blanket and sat next to him as we headed back to *Ocean Vigilante* at speed.

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As we neared our destination, I noticed increased amounts of apprehension on Aiden’s face. That was understandable as we came closer to the mega-yacht and one of the first things that Aiden saw appear out of the driving rain was the starboard-quarter M134 plus several armed individuals all staring down at him. As we came alongside *Ocean Vigilante*, I actually reached over and held his hand to reassure him.

I helped him out of the RIB at the stern and he was quickly grabbed by Cassie and Natasha who took him up a deck to the Main Salon. Aiden was in the early stages of hypothermia, so he was stripped of his wet clothes and wrapped in warm blankets. Hailee appeared with a mug of steaming hot chocolate – with marshmallows of course!

“Stephanie!”

Okay, I was staring as he was stripped . . . he had muscles . . . but not much else... I knew what was going through Aiden’s mind; I had been there and I knew that he would be scared; I had been – not that I had ever admitted it. I noticed that everybody was overtly armed – I was too. I sat down beside Aiden on a couch and indicated the hot drink.

“Drink it, Aiden – it’ll help you warm up.”

“I should have listened to you, days ago – then I wouldn’t have been almost drowned...”

“You couldn’t have known that they would turn on you – they dumped me and then they’ve tried to kill me repeatedly,” I replied.

“Yeah, they sent me to kill her; three times I tried, only each time, I failed,” Saoirse added as she came to sit down on the other side of Aiden.

“You’re both *Urban Predator*?”

“I was Foxtail.”

“I was Psyche, as you know.”

“I’m not as famous as my young friend here, but then we’re not *supposed* to be in the limelight!” Saoirse laughed.

“What do I do now?”

“Now? You rest.”

After bedding Aiden down in the spare bunk below Eric’s, I sought out Mindy.

I found her in the galley where she was playing cards with Danny, Cassie and Natasha.

“What is it?” Mindy asked and I shuffled into the seat beside Natasha and Cassie.

“It’s Aiden, isn’t it?” Cassie suggested.

“What’s going to happen to him?”

“Stephanie, you’re ten-years-old; you are *not* responsible for the boy,” Mindy said strongly.

“If I had rescued him, earlier, then he might not have been almost drowned...”

“Oh, sweetie,” Natasha said as she took hold of me by my chin and she tilted my head back so that she could look into my eyes. “You are still so innocent, despite everything that you’ve been through. You can’t take the weight of the world on your shoulders – even if your mother does...”

I heard Mum growl good-naturedly and Cassie laughed before Mum addressed me directly.

“You took responsibility for Saoirse, brought her into our home and you helped her. You cried for four straight nights after those two *Urban Predator* kids were gunned down in Chicago... There’s nothing wrong with being human and caring; Dave taught me that. I know I go too far, so I know what I am talking about when I suggest that you ease up.”

I smiled. Weakly.

“Kids!” Mum growled. “Come with me, Stephanie, I have an idea of what we can do with Aiden and I think that you might just approve.”

I allowed Mindy to take my hand and she led me up a deck and then forward to her cabin. She sat down on the bed and she picked up the phone. She dialled the Command Centre on speaker.

“Abby – could you get me the full number for Wayne Manor in Gotham, please?”

“What am I, directory enquiries?” Abby demanded. “On its way, boss – transferring you now...”

There was a short pause and then...

“Wayne Manor...”