

The following morning
Saturday, September 24th, 2016

Safehouse VY

Nobody was in a good mood that morning.

The facts of life had just been dictated by Jasper and Cameron. All the adults handed over their debit and credit cards. Any purchases could be tracked. Cash and replacement credit cards were available for use in the interim until the time that they were no longer being actively hunted. All personal mobile phones had been turned off, the sim chips removed, back on the day of escape. Everybody received a fresh *Fusion* mobile phone with a new sim chip and new encryption routines. The newbies were shown how to use the new devices and instructed never to go anywhere without them - even taking them with them into the shower and the toilet.

Everybody, except for the newbies, was armed with a pistol - even Alexandra. The newbies were to begin their weapons' training that day up at *Thetis*. All four newbies had awoken with a renewed spirit and the harrowing moments of the previous day were forgotten - apart from the vicious bruise on Harper's left cheek which had Olivia cringing.

"I think it improves her looks," Kaitlin quipped.

"Maybe we should slap you, then, improve your looks too, shit-face!" Harper responded.

"Bring it on, Harpy!"

"Okay!" Cassie said loudly as she moved in between the two sniping youngsters.

Everybody would have to change their ways and improve their counter-surveillance skills.

"Well, Natasha is going to have to control her speed," Naomi pointed out.

"Oh, very funny, munchkin!" Natasha growled as everybody laughed.

"Yes, attracting the attention of the authorities is contrary to our intended task of self-preservation," Jasper agreed. "Newbies, after you've finished breakfast, you will all get changed then go with Harper and Craig."

There were four unhappy, but resigned faces. One of them decided to emphasise her unhappiness, muttering under her breath.

"Jessica!" Lynn commented. "Any more mouthing words as foul as that, young lady, and you will know about it."

"Sorry."

Vengeance Air Station - Thetis

"This place is awesome!" Olivia announced as she took in the facility, having not had a proper chance the other evening.

"Don't touch my helicopters!" David Montgomery ordered as he set to work on his charges.

"Your helicopters?" Jeremy challenged.

"Without me, those pilots go nowhere - not even the mighty *Scorpion* can fly a bent bird."

"Point taken," Jeremy conceded.

"We pilots may drive the helicopter but we have no idea what goes on outside the cockpit," Keira said with a wink at her sister.

"We just press buttons and magic happens," Trevor acknowledged while providing his son with a sly grin.

"Seriously, those helicopters don't fly without the expertise of the maintainer. If Chief says the bird is bent, we don't fly," Keira explained. "Those helicopters are his until he says they are safe to fly and only then does he hand them over to us to fly."

"Thanks for the clarification," Jeremy replied. "I think it's cool - bit like Airwolf."

"Airwolf?" Jessica asked.

"It's a boy thing."

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Polaris and Stripe took their trainees over to the far side of the facility where there was a cordoned off space which was fully soundproofed and about thirty feet in length. The ceiling was low - a little over two-metres in height but that was not an issue to any of the six kids occupying the space.

"I want you each to know that if any of you fuck about during this session, you will get hurt . . . do . . . you . . . understand?" Polaris growled.

"Yes, Polaris!" came four voices, together.

"Before you, at the firing point, there are four pistols - they are all identical. It is the SIG Sauer P320 compact pistol, chambered in nine-millimetre Luger. It has a standard fifteen-round magazine and you should each find it comfortable to hold," Stripe explained. "Each of you, please pick up a weapon each - keep it aimed at the floor and DO NOT touch the trigger."

The four trainees stepped forwards and each tentatively picked up a pistol, keeping the muzzle aimed at the floor as instructed and they each kept their fingers well away from the trigger. Stripe began the detailed explanations.

"As you will notice, there is no magazine inserted. Still, we check the weapon for safety before we do anything else with it. THINK SAFETY! Now, none of you know her, but there was a *Predator* called Fury, yes? Well, she had a pistol blow up in her hand - poor maintenance on her part. She almost lost her right hand - for her punishment she suffered a lot of pain; ask her about it sometime, should you meet her."

There was some cringing from the girls as they looked down at their own right hands and the pistols they held.

"First, check the magazine has been removed - in this case, we can obviously see that the butts are empty . . ."

