

Tuesday, 10th May 2016

CIA Station, Toulouse

Urban Predator Headquarters (Europe)

Four-hundred yards to the east

1950 Hours

I left Kick-Ass and I pulled the two girls to one side.

“Look – I know I’ve told you two to control your lust for blood and your killing – especially you, Psyche, but right now I want you both to forget what I’ve said. I want you both to use every skill that you have ever learnt to destroy those who occupy that building. You will give no quarter. Let your anger for them guide you and help you to inflict the worst possible injuries that you can. You will kill and you will keep killing, until they are *all* destroyed...”

The two girls looked at one another for a moment and then they both nodded.

“This ends *tonight*,” Foxtail growled in agreement as she unsheathed her beautiful and very battle-ready Butterfly swords.

“Too damn right, my Foxy pal,” Psyche added, a Sai in each hand.

“Go, both of you; kill them . . . finish this.”

With just seconds to go before the assault, we were all poised and ready.

The facility that we were about to assault seemed to me very like a school – in fact, it had probably been intended for that exact purpose. Marty had obtained the detailed plans with the help of his *Synthesis* friends. The facility was enormous and was primarily at ground level with only a small proportion on the second floor. The facility was accessed via one of two access roads that passed through a single security point and then up a sweeping road, beyond the security point, and part way up a hill to where the main building was situated.

A lot of the greener parts of the site were occupied by trees, but the rest was just grass. There was also the possibility of hidden security. Infra-red images from the UAVs had identified over seventy hot bodies within the building. Forty to fifty of those were classified as minors while the rest were most probably adults and therefore valid targets of opportunity. To be safe, we also had to possibly double the number of adults as many may not have shown up on the infra-red scan depending on the building's structure.

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The tactical position was fairly simple. Leon was on overwatch and in a concealed position, high on the hill above the facility. She had two other prepared positions to move to as required – we had to consider that the CIA may have counter-snipers. The rest of *Fusion* and *Vengeance* had separated into five teams; each team with their own tasking.

Strike Team 1 consisted of Hit Girl, Shadow, Psyche, Crimson, and La Coccinelle.

Strike Team 2 consisted of Kick-Ass, Jackal, Spectre, Nemesis, and Drift.

Strike Team 3 consisted of Hawk, Wildcat, Raven, Foxtail, and Trojan.

Support Team A consisted of Battle Guy and Q.

Support Team B consisted of Wraith and Hal.

Both Support Teams were in the Command Vans, *Echo Two* and *Echo Three* which were parked in previously secured positions, over five miles away. Petra, Rogue, and Ravage were holed up in *Echo Alternate* and, I hoped, keeping out of any more trouble!

I had extensively briefed everybody on stealth and silent killing.

We had already witnessed what those bastards could do when called upon. The assault was a risk, but we had to shut the program down and we were at *Urban Predator Prime* – live or die, we would end *Urban Predator* that night. Earlier that day, I had spent some time with both Stephanie and her *Urban Predator* compatriot, Saoirse.

Saoirse, naturally, had had the most up to date information on *Urban Predator* and she had raised concerns about the Phase 3 trainees; they would be ruthless and it would be very difficult, if not borderline impossible, to make them see sense.

Me being Hit Girl; well, I had a plan for that!

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I was reminded of the assault that I had made to rescue Big Daddy, all those years previously. I was in my Hit Girl suit – not the same one, obviously – and I was wearing night-vision equipment. The current NVG equipment was fourth generation and fresh from our creative friend in Gotham. They were more compact and much lighter than the older models. On my back, I carried my Twin Wakizashi swords – I deemed the place being too enclosed for my Katanas. On my hips, I carried a pair of Glock 22 Gen4 Pistols in .40-Calibre. I also had my usual array of throwing knives plus two other more specialised weapons.

Beside me, was Shadow; she had her bō-staff across her back, plus she carried a shorter version of her compound bow, with a quiver of arrows of varying lethality, not to mention her usual FN Five-seveN pistol and one other device. I could tell that she was tense – we all were; a lot rode on the outcome of the night's mission, which was why there were nineteen people directly involved in the operation. Those vigilantes varied in age from the youngest, ten-year-old, Psyche, through to the twenty-nine-year-old, Hawk.

