

**Tuesday, 10th May 2016**

**CIA Station, Toulouse**

**Urban Predator Headquarters (Europe)**

**2030 Hours**

***Hit Girl with Psyche and Foxtail***

“Hit Girl – you move, she dies!”

“Kill me – I am ready to die; I was created here you know...” Stephanie stated simply and a little morosely.

“You’re going to die here you know,” the man replied. “...convenient.”

Over to my right, several feet away from Stephanie, I could see the prone form of Foxtail. The masked girl lay on her front, her pistol just inches from her right hand. My own pistol was aimed at the man's head – could I take the shot before that bastard shot Stephanie?

Could I take the chance?

Could I *not* take the chance?

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***Shadow with Crimson***

It was not an easy fight – not by a fucking long shot!

I fended off every strike and got in a few good blows of my own. We both got creative and managed to extricate ourselves and dive in amongst the treadmills where we drew our bō-staffs. The opposition paused – but only for a moment as two of the men watching ran over to the far wall and several jō-staffs flew through the air. Annoyingly they were not the standard wooden jō-staffs either; these seemed to be made from a synthetic material which was able to deflect our lethal blades.

Don’t get me wrong, though, the staffs *were* badly nicked.

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***Hit Girl with Psyche and Foxtail***

“You and your team will stand down,” the man ordered. “You will allow yourselves to be taken under arrest.”

With a jolt, I noticed that all was not lost: Foxtail was alive; her pistol was now held firmly in her right hand. If she moved much more, the man would notice. A distraction was needed...

“Kick-Ass!” I yelled as I stared beyond the man.

It worked! The man turned enough to move his pistol away from Stephanie’s forehead and before the dumbass could realise his error, there was a resounding crack as a single bullet sped through the air and the man’s head exploded. I saw Foxtail’s hand fall to the ground with her pistol, closely followed by her head. Stephanie’s face, complete with shocked expression, was covered in blood as was the front of her combat suit.

The almost headless corpse toppled to the ground.

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### ***Shadow with Crimson***

The room was also fitted with pillars at several points – they caused problems as we swung our staves.

One of the pillars blocked my opponents attack, but it also blocked my retaliatory strike. I was kicked in the stomach and I fell backwards across a padded bench. The man managed to get his jō-staff across my neck and he was very strong. He smiled as he believed he had the upper hand.

“End of the line, Shadow...”

“I’ve been there before, cunt!” I growled back as I drove an arrow which I had seized from my quiver, into his left temple with my right hand.

The man braced upwards and fell to the floor, very dead. I jumped up and ran to help Crimson who seemed to be battling two women and three men. Two more men dragged away another who clasped a bloody stump where his left hand had once been. The missing appendage lay on the ground not far from Crimson’s rapidly moving feet.

My approach was seen and I was quickly intercepted by two women and a man.

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### ***Hit Girl with Psyche and Foxtail***

Stephanie quickly clambered to her feet and she ran over to her fallen comrade and the younger girl rolled Foxtail over onto her back.

“Are you okay?” Stephanie almost shouted as she shook the older girl.

Despite the blood and tears, Stephanie's expression showed mounting concern. Her blond hair was streaked with the fresh blood which added positively to her already purposeful demeanour. I saw Foxtail stir and she slowly lifted her head.

“Don’t shout! Yes . . . I’m okay, just . . . a little winded – you better get your mask back on, girl!”

I saw a smile appear on Stephanie's face amid her obvious relief. She sheepishly looked around as she allowed me to wipe away most of the blood from her face and hair before she then pulled her mask back into place.

“She took a bullet for me...” Psyche said quietly.

“I’d do it again, too – you saved my life in Chicago, and I’ll *never* forget that,” Foxtail said as she slowly sat up and struggled to her knees.

I pulled both girls back to their feet.

“Let’s move,” I said simply.

