

Monday, October 3rd, 2016

About 30nm north of Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Position: 55.5248° N 7.2053° W

Course: 099°, Speed: 14 knots, 208.1nm logged

1706 hours

Electra had been bullied and verbally abused ever since the watch had finished.

Olivia was trying every feminine trick that she knew, and then some, to get the desired information out of the ten-year-old, however, said ten-year-old was refusing to cooperate.

"You're such a bitch, Electra!" Naomi growled. "You remind of someone."

"I was taught by the second biggest bitch out there," Electra replied happily.

"Who's the first?" Christopher asked.

"That, would be Mindy," Electra stated to general laughter.

Just a few minutes previously, the yacht had altered course to the east and headed towards Scotland.

"Where are we going?" the ever-inquisitive Jessica had asked.

"Campbeltown - we're picking up a pair of passengers," Cassie had replied cryptically. "Don't ask any more questions as I know nothing more."

Olivia had stared at Electra.

"You know something," she stated.

"Maybe I do," Electra teased with a twinkle in her eye. "Maybe I don't."

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The heckling of Electra only ceased during the evening meal when Cassie lost her temper with Olivia and Kaitlin who were encouraging and demonstrating obscene behaviour with the hotdogs which all were supposed to have been consuming.

"Olivia!" Cassie cautioned. "You may be engaging in *Predator* training and being trained by *Predators*, but that *does not* mean that you have to behave in the same depraved manner that *they* choose to!"

That proclamation caused a wild depraved yell to be emitted by all the *Predators* present with Craig's yell being the loudest, closely followed in volume by Harper's. Olivia, Jessica, Christopher, and Jeremy just laughed encouragingly.

"Damn *Predators*!" Cassie growled as she stalked off the deck. "A bunch of depraved little. . ."

"That's bad, right?" Kaitlin asked.

"Yeah," Craig replied.

"Cool!"

Monday, October 3rd, 2016

NATO Refuelling Pier, Campbeltown

Position: 55.4172° N 5.5711° W

Alongside, 195.7nm logged

2332 hours

It was almost totally dark as the mega-yacht nudged alongside the moorings.

There was a flurry of activity on the dock as she was secured alongside by Royal Navy seamen as fuelling hoses were passed aboard to allow dozens of gallons of marine diesel to thunder into the capacious tanks of the mega-yacht for the greedy engines to feed on. A small van unloaded almost a ton of supplies - mainly fresh food - and various other items which were ferried up the gangway. At the far end of the pier, where it touched the land, the entrance to the pier was guarded by six, heavily armed Royal Marines Commandoes who blended into the darkness.

A car pulled up beside them and recognition signals were exchanged before two people were escorted down the length of the 350-yard pier on foot. One was obviously an adult whilst the other was slightly shorter. Each carried a small backpack slung over one shoulder. As they approached the dimly lit yacht, the shorter of the pair appeared to be getting very excited. At the gangway, they were met by two adults and a youngster.

After brief introductions were exchanged, the extra passengers were led into the lounge where just about everybody was gathered.

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Electra smiled happily as she led her friend into the lounge.

The adult who followed behind, stepped forward and she began to introduce the young girl with her.

"May I introduce, Her Royal Highness Princess Mary of. . ."

"Oh, can it, Ginny!"

Ginny threw up her arms in despair.

"Hi, I'm all that which Ginny spouted - but I prefer just Mary. But you can call me 'H' if you want - less of a mouthful - or . . . considering Electra has already figured it out . . . Belle."

There was a collective intake of breath from all present.

"We would never have guessed," Olivia pointed out, throwing Electra a dirty look.

"You never told them?" Mary asked Electra who simply shook her head. "Thanks."

"Mary," Electra said. "Please meet, *Vengeance*."

Mary smiled enormously.

"You guys are brilliant - not in the same league as Hit Girl, but then nobody is - I'm a big fan of what you do and I think that what you do is amazing. I've dreamt of becoming a vigilante - but as Electra found out, I suck at it!"

"You got that right!" Electra muttered.

"I think it . . . oh, wow . . . I can't believe I'm actually meeting the real *Vengeance*!"

"You finished?" Electra demanded. "Or can I introduce everyone?"

"Sorry. . ."

"You've already met Natasha and Cameron - they're Crimson and Drift, by the way. Then there's Cassie and Keira - Nemesis and our pilot, Scorpion. Craig - Stripe, with his father, David, known as Chief. Harper, Naomi, Katlin, and Yvette - Polaris, Prowl, Glide, and La Terreur - including Craig, they're all *Predators*."