Psyche, easily the smallest – sorry, shortest – in our group, was also the keenest to fight. She carried her Sais on her lower legs, the grips level with her knees, and two SIG Sauer P30SK Compact pistols in 9-mm, on her hips. A large combat knife lived on her lower back, plus she carried a pair of throwing knives on her thighs. I knew that the young girl was desperate to put an end to the part of her life that had torn her from her family and then sent her on a path of murderous destruction.

Either side of the diminutive Psyche stood the other two girls who made up Strike Team 1. Crimson carried her usual weapons: her double-ended bō-staff, eight ceramic throwing knives, and her FN Five-seveN Mk2 pistol. She had a special task that night; she was to keep an eye on Psyche – just in case she went off the rails...

That left La Coccinelle, or Ladybug as we called her. She wore her usual cat-suit type combat suit and she carried a SIG Sauer P320 subcompact pistol on her right hip and a large knife on her left ankle. Around her waist were pouches for her various other items of very lethal weaponry.

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Strike Team 2 assembled and the boys prepared themselves by swapping some very dirty jokes, making crude sexual innuendo and generally keeping moral up. I had to admit that I had trouble not giggling when Drift produced some viciously funny jokes to which Jackal threw in some of his own equally funny and very crude jokes. Unfortunately for Nemesis, she was also a part of Team 2, but she told me that she could handle *any* boy! The nineteen-year-old Brit, was armed with her Katana, Tanto and FN Five-seveN Mk2 pistol. Her bleeding had only occurred a couple of weeks previously, but she had proved to have a head for fighting and she was a superb asset to have by your side.

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Strike Team 3 was made up of the remainder. Hawk had not been out much, thanks to her maternity leave. Now, though, she was back. She had her usual bō-staff, but she also carried a matching compound bow and a quiver on her back. On her right hip, she carried a Glock 17 Gen4 pistol while on her left, she carried a Taser – but not the same model as she had previously carried.

On her left side, there stood Wildcat and Trojan. The two eleven-year-olds were also well-armed for their sortie that night. Wildcat had her claws as always, plus her SIG Sauer P250 Combat Threaded Barrel pistol which sat on her right thigh. On her back, she carried her Wakizashi sword. Trojan was similarly equipped, but with a Glock 19 Gen 4 Compact pistol on his thigh plus a pair of Fairburn-Sykes Fighting Knives.

To her right, were our newest active recruits – Morgan and Foxtail. Both were seasoned, however, for them both it would be the first time fighting alongside Fusion. For Foxtail, the night would be the end of an era for her and I hoped that she would be able to bury her demons. Morgan, well, she had buried her own demons but she did seem to enjoy a good fight. Both girls were armed with pistols – a pair of Beretta Px4 Storm Compact Type G pistols in .40-calibre Smith & Wesson for Foxtail, and a single Smith & Wesson M&P9 pistol for Raven. Foxtail had her beautiful Butterfly swords and Raven had her single Katana.

Raven seemed very keen to prove to me that she could be useful to *Fusion*. I knew she was okay, or I would never have let her move to Chicago, but the sixteen-year-old girl was adamant that she had something to prove.

The Gatehouse

1958 Hours

Foxtail and Psyche went in first.

The two girls vanished into the darkness, at least they did to any outside observers who may have been watching them. To us, they were readily visible via the NVGs. The two girls stopped right on the edge of the lights that illuminated the area which surrounded the Gatehouse. Inside the Gatehouse were four men, all armed with pistols and all uniformed as security guards.

Three thousand feet above us, the two ScanEagle X200 UAVs, Eagle-1 and Eagle-2, cruised on their 1.5-horsepower engines. They sent a false-colour infra-red image to screens on the left wrist of our combat suits. From the aerial view, we could see that there was nobody else anywhere near to the Gatehouse and no vehicles were approaching the site. The majority of warm bodies in the main

building were gathered in what we believed to be the dormitories and living quarters on the second floor.

As the time clicked to 2000 Hours, the lights went out around and inside the Gatehouse.

Psyche with Foxtail

The moment the lights went out, I focussed on our targets as we both moved silently towards the Gatehouse. The four men were talking loudly as they attempted to find out why the power had gone down. Two of them left the Gatehouse and one looked up towards the main building which was still ablaze with light.

“Must be a local fuse...”