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### ***Shadow with Crimson***

As I was about to take on my three attackers, I saw a blur of red and black enter the room at the far end and then the woman before me stopped dead – literally – as blood seeped from her mouth and she fell to her knees, a dazed expression on her face. As she fell the rest of the way to the floor, I cringed at the sight of a vicious six-bladed ninja star which was deeply embedded in the back of her skull.

I looked back up and my other two attackers turned to come face to face with La Coccinelle, a ninja star in each hand. I wasted no time in pulling my compound bow off of my back and nocking an arrow. I quickly sent two arrows into the nearest pair of cunts and they died very painfully. Two more men fell to the ninja stars and then La Coccinelle put the handless man out of his misery with a knife to the heart.

Crimson had put down two of her assailants and she was fighting the final three. However, before either I or La Coccinelle could come close, three rapid gunshots echoed around the room and the fight was over. We turned towards the far doorway and I smiled as Hit Girl, Foxtail and Psyche each lowered their pistols.

“When you three have stopped ‘exercising’, we have work to do,” Hit Girl growled.

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### ***Strike Teams 1 and 2***

As I had mentioned previously, the assault reminded me of my assault on the warehouse when Daddy had died. Night vision, strobes, the lot. Only, at that moment, I was not alone as Team 1 met up with Team 2 on the first floor.

Each team had breached one of the two staircases in the darkness using strobes, stun grenades, and overpowering force. The stairwells were littered with shattered glass, ceiling tiles, expended cartridge casings, and bodies. Several of the teams had been hit by opposing fire, but nobody was injured – I owed Fox one hell of a big thank you for his combat suits.

We made quick time as both teams advanced down the corridors towards where we believed the dormitories, and therefore the kids, were. The guard force at the facility was large and had obviously been augmented before our arrival. There was still security active and two men approached; they carried automatic weapons and they opened fire into the shadows. We fired back and both men died in a hail of bullets.

They had barely come to rest before our boots pounded through the pools of still warm blood that flowed from their shredded bodies.

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We now had to tread carefully.

There would be many trainee *Predators* about and the last thing anybody wanted was to accidentally kill, or even to wound, a young kid. The two Teams were to head down each side of the upper floor and check each and every room. The first door that we came to had a sign: **DORMITORY A.**

We smashed down the door and came to a rapid halt at the sight before us.

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## ***Hit Girl***

Arrayed from left to right were an even dozen young kids, some as young as eight, with some almost twelve. Most wore grey jumpsuits, but some wore just shorts and a t-shirt. About five were girls. They all had one thing in common, though; it was obvious from their expressions that they were all very scared.

Between us and them stood six guards, two of whom were female – all were armed and there would be no easy way to kill the guards without inadvertently injuring the kids. The guards seemed to think that the kids had their backs, so for the moment it was stalemate. The five of us, versus the six of them. According to the chatter over the comms, there was a very similar situation in the dormitory across the way with Team 3.

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It was Psyche who broke the spell as she stepped forwards, her pistol aimed down at the floor. She looked directly at the kids.

“Phase 1?” She asked the younger kids, and they nodded.

“Phase 2?” She asked the older kids, and they nodded.

“I was Phase 2 – at least I was before I was terminated. You might have heard of me; I go by the name: Psyche.”

There was a collective intake of breath as most of the kids seemed to recognise the name. There were also some scowls and muttered words – I heard ‘traitor’ and ‘rat’, among others. The guards just smiled.

“I saw the light; I am free – I kill when Psyche says to kill. *Nobody*, tells me to kill – not even Hit Girl; we are equals...”

That was pushing it a bit, but I knew what she was trying to do. In my ear, I could hear Foxtail giving an almost identical lecture, although apparently, Foxtail was nowhere near as well-known as Psyche was. It was obvious that more persuasion was required.

“I am Hit Girl.”

I paused for effect and I saw instant recognition.

“I see that you know my name...”

“How do we know it is really you?” Came a young voice.

“Well, I could show you my Driver’s Licence, but I didn’t bring it with me... So you’ll just have to trust me – besides who else would have the balls to take on the CIA?”