Stripe paused as Overrun giggled but his sharp glare stopped her dead and she bit her lip.

". . . we move on to the breech. Pull back the slide and visually check that the breech is empty. You can also use your finger to confirm that the breech is empty. Release the slide gently back into place. Even though you know that the pistol is empty - KEEP YOUR DAMN FINGER AWAY FROM THE TRIGGER!"

"Now, let's introduce you to some of my little friends - these are nine-millimetre rounds," Polaris began.

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Keira poked her head into the range, about forty minutes later, to find instruction well underway.

The newbies were learning how to load a magazine with live rounds. There was intense concentration on the faces of all four kids as they worked on their task. Harper and Craig were watching every movement and pointing out anything wrong. Where they could, the experienced *Predators* provided hard-learned tips to the trainees, who were coping much better than the day before. Keira was very proud of her little sister and amazed by how well she was able to pass on her knowledge of death and destruction. There were also the beginnings of teamwork amongst them which was good to see.

Keira left them to their instruction while she went back to her tasks. Eric was busy preparing a short-wheel-base Ford Transit as a command van. The vehicle had been hastily fitted with some racking and the electronic equipment was all available from the capacious stores in the facility. Keira began to unpack eight Dell Alienware laptops with varying screen sizes. These were installed into the racks to provide Eric with secure communications and status updates. Eric already had several other laptops collating information and monitoring their security perimeter.

There was a palpable sense of urgency in the facility as everybody knuckled down to do their job. Nobody wanted to remain in hiding any longer than was needed.

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An hour later, they broke for lunch and for a change, there were big smiles on the trainees faces.

"They did good, this morning," Harper confessed.

"After lunch, we actually fire the weapons," Craig said and there were four enormous grins from the newbies.

"Looking forward to that, are you?" Keira asked.

The four nodded eagerly as they dug into their soup and sandwiches. It had been a relatively easy morning and they were all thankful that they were not getting beaten up by their mentors as on the previous day. It had occurred to each of them that they were not being trained to use a pistol for target practice - they were being trained to use the pistols to defend themselves. Nobody had yet talked about killing anybody but they knew that they might just have to put a bullet into another human being to save a life; possibly their own.

It was something which had dawned on each one of them when in bed the previous night and it was preying on their young minds.

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That afternoon, as promised, the trainees were allowed to fire their weapons, one at a time, under the watchful eyes of Stripe and Polaris.

Admittedly, they were new to the task and it had been possible to reuse the same paper target for all four of them as not a single bullet (out of twenty) had struck the target.

"The sights are off!" Ajax complained.

"Is that so. . ." Polaris commented as she appropriated Ajax's weapon before inserting a full fifteen-round magazine and pulling back the slide.

Polaris took up her stance and she fired off three rapid groups of five rounds.

"Go get the target, dipshit!" Polaris ordered Ajax.

The older girl ran down the range and she retrieved the paper target. She was stunned. The paper was torn in three places - you could not tell that fifteen rounds had passed through the target, yet there were three large holes. The humbled girl passed the target to Polaris without comment and with a very meek expression on her face.

"Now you know that I can shoot - it is time for some fun!"

"Yay!" Overrun exclaimed.

"Fun for Craig and me. . ."

"What you going to do?" Forager asked cautiously.

"Yeah," Harrier added warily.

"Well, seeing as Ajax has the biggest gob - let's use her to demonstrate. This is something that a friend of mine taught me - her name is Hit Girl."

"No . . ." Ajax said, her voice rising as she backed away. "You're not doing anything to me that Hit Girl taught you!"

"Boys!" Polaris grinned.

Forager and Harrier took Ajax by the arms and held her steady while Stripe placed a ballistic vest over her head and proceeded to Velcro it tightly around her stomach. The thirteen-year-old girl was feeling very frightened as she was led down the length of the range and then turned to face Polaris who was grinning. Behind Ajax, Stripe placed a mattress on the ground.

"What's that for?" Ajax demanded.

"Now don't move, Ajax," Stripe cautioned as he led the boys back down the range to stand behind Polaris.