He said no more – he could not; all that came out of his mouth was air and some blood. Foxtail gently eased the dead man to the ground and she patted the corpse on the head before she moved around the back of the single storey building, the Butterfly knife in her right hand still dripped blood from the man’s almost severed neck.

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The other man turned to see why his colleague had suddenly gone quiet. He saw a shadow and he turned towards the Gatehouse and backup . . . but he was too late as I drove a Sai into his right ear. His eyes rolled up into his head and I yanked out the Sai as he crumpled to the ground.

We both met up beside the door to the Gatehouse. I waved Foxtail forward, she shook her head and waved *me* forward. I shook my head and pointed at Foxtail, then at the door to the Gatehouse – she shook her head again and I saw a finger point at me and then at the Gatehouse door. I was about to shake my head when Hit Girl blasted into my earpiece.

“Will you two Urban Princesses stop fucking about!”

I grabbed the door handle and I pulled the door open.

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Foxtail threw a pair of combat knives through the air and both security guards slumped down in their chairs.

“I think they got the point...” I chuckled and Foxtail slapped me around the back of the head. “Hands off, Foxy...”

“Will you two either get a room, or get with the fucking mission; jeez!”

“Easy, my purple queen!” I replied.

“I’m gonna kill her...” Hit Girl muttered. “I’m gonna...”

There followed a few choice and very crude methods for gutting a ten-year-old – somewhat painfully, I thought . . . and totally uncalled for...

Strike Team 1

Foxy and Psycho rejoined their teams.

With the Gatehouse neutralised, we all moved forwards, in our teams, towards the floodlit main building up above us. Stealth was the order of the night and we relied on the NVGs and advance warning from the support teams who were able to access the downlink from the drones and spot anybody lying in wait for us.

We kept to the trees as much as possible. Those trees moved and rustled in the gentle breeze which blew that night and their movement would mask our own.

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We headed towards the kitchens on the east side of the building. They would bring us in, just short of the centre of the facility. As expected for that time of night, the kitchens were clear and disabling the security on the outside door had not been difficult.

The kitchens were dark and expansive. We used our NVG equipment as much as possible to retain our stealth. At some stage, the men at the Gatehouse would be missed and the alarm would be raised. As if on cue, a red light began to flash in the kitchen and the whole space was eerily lit up – then came a raucous klaxon. The alarm *had* been raised! I had barely taken another step before a pair of doors burst open and men appeared while bullets preceded them.

Everybody scattered and I dived down behind the kitchen counter as dozens of bullets headed in my direction.

Hit Girl

There was total pandemonium.

Glass shattered all around me and I suddenly found myself back in Frank D’Amico’s kitchen as I dodged bullets, glass, and razor-sharp flying shrapnel. Talk about bad memories! I heard a large explosion as a grenade detonated a few yards away and the shooting rapidly stopped. However, I stayed on the floor behind the kitchen counter as I heard feet crunch through the broken glass towards me.

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I brought up my Glock 22 and aimed for the end of the counter. A shadow came into sight, followed by a foot and then...

“Really – we doing this shit again?” Kick-Ass demanded.

“Again?” Drift asked.

“I’ve rescued her from a kitchen before,” Kick-Ass chuckled.

“This is *nothing* like that,” I growled as I stood up and holstered my pistol.

“No...” Kick-Ass said sarcastically. “Nothing like it . . . *at all!*”

Wildcat with Hawk, Raven, and Trojan

I was overjoyed at fighting beside Trojan – I was not about to let him get blown up again, either!

Behind us, came Hawk and Raven. We were in the southern portion of the facility which was mainly given over to classrooms. We had to search each and every one. We entered as a team and generally, I went first as the smallest and lightest. The first two classrooms were empty which might have lulled us into a false sense of security. As we had done twice before, Hawk pushed open the door while I dove in and scanned the room with Raven and Trojan following behind.

I felt a pair of bullets hit my chest and I went over backwards. Trojan put my assailant down with a single bullet to the head. Hawk and Raven each took down two more gunmen. I was about to declare the room clear as Hawk pulled me back to my feet when there came the sound of shattering glass and then the thud of a heavy bullet as it impacted the wall at the back of the classroom opposite the windows.

The first thud was followed by another as the headless corpse of a fourth gunman dropped to the floor of the classroom. I took in the single hole in the glass and the single hole in the classroom wall.