There was a chuckle or too at my remark. The kids began to whisper amongst themselves and the guards’ expressions began to show unease. I saw movement behind the guards as the kids quietly moved so that the older kids were closer to the guards. I followed the movement and so did the others; we all made some overt movements to keep the guards’ attention.

There was a scuffle and two minutes later, the guards were no more. The kids just stood there, unsure of what to do. The four older kids who had just killed seemed unsure whether their actions

had been right. It was fairly obvious that it was their first hand-to-hand kill but the kills had been perfect.

“You did well; very well – you all have my respect!” I assured them and they seemed genuinely pleased to be receiving respect and a compliment from somebody as famous as Hit Girl.

“Seize a weapon,” Psyche ordered and almost immediately ten of the kids were armed, four with sub-machine guns and six with pistols.

The others seized a knife each. If it wasn't so sad, it might have been comical. Twelve more kids, with a fucked up future. Fuck you, Vossen! Fuck every fibre of your being! When I get my fucking hands on you...

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I left Psyche in charge of the pre-teens while I wandered across to the other side of the upper floor – which was not as easy as it sounded, as bullets still flew. Team 2 were covering the stairs and all accesses to the dormitories. After some dodging about, I walked in the door of the opposite dormitory.

There the scene was different, but only slightly – this time there were no guards, but about sixteen kids in the same age ranges as we had just seen. Many of them had weapons raised and they looked ready to shoot.

“They are in two minds – most want to drop their weapons, but they are too scared,” Foxtail informed me.

“I am Hit Girl – you can trust these people; Wildcat, lower your weapon...”

“That is Wildcat?” A boy called out. “She’s awesome...”

I smirked and I could tell by Wildcat’s stance that she was embarrassed by her fame.

“Please don’t; she has one hell of an ego already!”

There was some laughter and I saw most of the weapons droop and then all but one. The boy was about twelve and he was obviously very scared.

“Lower the weapon!” I growled.

His hands shook on the weapon, his finger very close to the trigger. I had no choice but to act – I pulled my own pistol and I pointed it directly at the boy.

“You threaten my people and I *will* react, kid...”

“What will happen to us?” He asked.

“I honestly don’t know,” I replied. “You will be handed over to the French authorities...”

“Can we come with you?”

“No, you cannot.”

I saw him waver for a moment as he tried to sort out his thoughts. Then he dropped the pistol that had been pointed at Foxtail and he just stood there. I lowered my own pistol and holstered it. The boy began to sob and he clung onto me as he cried and to be very honest, I felt very uncomfortable. I also felt relief that I had not had to shoot the boy dead.

“You’re safe,” I said as I patted the young man on the shoulder.

None of what was happening to them was their fault and none of them deserved to die.

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From that point, the rest of the dormitories were cleared with the assistance of the young *Predators*.

To be honest, many of the kids were eager to give up their life and threw down their weapons at the merest hint that their training was over. Several guards fell at the hands of their own trainees – I was very pleased to see them kill their former tormentors; it would help with the healing process.

Once the dormitories were clear, most of Team 3 remained to guard the floor. Team 1 and 2, plus Foxtail, headed back down to the first floor. There were still guards to kill and we needed to find those behind the whole barbaric scheme.

‘Vossen . . . I am coming for you...’ I thought with a smile.

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### ***Jackal with Kick-Ass***

I kept with Kick-Ass and we headed towards the northeast portion of the building.

We knew that Psyche and Foxtail were ahead of us, somewhere. Naturally, Kick-Ass was keen to keep an eye on the two girls, especially after Hit Girl had let us both know about what had occurred earlier. Foxtail was in pain but she refused to give up and I knew how stubborn Hit Girl could be. Both girls were like sisters to me and yes, I was overprotective towards Psyche – so sue me!

We stopped at some doors on the left, and went in, just in time to see Psyche kicked across the room and hit the opposite wall, hard. The man who had kicked her had gone after Psyche to do more damage. Foxtail was fighting another man further away across the room.

