

That evening
Friday, August 26th, 2016

Vengeance Command Centre

"Mum!"

"Hi, sweetie,"

Stephanie ran forwards and she gave Mindy a big hug.

"It's only been a couple of days!" Mindy pointed out as Stephanie squeezed with one arm.

"Your point?" Stephanie demanded.

"Go on, you little scoundrel!" Mindy laughed as she ruffled Stephanie's hair. "Introduce me to your new friend."

"Mum, this is Yvette; we were trained together."

"Is that so?" Mindy replied, a little surprised. "Friends?"

"You seem surprised," Stephanie growled. "I didn't piss off everybody in *Urban Predator*!"

"Almost. . ." Electra muttered.

"Enough from you!" Stephanie directed as she watched Yvette examine Mindy.

Yvette turned to look up at Saoirse, then back at Stephanie. Finally, Yvette looked back up at Mindy, boring into her eyes.

"I think I know who you are," Yvette began. "You're the person that we were trained to become. You're the person that we were trained to destroy. You're Hit Girl."

Mindy glared at Stephanie who just shrugged innocently. Mindy then moved onto Yvette, giving the ten-year-old girl a death glare. The girl did not flinch a muscle, standing her ground.

"Well, Yvette, you are a very astute young girl. Very brave, too. Can you be trusted?"

Mindy glanced at Stephanie, then at Saoirse and Electra. Each nodded in turn.

"Yes, ma'am," Yvette replied as she looked directly into Mindy's eyes.

"You have a name?" Mindy asked.

"La Terreur."

Mindy laughed out loud.

"Suits you, Yvette; it really does!"

Stephanie laughed.

"The *Psyche* Crew is back together!" Electra called out.

"*Psyche* Crew?" Mindy queried.

"You don't want to know," Saoirse growled sourly as she shook her head in disgust.

That night

Blairhoyle

While Mindy, Keira, and Cassie chatted together, downstairs, the girls all squeezed into the bedroom used by Naomi and Kaitlin bedroom.

Kaitlin rounded on Stephanie and Electra.

"Neither of you finished that story from the other night," Kaitlin complained.

"Story?" Yvette asked.

"I was telling them how 'lectra got her scar," Stephanie explained.

"Ah!" Yvette exclaimed.

"I never got around to telling them how Electra stopped being a Yellow."

Yvette grinned.

"May I tell the story, please?" Yvette asked.

"Oui, vas y," Electra replied. "We helped Yvette with her English, so she returned the favour."

"You ready, mes ami?"

"Oui!" came the response from everyone present.

An unknown location in the USA

Late June 2014

Almost ten days had passed since the adventurous excursion to Virginia.

Stephanie was back at her training while Electra had returned to her duties in The Cage. In fact, Electra was just releasing a young eight-year-old French girl from the cage which she had occupied for two days.

"Get dressed!" Electra ordered coldly.

"Merci, Electra, Stephanie said you were good - I think your time in the woods hardened you up."

"You're a friend of Walker?"

"Yvette; you helped keep our friend alive - thanks."

Electra smiled.

"Hope I wasn't too hard on you - a friend of Steph is a friend of mine," Electra said quietly.

"Haig!"

Electra span around to see an instructor looking directly at her. The next few minutes were a blur as the instructor dragged the unfortunate Yellow from The Cage and into the Dining Room. All sound stopped as two hundred sets of eyes turned to stare at the seven-year-old girl in the yellow joggers and yellow sweat-top. Electra did her best to ignore the stares, most of which showed contempt; she was after all, just a mere Yellow, and not worthy of causing such a disturbance during a very valuable meal.

Three great people from history said that, 'An army marches on its stomach.' - *Urban Predator* was no different and the interruption was only warranted if there was worthwhile entertainment. The instructor released Electra and he smiled as two more instructors entered, one carrying a bag. There was muttering as many of the *Predators* present smelt blood in the air - or at least a strapping. Stephanie herself, was several tables away and she looked warily at Electra who was starting to shake with fear.

"Take off your clothes."