“We always keep our backs where, Wildcat?”

“To the wall, Leon – to the fucking wall!” I retorted. I was very pissed at being caught out and almost shot. Worse, I had that damn quote applied to my failure – of Hit Girl found out, I’d never live it down.

“Nice shooting by the way...”

In the next classroom, I heard something, but I could not make anything out.

I raised a finger to my mask and the others instantly understood as I moved slowly and silently around the classroom.

“Wildcat, Leon – I have a faint infra-red heat source, west end of the classroom.”

I raised a thumb to show that I had received the message and I moved to the far end. I waved Trojan over to cover the other side of a group of tables and Raven to move up with me. Hawk kept an eye on the door. I heard the noise again – it was a slight scuffling and . . . a whimper? I raised my left hand, fist clenched and Raven froze along with Trojan.

I waved Raven forwards and she moved slowly and carefully, her pistol held out before her.

Raven with Hawk, Wildcat, and Trojan

It was definitely a whimpering sound and it was coming from beneath a waist-high bench that was built into the back wall.

I moved closer and while Trojan and Wildcat covered me, I holstered my pistol and with a good idea what was hiding in the darkness, I plunged both arms in and grabbed hold of two objects that began to scream and fight as I hauled them out into the open.

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In each hand, I held a young kid – maybe eight or nine – both were girls and both were crying as they fought.

“Stop!” I said strongly but quietly. “We are not going to hurt either of you, okay?”

I had to repeat it twice more before the two terrified kids calmed down. I pushed them back into their cubbyhole and knelt down before them.

"I am Raven and I am a member of *Fusion* – we do not hurt kids, even *Urban Predator* kids."

I saw relief on the two young faces – they looked like twins, although one might have been slightly older than the other.

"Both of you – stay put and you will be safe," I said quietly. "I will come back for you both, once this is over, okay? What are your names?"

The younger looking one looked to the girl who spoke.

"I'm Naomi and this is my cousin, Kaitlin."

"Stay safe, girls – don't come out except for one of us."

We left the classroom and moved on.

Hit Girl

Fresh from my kitchen embarrassment, I was in a foul mood as I made my way deeper into the school.

I came across a man, his back to me, in the darkness. I wrapped my arm around his neck and I began to squeeze.

"Attacking out of the darkness ain't fair..." the man tried.

"Fairness went out the window with the twenty-six dead kids, fucker!"

There was a very audible crack as the man's neck snapped in my hands. It was a method of killing that I rarely used, unless I was really, really, pissed... I moved on and began to fight a man only a few inches taller than myself but he was broad and he had muscles.

We fought; neither of us gave much ground – my punches and kicks landed but they seemed to do nothing more than piss off my opponent. Naturally, he saw a small shape and assumed a girl – he was right but I was *not* defenceless; I could give as good as I got, if not better!

I upped my effort and I began to worry the man as the fight began to turn against him. My strikes came harder and faster as he tried in desperation to block them.

"Have mercy . . . give quarter..."

"Quarter be damned!" I growled as I drove two fingers into his eyes and pushed the eyeballs backwards into his brain. Slimy, yet satisfying, in a freaky kind of way...

"Give no quarter!" I barked out to all within hearing as I moved on towards the next breathing defender.

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I saw Psyche fighting a man more than twice her size but her diminutive size meant a smaller target and Psyche could move very fast when required. Her lithe form twisted to avoid the man's powerful

strikes but every now and then a punch would make contact with the ten-year-old and she would fall to the ground – but only for an instant as she sprang back up and reattacked.

I punched the man hard, in the side of the head and he fell to his knees where again, I kicked him in the head and he fell to the floor. Psyche turned to glare up at me.

“No fair – he was mine, bitch!” She growled.

“Sorry!” I replied defensively and I raised my hands in mock surrender.

The man tried to get up and he had risen as far as his knees when Psyche drew her pistol and blew his brains out.

“I never said you could get up, bastard – move again and I fucking kill yer!”

I chuckled and shook my head as Psyche holstered her pistol and then ran off towards her next victim.

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I headed down a corridor which led to classrooms and that was where I came across my first unwanted obstacle of the evening.

“You shall not pass...”

