

Thursday, September 22nd, 2016

MoD Boscombe Down

Shelter 19

19:58

As the rotor blades wound down, Scorpion jumped out with Raptor and they both moved over towards the rear of the curved bomb-resistant structure to the left of the shelter outside which they had landed.

The hardened concrete structure attached to the rear of the aircraft shelter had a recessed doorway, about one hundred metres from *Twilight*, was secured by a simple cypher lock which took less than a minute to defeat. Scorpion took a deep breath as she hauled open the outer door and passed into a small anti-room before hauling open another door and passing through into the main aircraft storage area. The lights were on and they illuminated a snub-nosed helicopter which sat in the centre of the hanger.

The McDonnell Douglas MD530F Cayuse Warrior was powered by a single Rolls-Royce Model 250-C30HU Turbine Engine. The T-shaped tail towered eight-feet nine-inches above the concrete floor and was painted a mall pale grey. From that Tail to the glazed nose, was 32-foot eight-inches. The helicopter, painted in an overall glossy dark grey with matt pale grey skids, was topped off by its 27-foot four-inch diameter, five-bladed main rotor. Below the cockpit was a black-painted protrusion which housed the targeting sensors and forward-looking infra-red cameras.

Raptor and Scorpion immediately began to pre-flight the helicopter.

..._...

A hundred yards away, the Chief and Jeremy were keeping an eye out, peering out into the driving rain.

"All clear - send him over," Scorpion called.

"Off you go, lad - head straight to the rear of the aircraft shelter and you'll find Scorpion waiting for you."

"Thanks, Chief!"

The boy dashed out of the helicopter and into the driving rain, racing in the direction that his father had headed, just twenty minutes earlier. As the eleven-year-old boy came around the aircraft shelter, he found Scorpion awaiting his arrival.

"Come on!" Scorpion said as she hustled Jeremy inside the capacious hanger which was capable of housing Typhoon and Tornado fighter jets.

Jeremy's young eyes went wide as he took in the helicopter which sat on its skids before him. His eyes were immediately drawn to the weapon wing which had been installed in the rear section of the aircraft. Hanging off the wing were an array of six weapons

occupying all six of the available hard points. The two inboard pylons each held a 7.62-millimetre M134D minigun. Next came a pair of M260 seven-round rocket launchers. Finally, on the tips of the weapon wing were a pair of four-foot long cylindrical launch tubes, each of which housed a single Raytheon Griffin B air-to-ground, precision low-collateral damage missile. Jeremy peeked into the rear of the helicopter where two large magazines housed 1,500-rounds of ammunition for the miniguns.

"Nose out, boy!" Scorpion laughed as she closed and latched the composite door covering up the opening over the weapon wing. "Climb in!"

The cockpit was state-of-the-art with two large full-colour flat-screens mounted in a vertical centre console. Beneath those screens, standard analogue instruments were spread across the console along with the satellite navigation system. Extending between the two pilot seats, a centre console housed two touch-screen computers, radios, and weapons switches. Ahead of both seats was a heads-up-display with a single blue reticule for firing the guns and rockets. In the right seat, Jeremy's father sat, setting up the aircraft's computer and checking out the engines and other critical systems before starting the engine. Scorpion helped the boy into the left seat, strapped him in and adjusted the boy's flight helmet. After connecting up the communications leads, Scorpion closed and latched the hatch.

"Can you hear me, Jeremy?" Scorpion asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Can you hear *me*?" Raptor asked.

"Yes, Raptor."

"From now on, you will be called: Harrier," Scorpion advised the boy.

"Harrier?"

"Yes - your codename," Scorpion explained. "We never use our real names during *Vengeance* activities, nor when wearing our uniforms."

"I understand, Scorpion."

..._...

"Ready to start!" Raptor announced.

"Go!" Scorpion announced as she pulled out all the red safety tags from the weapons and held them up for Raptor to see.

With an increasing whine, the Rolls-Royce gas turbine started up and wound up the revolutions to operating speed. Then the main rotor and tail rotor began to spin, increasing speed to around 6,000-revolutions-per-minute. The sound was debilitating within the tight confines of the aircraft shelter. Scorpion ran for the main doors

where she deactivated the warning siren and flashing amber warning lights before hitting the button to open the main blast doors. Raptor gave Scorpion a thumbs-up as she bolted out of the opening doorway and towards her own helicopter here the Chief was setting the rotors turning just as red lights began to flash around the airfield - Scorpion knew that they were on borrowed time even if she could not hear the sound of the raucous klaxon which was sounding around the airbase.