Electra began to cry as she pulled off her yellow sweat-top, kicked off her yellow running shoes, and then pushed down her yellow joggers. There was a collective intake of breath as those nearest took in the various medical dressings that ran from the top of her chest down to her left thigh, plus the additional dressings on her right thigh and her left shoulder. The girl was shaking, as she stood in just her knickers before a hundred *Predators*.

"This little Yellow has proved to us that she does not belong where she is," the instructor called out. "She bested a Phase 2 Predator - two actually. She also killed one."

There was a sharp and collective intake of breath - a Yellow was incapable of . . . well, anything. Even most Phase 1 *Predators* had never done more than hurt somebody, let alone killed anyone. But for a Yellow. . .

"Electra Haig, in recognition of your actions while in the field with Walker, you are no longer a Yellow. You are now a Phase 1 *Predator*."

There was stunned silence as the instructor with the bag pulled out a set of brand-new dark grey joggers, complete with a white T-shirt, and a pair of black running shoes.

"Get dressed!" The instructor ordered and then he ignored the girl as she rapidly pulled on her new clothing that instantly elevated her status. "Another young girl excelled on the same exercise, a short while ago. Walker!"

Stephanie stood up and faced the instructor. There was more crude muttering - she wasn't the most popular girl there; unless she was being strapped naked on a table, of course. Then the instructor began to speak and Stephanie just wished that the floor would open up beneath her.

"Psyche is *miles* beyond the rest of you useless wankers! It is time you all caught up to *her* standards!"

Stephanie blanched. A target had just been metaphorically pasted on her back. She did *not* need any extra attention; far from it.

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Stephanie almost ran out of the dining room the moment the instructors had gone and the bad language had begun to flow. She did not even pause to congratulate (or commiserate) Electra for her promotion. She spent a good hour or so generally blending into the surroundings and avoiding pretty much anybody - even her own 'crew'.

Then, towards nine that evening, she returned to her dormitory only to find that some changes had been made. The glares which Stephanie received as she walked between the beds made Stephanie wish that she was back in that Virginia forest. She reached her bed, surprisingly in one piece, having ignored the vicious and degrading comments thrown in her general direction, only to find that her immediate neighbour was no longer Yvette, it was Electra.

"I'm radioactive enough, without *you* making it worse!"

"Sorry," Electra muttered, knowing that as an ex-Yellow, she was an unknown and not to be trusted until she had proved herself, one way or another.

It seemed that the instructors were not quite done with having fun at Stephanie's expense and making her life hell. Yvette grimaced from her new bed which was now directly opposite Stephanie's. A pleasant change was that Jasmine Summers was now in the bed on the other side of Stephanie.

"Jasmine, Electra. Yvette. . ."

"We've met," Yvette replied.

"Oh, yes - you were incarcerated for setting fire to the Physics Lab."

"It was an accident!" Yvette insisted.

"Welcome to the *Predator* club, Electra!" Ruth said as she and Maxine sat down on Stephanie's bed.

"Thanks," Electra smiled as she got herself ready for bed on the first night of the beginning of her new life.

The following evening
Saturday, August 27th

Vengeance Air Station - Thunderbolt

"What is this place?"

"An old RAF base - RAF Kirknewton. Used only for ATC gliders now. We repurposed an ancient hanger; it was modernised and extended."

As Cassie approached the turn, she slowed and fumbled for a remote. Thirty yards off the road there was a barrier blocking any further progress. Cassie pressed the remote and the barrier raised upwards. The barrier closed after they passed through.

"Security was upgraded in a major way. The facility is black and the ATC know not to draw attention to us. The MOD have plastered their usual not-so-threatening signs around, but we're keeping it low-key."

Cassie turned right before she turned left behind an old hanger and drove along a crushed stone road for about 270 yards before she turned left onto a freshly laid crushed stone road and pointed the Ford Ranger directly at a more modern structure a little over five-hundred yards distant.

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The hanger was large, about 120 feet by 70 feet, and the corrugated iron structure covered an area of about 8,500 square-feet. The 96-foot-wide, main hanger doors faced in a southerly direction onto a large reinforced-concrete hardstanding of about the same area. The perimeter was an eight-foot tall, razor-wire topped, chain-link fence which enclosed an area of about seven acres.