"French?"

"Oui, I live en Paris," Yvette explained quickly.

"Okay."

"Jasper and Lynn are MI5 and are known as Sleuth and Doc. Then we have Olivia - Ajax, Jessica - Overrun, Jeremy - Harrier, and Christopher - Forager. They are all vigilantes in training and they suck just as bad as you. Finally, we have Sarah - Maia; she is our Captain for the cruise and a serving Royal Navy officer."

Electra appeared quite out of breath by the time she had finished.

"Your Highness - I'd have worn my blues had I known you were coming!" Sarah grinned.

"Hello, all of you," Mary said. "Please meet, Ginny. She is my Personal Protection Officer and my mentor."

"Hello. While we're being informal, let me just say that Mary is a nutty teenager who has no idea what she's getting herself into," Ginny put in.

"Thanks, Ginny!" Mary grimaced.

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While the adults moved up a deck to chat privately amongst themselves, the kids all descended on Mary who giggled as she found herself being pushed into a couch while everybody gathered around her - she was a Princess and therefore a curiosity.

The Princess was loving all the attention and above all, she was loving being with *Vengeance*. Meeting Rigour had been the best thing ever - despite the almost getting killed part! However, her visit was not for fun; she had been dispatched by her father on a fact-finding expedition as an envoy to hear *Vengeance's* side of the story. Her father, the Prince, had met with Electra's grandfather the day after Electra and he had vanished off to York. The Prince had taken a great personal interest in *Vengeance*, ever since its inception, and he had been appalled to hear of its treatment at the hands of the Government. The Prince believed in the law - *Vengeance* was innocent until *proven* guilty.

He had been equally appalled by his daughter's seemingly open attempts at getting herself killed. However, he was a man of reality and he knew when his daughter was edging beyond his control - she was a teenager enduring a difficult and ordered upbringing. Instead, he decided to use her and if possible get her trained by professionals before she *did* manage to get herself killed. On that note, he had written a brief letter to 'The Commander of *Vengeance*' advising them that he was placing his only daughter into their care. He went on to say that he expected them to train her in weaponry and close combat. He also expected them to maintain a stern discipline over the girl and as such, he authorised them to treat her just like they would any other member of *Vengeance* and to ignore her lineage. For Cameron and Natasha that had come as a surprise when the letter had been hand-delivered by Ginny who had been

appraised of the letter's content and she was secretly pleased to finally be able to see her mentee being properly controlled.

Finally!

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On the question of accommodation, Electra had had the final word.

"Mary is kipping with Kaitlin, Yvette, and me!"

Ginny just shrugged - she would share a cabin with Sarah in the bow as far away from the girls as possible. However, she gave her charge a stern talking to.

"Mary - no Princess nonsense; you do as you are told. Electra, don't accept any crap from her, understood?"

"Aye, aye, ma'am!" Electra replied as Mary just scowled and the thirteen-year-old found herself being dragged off to her sleeping quarters by Kaitlin and Yvette.

"Night!" Mary called out as she went.

"They should have fun!" Ginny commented.

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It was a little after one in the morning when Hull 67 cast off her moorings and she headed out to sea.

She had a 118-nautical mile voyage ahead of her - about a ten-hour cruise, however, they needed to arrive closer to night-time, so they would spend a day at sea before docking in Douglas, Isle of Man, at around six in the evening. The only issue as they headed out into the Irish Sea was a certain cabin with an eight-year-old *Predator*, two ten-year-old *Predators*, and a thirteen-year-old Princess, all of whom were giggling insanely until they were quickly put down by Keira.

Silence finally reigned aboard Hull 67.

Tuesday, October 4th, 2016

About 4nm south of Calf of Man, Isle of Man

Position: 54.0090° N 4.8150° W

At anchor, 307.4nm logged

1144 hours

Princess Mary swore under her breath and she caught the disapproving look on her protector's face.

"I'm not a Princess, right now, am I?" she grouched - that letter from her father had rankled somewhat when she had been shown it by Natasha over breakfast - she had always had the protection of being a Princess to ensure that she was treated well and had been known to bring on a 'high and mighty' outlook when required.

"You're hesitating!" Electra called out as she kicked Mary's hands out from under her and the older girl fell into a very un-princess-like pose.