Kick-Ass exploded!

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“How *dare* you touch my daughter!” he roared as he seized hold of the unfortunate man and lifted him bodily into the air before throwing him at the wall.

The man yelled with the impact and struggled to free himself from the broken plasterboard (I hate the term: dry-wall) around him. Kick-Ass never gave the man a chance to extricate himself as he kicked out with his armoured boot and I heard several ribs break amid the screams of the man.

Kick-Ass did not stop.

He was like a runaway train as he threw the man out onto the floor. Next the veteran vigilante drew a pistol and put a bullet in each kneecap. The man roared in agony.

“I’m not one for holding a grudge,” Kick-Ass called out, conversationally as he put two more rounds in the man’s elbows. “I leave revenge for the nutcase I have for a wife...”

If the man thought that he was being given some sort of reprieve...

Kick-Ass kicked him in the head until the man stopped moving. The man’s head was no longer a head – it looked more like a partially crushed watermelon. I looked up at my friend as he began to calm down – a bit like Dr Bruce Banner, post-Hulk.

Psyche came over, as did Foxtail who had killed her man.

“You okay?” Kick-Ass asked his daughter.

“Yeah,” Psyche replied as she wrapped an arm around her Dad’s waist. “Love you Dad!”

“Now,” Kick-Ass lectured. “Can you two keep yourselves out of trouble, or should I assign somebody to protect you both? Wildcat maybe?”

“Like hell!” Psyche almost exploded. “I am Psyche – I don’t need no goddamn protection. The only people who need protection are those I’m going to kill.”

“Well said, Psyche!” Foxtail chimed in.

Both girls shot out the door.

“Fucking nutcases, the both of them!” Kick-Ass growled as we followed.

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### ***Hit Girl with Shadow***

I had overheard Kick-Ass going nuts in defence of Psyche.

It filled me with pride. My husband could go from sweet and dorky, and straight full on rabid, in mere seconds. I wasn’t over the moon about being referred to as a ‘nutcase’, but I was what I was. Shadow had just shrugged as she had listened to Kick-Ass going nuclear.

We both took the time to go and check on my zapped Phase 3 *Predators*. Suffice to say that they were really pissed when we arrived, however, they made no efforts to yell or shout at us.

“Are all okay?” I asked.

They each nodded, unhappily.

“I had no wish to hurt you, but I could not let you shoot us, nor get shot yourselves. Your compatriots are safe and for the moment, so are you.”

“You be good now,” Shadow chuckled as we moved off.

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### ***Psyche with Foxtail***

Foxtail kicked the man in the head and he span hard into the wall where he left a small red smear as he sank to the floor.

“You always have to leave a bloody mess,” I growled and Foxtail chuckled.

I had never felt so close to somebody who was not my family. Yes, she had tried to kill me on three separate occasions, but that was water under the bridge and she had repented her sins. She had also risked her own life to save mine and that weighed heavily on my heart – I had no time to consider the ramifications of her actions; I would have to wait until we had destroyed *Urban Predator*. Saoirse was like a big sister to me and we both had a lot in common.

God, I thought, we’ll be fucking next!

I was *so* desperate for the day to be over. Being back in such a place as we were in, scared me and the memories that had come flooding back to me were horrible and I was fighting to push them out of my mind so that I could concentrate on the present.

I was dragged out of my deep thoughts by Foxtail as she pointed at a door off to the left which was not quite closed – what had been dark, just turned light as somebody moved away from the door.

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I pulled out my Sais and stood clear of the door. Foxtail drew her twin swords and she made ready to kick in the door. I nodded and with a well-aimed boot, the door smashed back against the wall. Bullets erupted forth and we both stood back from the door. Whomsoever was inside the room, stopped firing and I heard the very distinctive sound of a magazine being ejected – Foxtail had heard the same thing and she nodded at me.

I nodded back and we both burst into the room.

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There was but a single man and he struggled to insert his fresh magazine.