"Now, nine-millimetre bullets hurt like hell, but it's more of a sting compared to .40-calibre rounds. A .45-calibre round would probably break a rib or two on Ajax, so I'm sticking with the .40-calilbre."

"She'll like that," Overrun grinned.

"You're a fucking bitch; you know that, don't you?" Ajax yelled down the range.

"I am what I am!" Polaris said as she swept a .40-calibre Glock 22 from beneath the counter top and she fired off two rounds into Ajax's ballistic vest.

There was a loud scream as the girl flew backwards onto the strategically placed mattress. Polaris cleared her weapon before running down the range and dropping to her knees beside Ajax.

"You okay, Ajax?" Polaris asked with concern evident in her tone.

"I hate you so much and I want to really hurt you . . ."

Polaris laughed and helped Ajax back to her feet.

"You looked so stupid, sis!" Overrun called out as her sister came towards her, rubbing her chest.

"Let's see what you look like, then," Stripe commented as she placed an identical ballistic vest over Overrun's head.

"No way!" the eleven-year-old squealed but she gave up struggling and quickly accepted her impending doom.

Three minutes later, the young girl's scream echoed out around the range as she was shoved back by the force of the bullets striking her ballistic vest and she hit the very same mattress where her

sister had previously landed. The two boys quickly followed, both excited about being shot for some strange reason! Once the 'fun' was over, Polaris checked them all out to ensure that they had nothing more than a vicious bruise.

"You each have an idea of what it feels like to be shot. Trust your body armour. Sometimes it is better to take a bullet in the chest than risk losing your quarry. So, if some twat decides to shoot you, you won't be scared about the bullet passing straight through."

"Not so sure about that. . ." Overrun commented.

Early evening

Safehouse VY

"You enjoy yourselves?" Lynn asked as the kids returned that evening.

"Considering I was shot, twice, I feel pretty good," Jessica commented.

"It was really cool, Mum, Harper shot me twice!" Christopher confirmed.

"Did it hurt?" Lynn asked.

"I have a large bruise right between my breasts and, yes, it hurts," Olivia advised her step-mother.

"It's the best thing I've done since I arrived here," Jeremy advised everybody and his dad laughed.

"Well done, all of you," Natasha said to the beaming kids. "Craig and Harper have told me how well you each worked, today."

"As a treat, we have chocolate cake for pudding and you can all have an easy morning, tomorrow," Cameron advised and there was cheering from the youngsters.

When everybody went to bed that night, they were more sore from overeating than from the exertions of the day.

The newbies, especially, were very proud of what they had accomplished.

The following afternoon

Sunday, September 25th

Safehouse VY

Olivia, Jessica, and Harper were sitting on the floor in the living room, talking.

The day had gone well and they were all enjoying some much-needed free time. The boys were chatting with Craig in another room while

the adults kept an eye on the youngsters. The youngsters had a need to be pushed - just not too far. Nobody was enjoying their enforced exile but they were all determined to make the most of it. For the moment, they were safe and that was what mattered. The experienced among them were very concerned about what lay ahead and how long they might have to put their lives on hold.

As well as keeping themselves safe and training the newbies in basic defence, there was also the task of figuring out what the hell had happened! Why was HMG disavowing them? Who was behind it? For the moment, nobody was giving away any answers, despite many questions begin asked. Commander Lawrence was risking his very existence by probing within MI5 - his superior had advised him to be very careful or he might find himself arrested. Commander Lawrence was not worried about his own freedom but he was worried about those he was supposed to be protecting. As such, he was treading very carefully so that he could remain in a position where he could glean pertinent information for *Vengeance* and *Fusion*.

Synthesis had been tasked with digging for information through back channels. There was a general consensus among those who supported *Vengeance* that somebody was manipulating Her Majesty's Government into disavowing *Vengeance*. Commander Lawrence had a team of men and women who were all loyal to him and therefore to *Vengeance*. They were all covertly muddying the waters around *Vengeance* and covering any trails which may lead the 'forces of evil' to their door.

One such person was Debbie Grey who had provided crucial assistance to *Fusion* during their soirée into Europe, earlier in the year.