Mary would not admit it, openly at least, but she was having the time of her life - for once, she was being treated like a normal teenager and not like somebody special. That morning, she had been awoken by Kaitlin all but yanking

her out of her sleeping bag. Mary had enjoyed the rough handling and she had shoved Kaitlin quite hard to get her away from her – Kaitlin had just laughed. After seeing what the others wore, Mary had pulled on a sports bra, boy shorts, a light purple T-shirt and a pair of matching shorts, plus a pair of dark grey joggers. On her feet, she wore a pair of white trainers and trainer socks. Her long hair was tied back in a doubled up, pony tail.

After breakfast, Mary had found herself allocated to the Starboard watch – Ginny was in the Port watch. As such, Mary found herself standing between Olivia and Jessica while Naomi, Electra, and Craig proceeded to push them to the limit.

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Mary, Olivia, and Jessica were very quickly wishing that the watch would come to an early end and hence their training session.

Electra was pushing Mary hard – she had to, to find out what she could really do. The teenager's skills were good but the girl had a habit of letting her guard down at the most inopportune moments.

"Stop being so damn lazy!" Electra ordered as Mary was kicked to the deck once again to land beside a groaning Jessica.

Olivia soon followed as Craig put her down with a swift kick to her chest.

"None of you are putting in any effort!" Craig almost yelled at the three trainees. "I thought you were skilled, Mary."

"I am!"

"Well, fucking show it then!"

Mary felt humiliated – something she very rarely felt and nobody ever swore at her. The boy was still twelve and that grated, as did being ordered around by the ten-year-old Electra and the nine-year-old Naomi. Mary knew that she had no choice but to endure the battering humiliation if she wanted to learn something and not let her father down.

Even worse, Ginny appeared to be enjoying Mary's fall from grace!

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After a lunch, where a thoroughly disgruntled Mary had concentrated on her food, the Princess found herself on the bridge with Keira, Jessica, and Olivia.

"Thought you'd all like a break from the *Predators*," Keira said kindly.

The three youngsters were all pleased to be able to rest for a few hours, even though Keira kept each of them busy with chartwork. It was also the first time that Mary had been able to see the yacht properly in daylight.

"She's beautiful – I love the colour scheme."

"That she is," Keira agreed.

"How come she doesn't have a name?"

"She's brand new and we weren't intending on using her until she was ready – she's not even armed yet."

"Why are *Vengeance* being hunted?"

"A very good question, Mary," Keira replied. "We killed a man, a couple months back. He was somebody very important – actually, it was Electra who killed him."

He was a very bad person who used his organisation to commit murder, kidnap people - you name it. He was actively recruiting *Predators* and he tried to capture several but we got them out. As far as we can tell, his death was the start of us being disavowed."

"What can we do to help?" Mary asked.

"As far as we can tell, we've done nothing wrong. There's something bigger going on and I'm worried that HMG are far too focussed on us to see the greater picture - whatever that is."

"Maybe that's the plan," Jessica cut in. "Distract the Government while somebody does something bad."

"Wow!" Olivia grinned. "We don't often hear something smart coming out of *your* mouth."

"Thanks, sister!" Jessica scowled.

"She may have a point - a good one," Keira agreed. "We're going after a certain woman - she lives on the Isle of Man; a tax haven."

"You hope she can tell us something?"

"She's involved and she doesn't much like *Vengeance*."

"How come?"

"*Vengeance* played a part in sinking her super-yacht, back in May."

"Oh - that could upset somebody enough to want to kill you, I suppose," Mary mused.

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At four, that afternoon, the combat training began again.

Mary had had enough humiliation so she decided to show everybody what she could really do and after some goading from Craig, she went all out on him. Craig dodged back just as a very well-aimed and powerful kick almost took him off his feet. He was not surprised - he had been informed that Mary held a red belt in Taekwondo - but he had not expected such a ferocious response to his goading. However, he was pleased - if Mary could keep using her skills properly instead of easing off and being lazy, she would be a formidable opponent.

Craig could see the angry look on the teenager's face and he could see into her eyes - he could see hatred as she put everything that she had into fighting him. However, Craig was not going to let up - Mary needed to learn, just as the other newbies did. He did receive a warning glance from Naomi, however, but he ignored her as he deflected a remarkably sly punch and drove back with his own strike which took Mary off her feet - again. Very quickly, she was up off the mat and facing off against Craig, her face red with exertion and pain. There was another warning glance, this time from Electra, but Craig filed it away as he attacked again and again, pushing and pushing.

Mary pushed back but she was exhausted and no matter what she did, Craig attacked again and she was struggling to find any moves which would stop him. She did not want to capitulate but she knew that she would not have much choice. Craig was even grinning - she hated him, she wanted to destroy him . . . but how? She dug deep for her last reserves of strength and she threw herself at Craig. She rolled at the last moment, taking Craig down like a bowling ball to a bowling pin. The boy crashed to the mat, yelling out in surprise and pain,

but he sorted himself out faster than Mary could and he tripped her as she tried to regain her feet.