I threw the Sai from my left hand it embedded into the unfortunate bastard's right thigh. He went down onto one knee as he bellowed with the pain. Foxtail ran forwards and she placed the very sharp tip of one sword to the man's throat – he dropped the pistol and the half-inserted magazine to the floor.

"I have an idea," Foxtail said as she nodded her head towards a steel tank full of water.

I scowled but I nodded my ascent.

"Let's see how *you* feel..." Foxtail growled as she dunked the man's head into the water.

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I knew from bitter experience that the water was freezing cold and it sapped at your very being as you fought against the freezing liquid that threatened to drown you and inundate your lungs. The fear as you were held under the water was intense and many victims even pissed themselves, they were so scared, either as they were led to the tank or when they were actually in it.

When they hauled your head above the water, you spluttered as you fought for life-giving air and you shivered with the cold as you felt the water running out of your nose and mouth. But before you could do much more than take a deep breath, you were plunged back under the water and the torture began again. The procedure was often repeated until you all but passed out. Luckily, there was no intent to kill, so once the ordeal was over, you were thrust into an adjacent warm shower and you were left alone to cry as you warmed up and tried to come to terms with what had been done to you.

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The man being held down by Foxtail was not so lucky – I knew that there *was* intent to kill. As he thrashed his legs and arms, I knew that water was forcing its way up his nose and down his throat as he began to panic. He would start to choke and he would open his mouth to breathe – only he would suck in a huge amount of freezing water and he would begin to drown.

How could I know that? I had almost been drowned by the sick Phase 3 bastard that had held *me* down. I had been unable to face the swimming pool for two weeks afterwards; I had been so traumatized by the water torture.

The man's struggling began to ease but Foxtail's hold on his head did not.

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### ***Shadow with Nemesis***

"What have you two been up to?" I asked conversationally as the two *ex-Predators* appeared from a side room and closed the door behind them.

"Nothing – just messing about with some water torture," Psyche replied offhandedly.

"Just getting something out of my system," Foxtail added and the two girls headed off down another corridor.

"That was creepy," Nemesis admitted.

I pushed open the door which Foxtail had just closed and I took in the scene before me. There was a large steel tank, about six-foot long and full of water. There was the body of a man floating face down.

"Those two are getting creepier by the day," I agreed as I gently closed the door and I made a mental note to ask the two girls about the water tank later.

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The opposition had thinned slightly, but there was still plenty of ongoing resistance. The *Predator* kids were safe, at least the younger ones were – the older kids were armed and out defending the parts of the facility occupied by their younger kin.

The next problem was finding where Vossen and the other bastards were hiding.

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### ***Jackal***

Something was not right about the room I was in.

The floor showed signs of plenty of foot traffic, but the room was not all that big and most of the feet headed towards... It looked like a set of shelves, only on closer inspection, there was a subtle gap on either side of a foot-foot section of shelving and as I knelt down, I noticed a mark on the floor; it was circular.

It was fairly obvious that the shelves swung out from the right, I just needed to find the catch that released them. I had no idea what might be beyond the shelves, but I figured it was not just Vossen's stash of pornos!

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I found the catch and the shelves motored open, silently. Beyond them was a short corridor and then a set of stairs that descended into a basement. Whatever was at the bottom of the stairs, the lights were on and I was sure that I had seen a shadow move down there. I selected a flashbang from

my belt and pulled the pin. After a count of two, I dropped the grenade down the stairs and turned away.

There was a bright flash and a crash of thunder as the grenade exploded. I heard a pair of screams. Somebody was down there all right! I ran down the steps and I saw two shapes on the floor amid the rapidly dissipating and limited smoke from the grenade. Both shapes struggled to their feet – they were obviously kids. One was much shorter than the other and was also closer – I hit them hard over the head and they crashed to the ground. It was a boy – a familiar looking boy. I turned as the other shape moved to attack – it was a girl. I batted away her pistol and seized hold of her by the neck. I drove hard her against the wall beside a steel door.

“Well, hello, Princess!” I growled.