Scorpion leapt into *Twilight* and she strapped herself in as she studied the instruments before her. In the left seat, the Chief monitored the weapons systems and he listened out for Raptor in *Scourge*. The first vehicle to arrive was a Ministry of Defence Police Shogun which raced up the taxiway and skidded to a halt on the wet surface between Shelter 18 and Shelter 19. He appeared unsure of who to target - the dark, forbidding helicopter about to take-off from outside Shelter 19, or the smaller, well-armed helicopter which was air-taxing out of Shelter 18.

Neither movement was authorised and the two police officers in the vehicle erred on the side of caution as they were faced by the overwhelming show of firepower before them - Gatling guns *always* attracted cautious attention. The Shogun backed off as *Twilight* rose into the air and aimed its nose at the Shogun, encouraging the police car to move faster in reverse. As soon as *Scourge* emerged from the aircraft shelter, both darkened helicopters turned towards the south and increased speed to 150-knots indicated airspeed (IAS).

"You okay, sport?" Raptor asked his son over the intercom.

"Yes - this is cool!"

"Just don't touch anything - we ain't out of the woods yet."

The prophetic announcement was met by a whooping sound in the cockpit.

"Warning: laser targeting detected!"

The computer warning was chilling and Harrier went pale as he saw the warning indication on the right-hand TFT screen. The system indicated the threat coming from their seven o'clock. Raptor pulled the helicopter into a tight turn, not bothering to deploy flares or chaff; the Starstreak high-velocity missile was state-of-the-art and impossible to jam with flares or chaff as it was guided by a human operator's mark one eyeball. The missile had a range of less than four nautical miles and they were hauling arse out of the area at 150-knots - if only they could get out of range and out of the missile's line-of-sight. There was one problem: the missile travelled at over Mach 4 . . .

"Missile launch - evade! Missile launch - evade!"

Northumberland
Northern England

20:23

"Where are we going?"

It was about the twentieth time Kaitlin had asked since they had been scooped up from school with barely a word of explanation.

"England," Cassie replied.

"We're *in* England," Naomi pointed out.

"Yorkshire," Cassie said.

"Cassandra!" Kaitlin growled angrily.

Naomi and Harper stared at their younger companion in shock.

"Oops!" Kaitlin exclaimed. "Sorry - I didn't mean that."

"It's okay, Kaitlin," Cassie replied as she concentrated on her driving. "We're on the way to a new Safehouse. It is off the grid and nobody knows where it is, but Eric, Cameron, and Crimson."

"Cool!" Harper commented. "What about my sister?"

"Keira knows the location of an airfield near to the Safehouse, but not where the Safehouse is. We should be meeting up with Keira and the Chief at the airfield where we'll stow the trucks," Cassie explained.

"You heard anything from them?" Harper persisted.

"No - we're on radio silence; they'll be fine," Cassie replied.

MoD Boscombe Down

19:58

Twilight turned tightly, diving directly for the laser designator which was targeting *Scourge*.

The Chief triggered off a spread of flares which momentarily dazzled the man aiming the missile which veered off course and then self-destructed before it could endanger any civilians on the ground. *Twilight* came around and accelerated into the night, closely followed by *Scourge* before any more missiles could be launched.

Scorpion was incensed by what was happening. *Vengeance* was working for good, so why were they being targeted, literally? What had happened to turn them into the hunted? Answers to her many questions would have to wait until they landed, two hundred nautical miles away, along a deceptive flightpath and close to their fuel capacity, some of which had been burnt unnecessarily to avoid missile fire.

Scorpion was worried about her sister, just as much as the Chief was worried about his wife and son.

Ninety minutes later

Location: Classified

"Where are we landing?" the Chief asked.

Scorpion looked across at her companion.

"I know of it, but I have never been there - it's called *Thetis* - it's on a corner of an old RAF airfield. We land there, secure the helicopters, and I understand that there should be vehicles which we can use to drive to Safehouse Victor Yankee, about an eleven mile drive to the southwest of the airfield."

"How long until we land?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"*Scourge, Twilight* - begin evasion and landing procedures."

"*Scourge copies.*"

The two helicopters flew through the night along their pre-planned deceptive flight plan. They had avoided cities and towns, sticking to open fields. The two attack helicopters were flying without lights or transponders, breaking many Civil Aviation Authority regulations. Their usual cloak informing air traffic control that they were military helicopters had been burnt when Her Majesty's Government had turned on *Vengeance*.