Mary went flat on her face and she just lay there, sobbing for a moment.

"Fuck this!" Mary yelled as she jumped up and then fled the deck, tears streaming down her face.

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The deck was silent as everybody just stared in surprise at the vanishing Princess.

Craig grimaced - he was concerned that he had gone too far and the disapproving looks which he was receiving from Electra and Naomi said as much. There were raised voices coming from the gangway which led below but it was not possible to understand what was being said. Nevertheless, Mary reappeared a few minutes later, looking miserable. She also looked very unhappy and she was struggling to form words as she stood before Craig and the others.

"I apologise to everybody for my behaviour. I'm here to learn, not . . . not to be a prima donna. Please don't think less of me."

"Don't worry, Mary," Cassie said. "Prima donna is just another term for *Predator* and I have two for daughters - I'm used to it. You're only human, no matter what your lineage."

"Thank you."

Olivia grabbed Mary and pulled her into the group of girls.

"I've been there - I hated the abuse I received from them, but I now know I needed it. This isn't a game - that police station thing scared me half to death. If I can do this, then so can you."

"Thanks, Olivia."

Over by the gangway below, Ginny smiled.

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It had been a roller-coaster ride, the past few days.

First, Mary had been risking her life and almost getting killed. Then she had found an ally in Rigour - yes, Ginny had felt justified in shooting Rigour to protect her principal, but she had held off. Mind you, the body armour would have protected the girl, although the bruising would have been major. Electra was an amazing young girl who had obviously been through a lot. Ginny had been briefed on the *Predator* situation as part of her security briefings - she would have needed to watch out for them at Mary's school. Initially, she had been incensed to find Mary without her mask - she and her family had so much to lose if her face got out as that of an illegal vigilante.

There had not been much time to talk with Electra's grandfather, except for him to promise total secrecy over the activities of Mary/Belle. Apparently, Electra was difficult to keep under control, too. After Electra and Commander Haig had vanished for their emergency trip to the north of England, Ginny had escorted Mary home. Along the way, Ginny had threatened everything from house arrest to being locked up in the Tower of London. Mary knew that she was in big trouble. Only it got worse; her father was awaiting his daughter's return and the heavens quickly fell in on the young girl. Indeed, Ginny had been very lucky to keep her job. The Prince had listened to it all as Mary had poured everything out to her father from beginning to end. It had not been a fun couple of hours

and Mary was in her own personal hell as she went through every time she had put her life on the line and disobeyed her father as well as Ginny.

The following day, the Prince had met up with Commander Haig and they had talked about many things, including *Vengeance* and their wayward dependents. Commander Haig had explained all about Electra and what she had been through while the Prince had listened intently. At the end of the conversation, the Prince had asked where Electra was at that moment. The Commander had gone on to explain about the yacht and the Prince had suggested that Mary and her guardian should be sent to meet up with the yacht. Mary would become an unofficial envoy and she could learn more about what was going on as well as maybe learn how to look after herself properly, assuming that she was intending on refusing to give up being a vigilante.

After a long and private talk with her father, Mary had agreed to the terms - not that she had had much choice - only he had left out anything about her being treated like a mere commoner.

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Electra was amazed at how fast things had moved.

She had thought that her own life would be forfeit, only the news of her friends needing help had overturned everything. The conversation had been short, but remarkably rewarding.

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"I'm sorry," Mary tried.

"Not good enough!" Ginny growled in response.

"Your secret is safe, ma'am," Commander Haig assured the youngster. "You are just as wayward as Electra. Only, we have to go, so this conversation will have to wait."

"My friends are in trouble," Electra said quickly in explanation. "*Vengeance* is in trouble."

"I want to help," Mary volunteered. "I can speak to my father . . . even my grandmother."

"Nothing wrong with help from high places," Electra observed.

"Good luck, Electra," Mary said meaningfully.

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Mary's father, the Prince, had been able to move fast and Mary had been ordered north with all dispatch to meet them in Campbeltown.

Tuesday, October 4th, 2016

Douglas, Isle of Man

Position: 54.1462° N 4.4740° W

Alongside, 345.8nm logged

2007 hours

The operation was well underway.