As they approached, the chain-link gate automatically slid open allowing them access.

"That first gate was opened remotely from the Command Centre," Cassie explained as they stopped after twenty-five yards at another gate. "The second gate will only open once the first gate has closed."

"A kill-zone?"

"Eight Claymores - four per side. . ."

"That could ruin your entire day!"

They drove up a dirt track and then across the concrete hard-standing and through the dark, twelve-foot gap in the partially opened hanger doors which then slid noiselessly closed behind them.

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The lights snapped on the moment that the doors were sealed. David Montgomery was stunned as he exited the Ford Ranger and gazed around the interior of the pristine facility. The walls were concrete block, painted white from the top down to about twelve feet off the ground. The rest was a dark red. Several enormous air-conditioning units hung from the ceiling to allow turbines to be run within the hanger while the doors were closed.

The hanger was currently empty of aircraft and the Ford Ranger sat in the centre of the right-hand of two red painted dashed circles on the dark grey, anti-skid surface of the hanger floor. The left-hand circle was a lot larger than the one to the right. Both circles were crossed near the front and back with a solid horizontal stop line. Other white dotted markings led to the hanger doors.

"Two helicopters - one is small, the other much larger," The Chief mused as he examined the markings.

"Yes - the larger one is an AW109LUH and is called *Twilight*. The other is *Scourge* - she is an MD 540F - and she is our light attack helicopter. Over there at the back, we have our munitions storage. To the right, at the back, is the engineering workshop and the right side of the hanger is made up of offices and accommodation."

"When do your charges arrive?"

"*Scourge* is still undergoing advanced testing - *Twilight*, though, she will be here in, oh, five to ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?"

"*Twilight* is on a ferry flight from Boscombe Down. Our pilot has our boss with her."

"Her? You have a female pilot?"

"Yes, we do. The best the Royal Navy has available."

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"*Vengeance, this is Twilight. Requesting landing clearance at Thunderbolt, over.*"

The female voice came from a wall-mounted speaker.

"*Twilight, Vengeance. Clearance granted.*"

"That's the Command Centre talking to the helicopter," Cassie explained. "Once the helicopter closes, the pilot will trigger the landing procedure from the onboard computer. At three miles, the landing pad outside will be illuminated by electro-luminescent strips embedded in the concrete. At one mile, all externally visible lighting will be turned off and the hanger doors will open. You may need these..."

Cassie handed Montgomery a flight deck helmet with integrated communications and NVGs. Quickly, Montgomery and Cassie pulled on the helmets and adjusted the NVGs. Seconds later, right on cue, the lights in the hanger went out and the doors slid open noiselessly. Outside, the landing grid markings were illuminated in a luminescent pure white and the roar of approaching turbines along with spinning rotors was readily audible.

The helicopter was visible in the NVGs but not with the naked eyes as all navigation and landing lights were extinguished.

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The undercarriage was lowered just as the Agusta-Westland AW109LUH crossed the security fence and flared for a landing. Cassie produced two illuminated wands and held them vertically with her arms bent at the elbows. The helicopter hovered over the pad and Cassie then crossed both of her arms with the wands held out to her sides. The helicopter descended until the undercarriage contacted the pad and Cassie began to walk backwards along the solid white line towards the hanger. Her upper arms and the wands moved from horizontal to vertical together and back again.

The almost forty-three-foot long helicopter edged forwards slowly while Cassie and the Chief kept well clear of the thirty-five-and-a-half-foot four-bladed main rotor blades which spun rapidly eight feet off the ground. Cassie continued to guide the helicopter into the hanger until the front wheel reached the correct solid horizontal white STOP line. Then she raised her wands above her head and moved them horizontal at arm's length and then back again above her head. The helicopter came to a dead stop. Cassie held the left wand down to her side and brought the other wand across her throat in a cutting movement.

As the main and tail rotors slowed and came to a stop, the twin turbines whined down to nothing as they were shutdown.