Hiding the sound of two helicopters was all but impossible, however, the weather had closed in and both Scorpion and Raptor were relying on their infra-red systems to see through the raging torrents. As they closed, the helicopters tightened their formation as came into the hover over the airfield, a dozen yards from a set of buildings spread over a five-acre area.

"*Twilight, Scourge, standby for air-taxi.*"

Battle Guy's voice was very reassuring as a section of the largest building began to open - no lights were visible except for the very dim electro-luminescent lighting which framed the growing opening and the markings which illuminated on the ground.

"*Twilight,*" Battle Guy advised. "*Follow the markings and angle to the right. Stop and cut engines on my command.*"

Scorpion edged forwards slowly, dropping the undercarriage and allowing the wheels to come in contact with the concrete but maintaining a hover as she passed through the opening, keeping her centreline on the glowing yellow stripe ahead of her. The stripe angled to the left and right - Scorpion took the right path and then slowed as she saw a red marking across her path.

"Standby, Twilight . . . STOP!" Battle Guy called out. "Cut engines and power down."

Scorpion pushed down on the collective and the helicopter sank down on to the concrete. Scorpion applied the wheel brakes before cutting both engines and slowly applying the rotor brake.

"Scourge," Battle Guy advised. "*Follow the markings and angle to the left. Stop and cut your engine on my command.*"

Raptor edged forwards, dropping the helicopter down, but keeping the skids off the concrete as he followed the same markings as Scorpion had but taking a left turn.

"Standby, Scourge . . . STOP!" Battle Guy called out. "Cut engine and power down."

Raptor halted the forward movement and he allowed the helicopter to settle onto its skids. The power to the engine wound down and the rotors spun to a stop as the brake was applied. Both Raptor and Scorpion were filled with relief as all the tension of the previous two hours eased perceptively. With a hum of hydraulics, the large doorway closed behind the two helicopters and the moment the doors closed and locked, the interior of the building was bathed in dazzling lights.

"Good luck, Vengeance! Battle Guy, out."

"Wow!" Jeremy breathed as he pulled off his flight helmet.

"Tell me about it!" his father added in amazement as he surveyed what was outside his cockpit.

"You getting out?" Keira asked as she slapped a gloved hand on Trevor's cockpit hatch.

"What is this place?" Trevor asked as he climbed down from the helicopter.

"Another one of Hit Girl's super-secret facilities, by the looks of it," David Montgomery offered as he helped Jeremy out of the helicopter.

The inside of the building was stark but functional. Apart from the two attack helicopters which sat dripping water onto the red-painted concrete, there were eight vehicles parked side-by-side a few yards from Scourge. The vehicles varied from a pair of large hatchback Mondeos, through a pair of Audi S8 saloons, and a pair of Ford Transit vans, to a pair of Audi Q7 4x4s. Over to the right, not far from where *Twilight* sat, four large Portakabins, stacked two high, sat on the concrete floor. The upper left of which had 'ACCOMODATION' marked on the door. Keira headed up the external steel steps and swiped her access card through a reader beside the door which clicked open obediently.

"I think we need to get ourselves cleaned up," Trevor commented as he headed back down the steps to get some fresh clothing for him and his son.

An hour and a half later

Location: Classified

"This looks like a shithole," Kaitlin commented as the convoy turned off the narrow road and into what looked to be a derelict . . . shithole.

"I hate to say it but the walking mouth is right," Naomi commented.

"Kind of looks like the location for one of Mindy's hideouts," Harper added.

"What are you doing?" Naomi asked her cousin as the little girl appeared to turn herself upside down and then rummage in her school bag.

Kaitlin reappeared thirty seconds later holding a small Keltec P-11 sub-compact pistol and a magazine which she inserted into the pistol's butt.

"You had that at school?" Harper growled.

"Officially, no," Kaitlin replied as Cassie peered behind the seats.

"You and I are going to talk, young lady," Cassie commented.

"However, right now - that's not a bad idea."

Kaitlin grinned smugly as Naomi scowled.

Vengeance Air Facility: Thetis

Scorpion and the Chief pulled on masks and they both ran down the steel stairs, MP7 personal defence weapons in their hands.

Above them, Trevor and his son, Jeremy, remained in the accommodation. Trevor held an H&K G36C ready to fire, covering the area around the helicopters. As Scorpion and the Chief took up positions close to the main door, Jeremy killed the lights from a panel in the accommodation. The CCTV cameras arrayed around the exterior of the building had observed movement outside and the lights of several vehicles pulling up outside.