A crucial component had arrived, just that afternoon, and was being unloaded in the centre of the island. The assault team had left within minutes of the yacht

coming alongside. Marinette and Adrien had been waiting for them with a trio of rented Land Rover Discovery 4x4s. Elsewhere on the island, Eric and Alya were busy reconnoitring the target.

"Assault team, this is Akuma - target is in residence and just settling down with some coffee."

Nemesis smiled to herself as she drove the Land Rover across the island. With her were Stripe, Ajax, Harrier, Prowl, and Polaris. Half a mile behind, Crimson, Drift, Rigour, Glide, and Overrun, followed in an identical vehicle. Just leaving the yacht was the backup team made up of Scorpion, La Terreur, La Coccinelle, La Chat Noir, and Forager. Chief had been dropped off somewhere by Scorpion an hour previously before she had returned for the backup team. Jasper, Lynn, Sarah, Ginny, and Mary (much to her annoyance), would remain on the yacht.

The attack was timed for 21:45.

Kirk Michael
Eastern Isle of Man

21:30

"Why am I even here?" Ajax complained as she adjusted her mask - she hated it.

"The same thought crossed *my* mind," Polaris growled having heard Ajax bellyaching for the past hour. "If complaining was a weapon. . ."

"Bitch. . . ." Ajax muttered.

"We're short on people," Nemesis explained. "You guys have been trained - kind of, so we need you with us. You'll stay on the side-lines, but if things go to hell, then you guys can always come rescue us."

"If things have gone so bad that you need us. . . ." Overrun began.

"Don't say it," Prowl warned. "The attack has enough problems as it is."

"Oh, great!" Stripe growled as rain began to pelt Team One while they lay in the grass, one hundred yards to the west of the property.

One hundred yards to the north of the property, Team Two lay awaiting the go signal. They too were overjoyed to see the rain.

"This sucks!" Glide commented as she lay beside Overrun.

"Could be worse," Overrun commented.

"How?"

"No idea."

Two hundred yards down a bank, to the east of the property, the backup team lay in wait.

"At least we have cover," Forager commented as they all sat beneath some trees, sheltering from the rain.

"Merde!" La Terreur growled.

"All teams - Akuma - attacking in two minutes!"

As the clock ticked down to zero, everybody readied themselves for the upcoming attack. They visualised the plan of the house in their minds and went through

the attack plan ensuring that the execution would be perfect. There would be no allowance for mistakes – they were shorthanded and they were attacking an unknown stronghold with an unknown security force.

But it was nothing that *Vengeance* could not handle.

Hull 67

Mary was in the yacht's state-of-the-art Command Centre.

Jasper and Sarah were operating the systems before them allowing those remaining aboard to listen to the assault teams and in certain cases, view what was going on. Ginny and Lynn were responsible for monitoring the dock in case of any problems with the local authorities. The engines were warm and they could be restarted in an instant for a quick departure.

"I assume you can handle this?" Lynn commented as she handed Mary a holstered Glock 19 pistol.

"She can," Ginny confirmed. "We've used Glocks on the range, although she's never actually fired one in anger."

Mary's face went a little pink at the comment but nobody noticed.

"There's always a first time for everything," Jasper commented as Mary strapped on the holster.

Mary checked the weapon; ejecting the magazine and checking the action before returning the magazine and re-holstering the weapon to Jasper's nodding approval.

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Mary had done everything that she could, to help those preparing to go out.

However, she had been very surprised by the openness as everybody changed and prepared for the evening's activities – nobody seemed to close doors to change or even lock the bathroom door while they showered or weed. At one stage, Olivia was actually standing in the bathroom while she put her hair up without a thought as to who might see her standing there, as naked as the day she was born, having just taken a shower. Also standing around the place, just as naked, were Naomi and Harper as they did each other's hair. There appeared to be a distinct lack of modesty amongst the girls but none appeared to mind. Despite Mary being at a similar stage of physical development to Olivia, she would never strip off in public – nobody, other than Ginny, had seen her naked since she was about six, indeed when Mary had showered earlier that day, the bathroom door had been firmly locked. Mary had then received another surprise, actually a shock, when she had caught sight of Electra drying off after her own shower – the scar . . . Electra had waved it off and briefly suggested that they discuss it later.

Everybody was all business as they pulled on functional underwear and then their combat suits. As Mary understood it, they were wearing the Fusion Covert Combat Suit Mk2 – or FCCS2 for short. The FCCS2 suit would be covered by normal clothing as they travelled but the extra clothing would be shed before the actual attack. Mary recognised the suits to be of the same design to that which Electra had worn in London. Olivia was struggling with hers – apparently, she had never worn one before. Harper had taken pity on the older girl and had assisted her into the remarkably light trousers and top. Cassie had commented

that the suits for Olivia and her sister had been made soon after Jessica had blundered into the Fusion Command Centre, one afternoon.