The six youths, an even mix of boys and girls, stood shoulder to shoulder and they blocked my path. They each wore Kevlar body armour and lightweight, navy blue overalls. They all seemed to be mid-teens, which I reasoned, made them Phase 3 and therefore very dangerous. They were all armed with a pistol each and the said pistols were each held expertly, ready to fire.

“I will give you all a chance to *walk* away free from this place. *Urban Predator* is finished – you may have heard of me...”

“We don’t care who you are, bitch!” One boy yelled out.

I heard pounding feet behind me and I was joined by La Coccinelle.

“Ah, Hit Girl...” she drawled, her French accent heavy on the words.

I saw six pairs of eyes go wide at the mention of my name.

“*You* are Hit Girl?” A girl asked with surprise.

The voice trembled slightly.

“I am . . . and I am giving you all a chance to live – take it; join us.”

Poor brainwashed bastards, I thought as I saw the pistols come up as one, but before they were ready to fire, I had seized my alternate weapons from my hips and I raised the pair of Taser X3s towards the six kids. I triggered off all six of the cartridges; three from each Taser. The kids dropped the pistols as they fell and they convulsed on the floor. I disconnected the cartridges and reloaded before I knelt down with La Coccinelle and secured the kids’ hands with zip ties. Their pistols, I disassembled and threw into a nearby waste receptacle just as Wildcat appeared around the next corner.

“Trust you to leave a mess!” The young vigilante growled and La Coccinelle laughed.

“Adieu, Wildcat, Hit Girl...” La Coccinelle said as she turned and vanished into the darkness.

“You fighting, or are you just gonna stand there like a jackass?” Wildcat demanded.

I said nothing, but I still kicked out and caught Wildcat’s butt; she laughed and we both headed out to find more sport.

Kick-Ass with Jackal

“Oh, wow!”

I was in purple hell...

We had slipped into a classroom and on almost every noticeboard, a certain purple vigilante glared down at us. There were pictures of her from when she wore that cute pink belt and the kilt. Nasty images flashed through my mind at the sight of Kick-Ass 2.0’s pint-sized headache. Later images showed my wife in her later Hit Girl incarnation with the shorter kilt and the figure hugging... Focus, Kick-Ass, focus!

Obviously, the classroom that we were in was used to teach all about Hit Girl. There were posters that showed her favourite weapons and styles of fighting. Somebody had gone to a lot of trouble to piece together Hit Girl’s repertoire.

“Creepy!” Jackal commented.

Hit Girl with Wildcat

We were in a room full of computers and as we searched the room, the large wall-mounted screen at the end of the room which bore a rotating commando dagger symbol, sprang to life.

I immediately went on guard, but saw nobody – I looked over at Wildcat, who just shrugged. As I turned away from the screen, Wildcat laughed.

“What?”

“Look!” Wildcat chuckled as she pointed at the large screen on which text had appeared.

Go, Hit Girl!

Love *Synthesis*...

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” I growled and I saw the camera mounted above the screen.

I raised the middle finger of my left hand. The stupid Kitty-Kat actually waved, so I grabbed her and pushed her out the door.

Support Team B: Hal with Wraith

Five miles to the south

“Leon, Support Bravo – you have targets of opportunity at your seven o’clock low; engage at will...”

As we both watched the large screen that showed the IR image from EAGLE-2, we followed the six men which Wraith had just reported, as they closed on the main building. They had come from a small outbuilding, which to us had seemed to be nothing of consequence but now appeared to have been a security post. There was a small flash a distance from the men, at the top of the screen and one seemed to fall, a hot pattern spreading from his body. The effect was repeated three more times as the men scattered. The last two seemed to die together when what appeared to be a single bullet took out both heads as they came into line.

“Support Bravo, Leon – six down; relocating to position Charlie.

“Copy that, Leon – stay safe...” I replied.

Foxtail with Psyche

I hated schools, especially psychotic ones like the one which we were in at that moment.

I could remember nothing about my schooling before *Urban Predator* and then the school in Chicago where I had been when I was activated to go after Psyche. Since then, I had been attending the very same school as Chloe, Joshua, Morgan, and Abby among others. Consequently, I was much happier and my grades were good.

At least at a normal school, the teachers treated you well and they took the time to help you rather than just talk down to you and try to break you. I wanted to hurt them so much with every fibre of my being and I knew that my best friend felt the same.