Scorpion pressed the button, opening the doors to form a gap of about two feet in width. She stepped forwards, looking out into the driving rain. She could hear footsteps very close and then a pistol appeared out of the rain. Scorpion knocked the pistol up with her weapon and then kicked out sending the pistol's bearer crashing down outside. Scorpion moved slowly, her movements covered by the Chief. The pilot moved forwards and stared down at a small, slim shape on

the concrete just as there was movement in her peripheral vision and she found what could only be a weapon being pushed against the side of her mask.

"Okay . . . that didn't go according to plan!" the slim shape growled as she lay on her back, staring up into the rain.

"Kaitlin?"

"Hi, Scorpion!"

..._...

Once everybody was inside the building and out of the rain, along with the vehicles, the doors were closed and the lighting reactivated.

"Having no comms sucks!" Natasha pointed out.

"We have fresh encryption chips available that use frequencies and algorithms unknown to HMG," Keira advised her friend as she hugged her little sister.

"I'm very pleased that you all made it," David said as he hugged his wife and son.

"So - what do we do now?" Jasper asked.

"I would like to know what the bloody hell is going on!" Olivia demanded.

The thirteen-year-old girl was very unhappy. She had been hauled out of school, thrown in the car along with her sister and step-brother, and then she had endured three hours in a car along with a lengthy stop somewhere in the Scottish Borders. Nobody had so much as noticed that any of them were even there and they were forced to remain in the car.

"Who are these people?" eleven-year-old Christopher asked.

Jessica looked up at her father who nodded and the eleven-year-old girl took a deep breath.

"These people make up *Vengeance*," Jessica explained to her sister and step-brother.

"Keep dreaming!" Olivia exclaimed but then her grin vanished as she looked around her and her eyes took in the helicopters adorned with weapons and the serious looking people who were all looking at her. Then she looked at her sister, "How could you know?"

"I accidentally met them the other week. . ."

"You mean you were snooping!" Olivia growled - snooping was one of Jessica's not so welcome traits.

". . . Naomi, over there, she scared me half to death. Beside her is Kaitlin, Harper, and Keira. Over there is Craig and his dad . . ."

"I'm David, and this is my wife, Amy."

Jessica nodded her thanks to David as Natasha continued with the introductions.

"I am Natasha, and this is my brother, Cameron - we run *Vengeance*."

"You are Crimson and Drift?" Olivia exclaimed.

"You going all fangirl, again, sis?" Jessica grinned. "My sister has a thing for Drift . . ."

"Shut up!" Olivia hissed as her face went pink.

"Beyond Keira, we have Cassie and her mother, Alexandra, plus Eric. Then we have our newest member, Trevor and his son, Jeremy."

"Hi," Jeremy offered as he looked around.

"Don't worry about all the little girls - they're strictly harmless," Craig commented as he walked over to Jeremy. "I'm Craig. Don't worry about hurting any of these girls; they can take it just as much as they can dish it out."

"Ignore the brainless, idiots, Olivia - their brains are in their dicks," Harper grinned as she walked over to stand with Olivia while Christopher headed over to join the boys.

"Let's get the equipment secured and we can head up to the Safehouse," Cameron directed.

Safehouse VY

They used the replacement 'clean' vehicles for the twenty-minute drive to the Safehouse.

The convoy took a right off the road, up a narrow track before they stopped at a large black gate which blocked the access further up the track to the left. Keira jumped out of the passenger seat of the leading Audi and she typed in an eight-digit number provided to her by Eric who sat in the Ford which was stopped behind the Audi. The code appeared to work as a green LED clicked on and the gate began to slide to the left, almost silently. Keira ran back into the dry safety of the Audi and her driver, Natasha drove through the gate followed by the other vehicles.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Harper commented from the back of the car.

"Is that because this is a place setup by Mindy and there could be random mines and other nasty surprises?" Craig chuckled.

"Exactly."

..._...

As the cars pulled up in front of the house, Keira was surprised to see that the building was lit up - almost every window had a light on and the curtains were closed - even the porch light was on.

"Somebody's living here?" Natasha pointed out unnecessarily. "We got the right place?"

"I think so?" Keira replied as she climbed out of the Audi.

Her confused expression was mirrored by that on Eric's face as he pulled a pistol out from the back of his jeans. His movement was mirrored by Keira and Natasha, along with Craig and Harper. In the car behind, Naomi and Kaitlin stood ready, pistols in their hands with Cassie standing beside them, an MP7 at the ready. The rain was still pelting down as Natasha and Keira moved towards the front door. As they approached, the door swung open and a voice called out to them.