To be honest, Mary was envious of the team as they geared up in state-of-the-art equipment while she was forced to sit on the sidelines.

Kirk Michael

21:45

The house was large, and was surrounded by over six acres of grounds.

Both assault teams avoided the main gates to the east of the house where there were six men on duty, not to mention the pair of armoured BMW X5 4x4s which sat outside the front of the house on the oval-shaped drive. The men were all armed with modern automatic weapons and they were all physically large. Considering the nationality of the woman who lived at the house, the mercenaries were probably a mixture of Brits and Americans.

Infrared scans had revealed that there were upwards of two-dozen guards in and around the property - the woman obviously took her security very seriously. Backup forces had also been identified including the woman's helicopter, a Sikorsky S-76, which was ensconced on a concrete pad to the south of the house. The pilots for the helicopter were accommodated above the triple car garage, thirty or so yards from their ride.

Six men patrolled the gardens which surrounded the house to the north and east sides - they died first.

Assault Team One: Nemesis, Stripe, Ajax, Harrier, Prowl, Polaris

From the east, six shapes moved through the darkness.

They all stopped at a single signal and as one, they crouched down, their SIG Sauer MPX-SD submachine guns aimed towards the enemy. Prowl and Polaris moved up alone, they monitored the six men who moved around the brightly-lit rear gardens. They were professionals and they kept their weapons ready for instant action. Between the *Predators* and their quarry was a six-foot wooden fence with trembler wire secured. Trembler wire recorded any significant vibrations on the fencing which would then trigger an alarm. However, due to heavy winds over the past few nights, the alarms had been disabled - that fact was confirmed by Akuma.

"Prowl, Polaris - Akuma - you are go; alarms are down!"

The two vigilantes ran forwards, their weapons pushed behind their backs and they both vaulted the fence like they were a pair of scurrying monkeys. They came down into shrubberies which surrounded the interior boundary of the gardens. The heavens were obviously on their side as the rain increased to torrential proportions. Prowl and Polaris each ran towards a man, picking a target which was momentarily out of sight of another man - the rain had reduced visibility somewhat, despite the blazing flood-lighting.

As one, both vigilantes leapt into the air and they slashed their targets' throats, dragging them to the ground, before issuing the coup de grâce with a stab to the heart - not because of any misplaced feeling of mercy, but because the operation demanded quick, silent deaths. Before the bodies had ceased twitching, the vigilantes were expertly stalking their next prey. Within

another minute, two more men were dead, their still-warm blood seeping into the perfectly-manicured lawn.

"Targets down - coast is clear," Polaris reported coldly as she made her third kill of the evening without conscious thought.

Assault Team Two: Crimson, Drift, Rigour, Glide, Overrun

Sixty yards away, to the north of the house, four men were just as dead.

Rigour and Glide ensured that the fifth man died just as violently as his comrades - he never knew what took his life, nor for that matter that he had died at all. The operation was three minutes old and eleven men would never see another sunrise - even better; nobody knew they were dead. The two individual teams reformed and moved towards the main house in tandem from their different directions.

Team Two took the north end of the house, entering what the plans described as the 'day room', on the ground floor. No alarm was tripped as they levered open the double doors from the patio - Q had taken care of that. The house was ultra-hi-tech, to a fault - so much so that everything was 'internet connected' - even the damn fridge!

"Team Two is inside," Crimson reported as they closed the door behind them.

The Study First Floor

The woman was in her late forties with long flowing light brown hair.

She sat at her desk, a pair of ornate spectacles balanced on her nose as she looked through some papers. It had been a long day and she was tired, but there was still plenty of work to be done. The current set of papers were briefing documents concerning an organisation known as *Vengeance*. She hated them with a passion, much as she did with their sister organisation, *Fusion*. She momentarily glanced up at a portrait which hung on the wall above her desk. It was of a giant yacht - *Cummings Delight*, was the name - although, at that moment, the yacht was a permanent feature on the ocean floor in the North Atlantic.

Hit Girl was going to pay - in blood. *Vengeance* had come to the end of the line - yes, their fall from grace was a part of something much, much, bigger, but it was still a pleasant bonus.

Central England

"Sir!"

"What is it?"

"Susan Cummings is under attack, sir."

"From what?" the man demanded as he jumped up.

"We don't know, sir."

"Well, bloody find out then! Hold on . . . how do we even know?"