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Debbie Grey was a tall woman of about five-feet-five-inches in height with auburn hair, and she was generally dressed smartly in a grey trouser suit. However, for her current mission, she was dressed down in blue jeans with a cream blouse and a black faux-leather jacket. Her outfit was finished off with a pair of ankle-length black low-heeled boots. Under the jacket, in the small of her back, she carried a Glock 26 pistol.

The thirty-two-year-old woman drove her unmarked, 'company' Vauxhall Vectra hatchback into the city of York, early that morning. After stopping off for a breakfast wrap and a latte at a convenient McDonald's, she ventured off north of the large city towards the market town of Malton. She was 'searching' for *Vengeance* - at least officially - and unofficially too. A meet had been arranged between herself and a member of *Vengeance*. Her intended task was to pass over some crucial intelligence as well as secure codes and methods of communication. The plan was that if she, and her team, were operating around York, then another team who were *not* pro-*Vengeance* might be allocated there.

After the drive, north, she parked her car in the centre of Malton before heading into the main shopping area.

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"Echo One - Echo Base - you have company at your eleven o'clock."

Debbie never turned her head but she adjusted her eyes to catch sight of her target. She wore dark sunglasses allowing her eyes to dart around and study her surroundings without attracting attention. The target was a young woman, maybe early twenties who was walking through the town with two young girls in tow. Both girls were laughing and giggling as they talked animatedly.

"Echo One - Echo Three - we have the opposing team joining from your two o'clock."

That was bad news. Over to her right, Debbie saw three men - it was the haircuts which gave them away. Ex-armed forces - they were mercenaries to be sure. They were also trouble. It was the first time that anybody had seen the adversaries who were believed behind the current situation involving HMG and Vengeance. Debbie did nothing to attract attention to herself nor her target, instead she braced up, ready for what was about to happen - knowing that it would hurt but it had been deemed the only way.

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"Nemesis, target is dead ahead, black leather jacket and sunglasses . . . hold!"

Cassie slowed as she closed her target. Naomi and Kaitlin heard the same message and braced up but they continued their animated chatting just as if they were two little girls enjoying a day out.

"New players - ten o'clock," Q advised.

Q was several miles away, monitoring the situation through a hack of the local CCTV system. As Cassie closed with their target, she turned to the girls.

"Now, what do you two want to eat?" she asked as if the two girls were her own daughters (not too far off the mark, neither) "At least if you're eating, you're not talking!"

"I want a doughnut," Naomi replied.

"I want a yum-yum - Greggs is just over there," Kaitlin countered.

"Okay - you two are real pains!" Cassie said. "Go!"

The two girls ran forwards, smashing into the unfortunate Debbie, knocking her backwards and down to the ground. Naomi and Kaitlin fell to the ground too but quickly rolling back to their feet. Cassie rushed over to Debbie apologising for the 'accident' before kneeling down beside the fallen woman. Swiftly, Cassie ran her hands around Debbie's body and she seized the pistol, palming it and slipping it into her pocket before bolting away from the three men who were closing in on her and the two girls.

The men began to run after the three of them as they bolted down an alleyway between two shops.

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"Echo One - Command - report!"

Debbie jumped back to her feet, intercepting the three men.

"Are you Police?" she asked. "I think I've just been mugged."

"Fuck off, you stupid bitch!" the front man growled as she shoved Debbie out of the way.

Debbie smiled, she had slowed them down by a few seconds - every little helped.

"Command - Echo One - target attacked me and took my weapon. Target plus two minors heading west.

"Echo One - Command copies. We're checking CCTV now."

Only they weren't!

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Jasper knocked on the door of the 'plumbers' van and the door slid open. Jasper raised his suppressed pistol and he grinned at the two men seated inside the van.

"Which one," he asked.

"That one," one of the technicians said as he pointed at a disk array located below the worktop.

Jasper put a bullet into the indicated array, plus another into an identical one to the left.

"Thank you for your cooperation!" Jasper said as he stowed his pistol and strode off.

A few minutes later, Debbie turned up at the van.

"Our recordings, the CCTV?"

"All gone, boss."

Debbie smiled as she returned to her car.

Jasper

Four hundred yards away, Cassie and the girls ran towards the rendezvous point where, they hoped, Jasper would be waiting to get them out of there.