"Bienvenue, mes amis!"

..._...

Harper bolted forwards, as did Naomi and Kaitlin. Yvette's eyes went very wide as she attempted to dodge the three pistol-waving girls who flew towards her. She failed miserably and was almost crushed as the three girls squeezed the air out of her lungs.

"Yvette!"

"Oui . . ." Yvette muttered hoarsely.

"Inside, please!" Adrien Agreste insisted and everybody quickly grabbed their kit and ran inside.

"Confused, yet?" Alya Césaire asked as she received some strange looks.

"Mindy suggested that we come over to activate the Safehouse and check all was clear for you. We are not affiliated with *Vengeance*, so we are not being watched," Marinette Cheng explained once the door was closed and everybody was seated in the capacious living room.

"When did you get here?" Cassie asked Marinette.

"We got a call early, this afternoon, and we hopped the first flight from Charles de Gaulle and we landed at Leeds-Bradford Airport, around four," the French vigilante replied.

"Okay," Natasha called out as she stood up. "There are twenty-three of us, so we need to tolerate some close quarters. Most of us know each other but we have some newcomers to *Vengeance*. Please make these people feel welcome - especially as, for some, they have no fucking idea what is going on. As far as we know, we are safe here. I want everybody to get a good night's sleep, please."

Alya stepped forwards.

"I have allocated rooms for you all. The adults will be on the first floor while the children are at the top of the house on the second floor. I have put all the boys in one room and split up the girls between two of the rooms. Some of you will be sleeping in sleeping bags on the floor - sorry, but we are very tight on space," Alya explained.

"Breakfast will be at eight - please get some rest, girls!" Natasha commented as she stared at Kaitlin, Naomi, Harper, Yvette, and then back at Kaitlin.

"Why does everybody look at me twice?" Kaitlin demanded.

"Because you are twice as guilty as everybody else!" Cassie grinned to general laughter.

..._...

Before they turned in, Cassie and Keira went on patrol around the house. As they climbed up the stairs to the second floor, there was expected sound of giggling and laughing. Not surprisingly, Kaitlin was in the boy's bedroom winding up Craig and teasing the two new boys: Jeremy and Christopher.

"Night, Cassie . . . night, Keira!" Kaitlin yelled out as she bolted past and made for the bedroom next door which she was sharing with Yvette.

"Night, boys - you all okay?"

"Yes, thanks, Cassie."

Craig had the single bed while the other two boys were in sleeping bags on the floor.

"Welcome to *Vengeance*, Jeremy and Christopher, you can trust Craig - listen to him," Cassie suggested with a smile as she closed the door.

The two young women moved onto the girls' bedroom at the east end of the house. The new girls, Olivia and Jessica had the two beds while Harper and Naomi snuggled up beside each other in sleeping bags on the floor.

"We have the new girls the beds," Harper pointed out.

"Very nice of you, Harper," Natasha replied. "You two, okay?"

"Yes, thank you," Olivia replied and Jessica nodded.

"I know this must be one hell of a shock for you both - worse for you, Olivia, as Jessica already knew a little bit about us," Cassie offered.

"It's been exciting," Olivia admitted.

"Night, girls."

The final destination was the room which was occupied by Kaitlin and Yvette.

"Stay in bed, please, Kaitlin," Kaitlin said as Cassie opened her mouth.

"Very funny!" Cassie laughed.

"Night, girls," Natasha grinned.

..._...

"All quiet on the home front?" Jasper asked as Cassie reached the kitchen.

"For now, and for as long as Kaitlin stays asleep," Cassie replied.

"What a fuck up!" Jasper commented sourly.

"Tell me about it."

"I suppose we spend tomorrow putting together some sort of a plan to turn this crap about - get you guys back where you belong, defending this country from what ails it."

"We need to figure out who and why before we can get to work," Cassie agreed.

"I'm scared for what might be awaiting us," Keira added. "Facing somebody we know is one thing, but facing an unknown foe and our own Government. . ."

"We are here to help in any way that we can," Marinette offered supportively.

"Anything that we can do," Alya confirmed with a nod from Adrien.

"Thank you," Natasha said. "Vengeance thanks you."

"Vengeance is not alone in this," Marinette said. "Bonne chance à nous tous!"

"Good luck to us all!" Cameron confirmed.

"We're going to need it. . ." Cassie admitted darkly.