"Our security systems are integrated, so we're getting her CCTV feed - it just kicked off, sir - the feed, I mean."

"You recording it?"

"Yes, sir."

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The security guard replaced the phone and they sat back to watch the unfolding attack.

Before them, they could see a swimming pool. There were a pair of guards at one end of the long room. They were talking but then they almost jumped and they both stood staring at the ceiling. Neither saw a door being forced open, part way down the room. Neither saw two armour-clad individuals step through the door and approach the guards.

"How the hell. . .? Turn up the volume."

The man's colleague twisted the knob on a set of speakers and . . .

". . . It ain't much I'm asking, I heard him say . . . Gotta find me a future move out of my way . . ."

"Queen?"

Kirk Michael **Isle of Man**

The house was wired with the latest Bang & Olufsen sound system.

A fact that Q had taken to heart and he had hacked the system. He had a selection of fitting tracks to play - the sound of which would cover the assault teams attacking the house. Queen - I Want It All - was a fitting start, and it ably covered Stripe and Nemesis as they broached the swimming pool and took out another pair of guards.

A third guard stepped through the glass doors at the far end of the pool and he froze as he saw a body floating face down in the pool, a red cloud of blood blossoming out from the body. Another body lay to his left - he raised his weapon as Nemesis stood up from behind the bar and she put a bullet in his forehead. Nemesis, Stripe, Prowl, and Polaris moved on, leaving Harrier and Ajax on guard, covering their escape route. Both of the young, trainee vigilantes, were nervous and they preferred being on the outskirts of the danger.

For Ajax, it felt a lot safer and she had no desire to discharge a single round from her weapon.

The Study

Susan Cummings had no idea what was going on - the noise was deafening - and she hated the current track: Europe - The Final Countdown.

She cast an eye out of her westerly-facing windows and through the rain, she saw . . . a body . . . and another one . . . and . . . she grabbed up her handbag and she ran from the study, making for the staircase. She scrambled down the stairs to find one of her men engaged in a gunfight, his weapon pointed away from her into the lounge. She ran away from the man, into the kitchen. Ahead of her, as she ran down a passageway beyond the kitchen, she saw

somebody appear from the swimming pool - the head wore a mask. Cummings fired off three rounds from the Browning pistol she had whipped out of her handbag and she dove down a passageway to the left.

There, she found her flight crew thundering down the stairs from their accommodation. The pilot and the co-pilot both had their pistols out and ready as they escorted their employer out through the garage. Once outside, they were met by two bodyguards and the five of them ran for the helicopter pad and the Sikorsky S-76 which sat ready and waiting for flight. They made it a dozen yards before there was a loud whooshing sound and then the £10-million helicopter exploded, blasting the five people head over heels away from the helipad.

Susan Cummings scrambled to her feet and she stared at her pilot who sagged onto his knees, his chest a mass of blood which was rapidly being washed away by the driving rain but being constantly replenished from his injuries. The co-pilot was probably dead - his severed head lay a number of feet from his body. She was dragged by her two surviving bodyguards back towards the house and the armoured vehicles out front.

High above, the sound of a single turbine engine could be heard.

Scourge

Raptor hauled the McDonnell Douglas MD530F attack helicopter around with ease as he prepared to cut off escape route number two.

The Chief prodded the buttons which surrounded the multi-function display and he switched the currently selected weapon from the Raytheon AGM-176B Griffin Precision-Guided Munition (PGM) and he selected the dual 7.62-mm M134D miniguns as the helicopter lined up parallel to front of the large house. The MX-10D infra-red pod mounted beneath the cockpit saw through the rain and darkness, picking out the warm targets of the BMW X5 4x4s which were being readied for a quick escape.

The helicopter dove downwards before Raptor depressed the trigger on his cyclic and the unmistakeable, gut-wrenching chainsaw sound of the miniguns sending armour-piercing death earthwards, cut through the night before cutting through the two armoured 4x4s and the men standing close by. Only the self-sealing fuel tanks prevented the vehicles from exploding but the devastation was total and the luxury vehicles would never again suit their intended purpose.

As Scourge passed overhead, one or two bodyguards fired off a few rounds but all fell wide of the mark.

Assault Team One: Nemesis, Stripe, Prowl, Polaris

The four vigilantes ignored the explosions occurring outside and the sounds of heavy gunfire.