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The hanger doors had begun to close almost immediately the tail rotor had passed inside. The hanger was deathly silent except for the crackle of hot turbine blades and the whine of hydraulic systems shutting down. Finally, the two front hatches on either side of the cockpit swung open and two people emerged. Both wore full flight suits and helmets.

The Chief noticed that the pilot wore a dark grey flight suit and she had a patch on her left upper chest. It read 'VENGEANCE' and 'SCORPION'. Her helmet bore a set of NVGs which were hinged upwards away from her eyes. The Chief also noticed that both were women, even before they both removed their flight helmets and both sighed with the relief of being back on the ground after a three-hundred nautical mile flight lasting a little over two and a half hours.

"Hi, Chief, I'm Scorpion," Scorpion said as she offered her hand.

The Chief took it and shook hands. He felt like he knew the young female pilot but he was not sure where from.

"Chief," the other young woman said with an American accent as she offered her own hand. "I'm Hit Girl."

The Chief looked shocked by the revelation but he nonetheless shook hands with arguably the most violent woman in the world.

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Twenty minutes later, the Chief was sitting on a comfortable seat in the pilot lounge. Across from him, sat Hit Girl and Scorpion. To his right, sat Cassie.

"Time for explanations, Chief," Hit Girl began as she finished putting her, still damp, hair up into a single ponytail. "My name is Mindy, and this is Keira. Cassie also has another name: Nemesis."

The Chief absorbed the information and mulled it over.

"Why are you revealing such information to me? *Vengeance*, *Fusion*; laying them open for me."

"We want you to join us, your son too," Cassie explained. "As you can see, *Vengeance* requires an aviation engineer."

"There's also way too many girls in *Vengeance* - we need some men onboard," Keira added.

"To be honest, since I retired, I have been a little bored. However, I have my family to think of. I know that Craig needs support, and I accept that, but is he going to be put in danger?"

Mindy sighed.

"Yes, if Craig joins *Vengeance*, he will be placed into dangerous situations," Mindy replied candidly.

"Thank you, for being honest, Mindy."

"*Fusion* and *Vengeance* are built on trust. Every member must trust each other, one hundred percent. Honesty is part of what both organisations are built on."

"Okay - I'm in."

The following morning

Sunday, August 28th

Vengeance Command Centre

"Craig, please meet the team."

Natasha indicated each member in turn.

"My brother, Cameron, also known as Drift. I am Crimson. We lead *Vengeance*. In charge of the technical aspects, we have Eric - or Q

as we refer to him. Cassie, otherwise known as Nemesis. Keira, is our pilot, Scorpion. That leads us onto the four bitches from hell! Harper - Polaris. Naomi - Prowl. Kaitlin - Glide. Electra - Rigour. *Vengeance*, please welcome our newest members: David Montgomery and his son, Craig. Craig was a Phase 2 *Predator*. His codename is Stripe. David will be Chief. We have just taken delivery of our first aircraft. *Vengeance* is growing and we will be taking on more important missions. It is a new dawn for us here and with Mindy's assistance, we will grow what we have begun."

The girls began to cheer which Craig found majorly embarrassing.

"Thank you for your welcome, Craig and I are very pleased to be joining such an illustrious organisation."

"Welcome, both of you," Mindy said. "*Vengeance* has grown more than I could ever have expected, back when I first came across Cameron and Natasha."

The twins blushed slightly.

"I will be travelling back to Chicago, tonight, with Saoirse, Stephanie, and Electra. I am enjoying these more regular trips back to the UK and I look forward to many more."

"Will Electra be coming back, soon?" Kaitlin enquired.

"Yes, honey - we just need to complete her training. Give it a few weeks."

Mid-way across the North Atlantic

"You've made an impression amongst the other *Predators*, Electra."

"Thanks, Mindy."

"Stephanie has trained you very well - she continues to surprise me."

Mindy smiled over to where her eldest daughter was fast asleep in a seat.

"She reminds me of that cartoon," Saoirse commented. "You know, 'Transformers: More than meets the eye!' That's Stephanie!"

"Maybe it should be: '*Predators* - more than meets the eye!'" Electra quipped with an evil grin.

"Good one!" Mindy laughed.

Electra was right on the mark.