However, there was a slight problem. Jasper had returned to his Audi to find that the vehicle had watchers - a BMW X5 sat a dozen yards away, two men visible in the front seats and they were watching the Audi S8. They had not seen Jasper's approach and he continued on his

way, striding past the Audi and making for the pedestrian entrance to the multi-storey car park. The Audi was parked on the third level of the car park – the place had been heaving on their arrival.

"Nemesis – transport is unavailable, standby."

"Well . . . *fucking* . . . *make it available!*" Cassie breathed as she ran.

Jasper began working on a plan.

The Girls

Kaitlin ducked and rolled as the brickwork beside her exploded.

The eight-year-old brought up her SIG Sauer P239 Compact and she returned fire, the bullet barely making any noise as the exhaust gases were absorbed by the suppressor. Her target dove to one side, narrowly avoiding the incoming nine-millimetre round. Naomi had drawn her own weapon – an identical SIG to her cousin's pistol and she was covering Kaitlin. Cassie, in turn, had drawn her own SIG Sauer P226 pistol with attached suppressor.

It was to be a, somewhat bizarre, suppressed gunfight!

Jasper

The men appeared transfixed on the Audi – much to their detriment, or so Jasper thought.

As Jasper approached the X5 from the side, he found himself accosted by a man of comparable stature.

"You lost, mate?"

"Just lookin' for me motor."

"Well you're just findin' trouble, 'ere, mate."

Jasper caught sight of the pistol under the man's left armpit. Without warning, Jasper rammed his left hand, heel exposed, into the man's nose, crushing it and then punching him in the throat. The man gurgled as he sank to the floor, blood spreading across the pale concrete.

"Enjoy your rest, *mate!*" Jasper muttered as he moved closer to the X5, pulling a collapsible billy club from his back pocket.

With a flick of his wrist, the club extended. The two men in the X5 never saw his approach, relying on their own watcher who was now suffering painful injuries a few feet away from them. With a swish, the club smashed the driver's side window, showering the driver with shards of safety glass. The passenger recovered quickly from the exploding window and he raised a pistol in Jasper's direction. Jasper was ready – he released the arming handle of a red smoke

grenade and threw it into the foot well at the driver's feet. Within a second, copious amounts of thick, choking smoke erupted out of the canister. The passenger fell out of the vehicle in his haste to escape. By the time he regained his feet and brought his pistol up, he caught a brief glimpse of an Audi S8 vanishing down a ramp.

The man cursed and coughed up more smoke.

The Girls

"*Sleuth is inbound!*" Q advised the team.

"Tell the cunt to get a bloody move on!" Cassie growled in response.

Cassie and the girls were using parked cars for cover as they awaited the arrival of Jasper. Their ammunition was very limited so they took careful shots as, it seemed, were the opposition who had obviously not expected a drawn-out gunfight. The men were good but Cassie was pleased to see that her *Predator* daughters were able to hold their own. Two of the three men had bullet wounds but they were not giving in - at least not when faced with two little girls and a young woman.

It was with great relief that they heard the sound of an engine coming up behind them.

Jasper

The gunfight was running hot and it was time to go.

Jasper spun the car around and reversed towards the girls, keeping his engine away from the gunfire.

"Nemesis - get your team ready; we're leaving," Jasper called over the comms.

Cassie studied the three attackers, figuring a breakout plan. They could not just dash to the car - that, would be suicide. But Jasper had a plan. He drove the armoured Audi directly at the gunmen, bullets pounding into the boot and rear window. He spun the vehicle around putting it broadside between the gunmen and the girls. Kaitlin broke cover first, under the covering fire of Cassie and Naomi. A bullet took the young girl off her feet and she fell backwards onto the tarmac. Naomi emptied her magazine at the gunmen, dropping one with a bullet in the head while Cassie swept up the fallen Kaitlin and threw her into the back of the Audi.

Naomi dived after her cousin as Cassie fired off the last round in her pistol before turning to pull open the passenger door of the Audi. Cassie's eyes went wide as she saw the muzzle aimed in her direction and then a bright flash.

The bullet sped unerringly towards its target.