Psyche kicked open the door to a classroom and...

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I froze and so did Psyche as she stood beside me.

Unbidden, a single phrase went through my mind, the cold voice as it spoke:

‘An asset’s greatest weakness are those who know them. People who know you can tell others about you; therefore, they must be eliminated.’

The room was stark and hospital-like. A wheeled hospital bed over to one side, a metal desk with a computer in the centre of the tiled floor. Three steel chairs over in the farthest corner... Then that voice again:

‘Take this weapon and eliminate those closest to you. When you have done so, you will leave here not as who you were, but as Saoirse Doherty.’

I remembered how calm I had been, how easy it had been to pull the trigger, how natural I had felt. I had taken the weapon from the woman, grip first. I had been able to tell that it was loaded – two rounds; one for each member of my family.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

She had pulled off the hoods and I had seen their faces – there had been no emotion . . . I had felt nothing...

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I snapped back to reality and I found that I was shaking, with a hand on the wall and Psyche yelling at me. I put a gauntleted hand to my face and I willed back the tears that flowed beneath my mask. The pain in my heart was terrible. It had always been there, in my subconscious, but until that moment, that scene had remained hidden.

“Hey, Foxtail,” Psyche pushed. “We’ll talk about it later, together – I know what you’re feeling; I came apart at Christmas last year and they helped me – they can help you too...”

I pulled myself together and we left that room of death and sorrow but not before I threw in a pair of hand grenades.

Shadow with Crimson

I heard the pair of dull ‘crumps’ a short distance over – grenades I assumed.

The pickings were good and we were both two up and searching for more blood. We had both witnessed the dead kids and we wanted to avenge each and every one of them – it was the least that we could do.

We turned left and Crimson pushed open a pair of double doors which led into a weight’s room. It was large and very well equipped – it was not empty, either. At least as far as targets were concerned... The lights came on and we pushed our NVGs out of the way. The lenses over our eyes automatically dimmed to regulate the bright light as we faced around a dozen adults – four of them women.

The fight began as a dumbbell flew in my direction – I dodged it easily and I was rapidly in a hand-to-hand fight with two men and a woman. Crimson was fighting three women as the other men just stood and watched what to them must have been a pair of one-sided fights.

They were right, partially – the fights *were* one-sided, only, Crimson and I were going to win...

Psyche

I never heard them approach, but something went around my neck and that something began to tighten; I struggled to breathe.

I kicked out and attempted to break the grip of the hands that held the garrotte. I was lucky, my suit stopped the garrotte from shredding my neck but it could not stop the tightness around my throat. I tried to yell out but only a gurgle seemed to emanate from my mouth. I tried everything that I had been taught – but nothing seemed to work.

The man laughed – the fucker enjoyed his torturing of me...

Foxtail

Psyche was taken before I knew what was happening.

A man had a garrotte around her neck and another had kicked me down to the floor where my pistol had gone flying. I had scrambled to seize it even as I received kick after kick from the large man who seemed to enjoy kicking me. As my fingers closed around the butt of my pistol, I had a decision to make. Shoot the man killing my best friend and die myself, or shoot the man trying to kill me and lose that best friend.

It was the Devil's Alternative: whichever my choice, somebody would die.

The choice proved easier than I thought.

Psyche

There was a loud crack and then the pain around my neck eased.

I fell to the floor gasping for air. The man who had been strangling the life out of me lay on the floor, a hole in his forehead. I looked over at Foxtail as she knelt and smoke drifted away from the muzzle of her pistol. I took in the situation before me and I instantly realised what Foxtail had done.

'You stupid bitch!' I thought without malice but with a lot of sadness, as the CIA bastard aimed his pistol at Foxtail from merely a foot away; he fired three times...

"NO!" I screamed as my best friend collapsed to the floor – she did not move.

Hit Girl

Things were going wrong.

Psyche had gone off the air – her last comment had been garbled. As I ran towards her last known position, I felt pangs of worry and I had visions of disaster. Those visions seemed to come true as I came into an open area; I came to a sudden halt and my worst fears came to fruition. Stephanie was on her knees, her mask in her hands, and she stared resolute up at a man who had a large-bore pistol to her forehead.

Tears of anguish streamed down her cheeks.