Q had thankfully turned off the music. He had been scraping the barrel with: Kenny Loggins - Danger Zone! Nemesis made her way into the kitchen first, where she could see a bodyguard just as the lights went out throughout the building. The idiot was worse than slow in the mind as a bright light drew his attentions much like a fly to a bright light. The flashing writing on the screen attracted his attention but he was slow to comprehend the threat. He read the words, several times before comprehension finally dawned, which was far . . . too . . . late.

He turned, raising his automatic weapon, only for a large knife to come towards him, out of the darkness. Nemesis grinned as she yanked her knife out of the man's chest and he fell to the granite floor. She looked at the screen set into the left-hand door of the giant fridge and she chuckled at the flashing words which had so confused the guard.

*You're
fucked!*

Q liked his little games!

..._...

Unfortunately, things started to go a little wrong for the assault teams.

Assault Team Two found themselves pinned down in the lounge by several bodyguards, all armed with automatic weapons. Some men had made an entry behind them into the day room and had them in a crossfire. Assault Team One made a move to assist Team Two, but they met intensive fire from the main entrance hall and they quickly retreated into the kitchen. Then, a bodyguard threw a hand grenade which detonated in the kitchen with a bright flash and part of the ceiling collapsed down on top of Prowl and Polaris, pinning the unfortunate Polaris to the granite floor.

"Ajax, Harrier - we need you both," Nemesis called.

Back in the swimming pool, Harrier ran forwards, but Ajax hung back. She was shaking - the noise of gunfire, the explosions, it was too much for her. Harrier ran forwards down the corridor to the kitchen and he began to dig out the girls while Nemesis and Stripe kept up a barrage of fire with their limited ammunition.

"Ajax - you've got to step up; we need you," Prowl radioed.

Polaris was trapped and Prowl was hurt - neither of them were of any use at that moment. Ajax froze, she did not know what to do. She continued to shake, just as she had been for the past twenty minutes.

"You can do it!" Polaris encouraged.

Assault Team Three: Scorpion, La Terreur, La Coccinelle, La Chat Noir, Forager

At the same time that Team One and Team Two were having problems inside, Assault Team Three received an urgent radio call from Scourge.

"Four vehicles, coming from the south at speed - Team Three standby to engage."

As one, the team stood up and moved forwards up the slope towards the road. They heard Scourge coming closer and then the night was lit up as the twin M134D miniguns cut through the convoy and there was the horrendous sound of vehicles skidding on the wet road and then the tearing of steel as vehicles collided. Once Scourge was clear, Team Three moved forwards to check out the scene.

It was total carnage.

One of the vehicles was wrecked and was firmly embedded into a hedge while another vehicle, probably a Land Rover - it was difficult to tell in the darkness what the shredded hulk used to be - had smashed into another vehicle which had overturned and was lying on its left side. The fourth vehicle had survived remarkably unscathed. Of the sixteen men in the convoy, less than half

had survived the attack and subsequent crashes in any fit state to fight a battle.

"Bad day?" La Coccinelle asked as she put a bullet into the head of a man who was crawling from the wreckage.

The survivors had not expected an ambush and they all died in a hail of gunfire from the weapons of La Chat Noir and La Terreaur. Forager kept to the sidelines without firing his weapon, stunned by the sights before him.

"Team Three reports the convoy neutralised," La Coccinelle radioed.

"*Bien!*" Akuma responded.

With that, Team Three returned to their previous position.

Hull 67

Mary listened to the conversation and decided that she had to do something.

"*Ajax won't engage,*" Nemesis advised.

"*Assault Team Three, standby to backup Team Two!*" Q ordered from his command van.

"Can I speak to her - only her?" Mary asked.

Jasper pressed a few options on a touchscreen and he nodded. Mary grabbed a microphone and she began to speak.

"Ajax, this is Belle. I know how you're feeling. My second time out, it all got out of hand and I was so scared, I weed myself. The man came at me and I froze; he had hurt the woman I was trying to help - I felt disgusted about being weak, for weeing myself - I shot him and I killed him."

"You did *what?*" Ginny exploded.

"I've never told anybody about that," Mary continued, ignoring Ginny. "They need you, just as that woman needed me. I had to step up; so must you. Go, but stay safe."

"*I . . . okay . . . I'll try - promise me you'll tell me the full story?*" Ajax responded shakily.

"I promise."

Ajax

She moved without thinking.

The teenager had weed herself at the sight of the first dead body, so that wasn't a problem. She ran out of the swimming pool, into the rain, and across the lawn, towards the dining room.

"*Ajax - we need you!*"

"*Ajax!*"

Her friends were in trouble. She had to help them. Her friends were in trouble. She had to help them. The same mantra went through her mind, again and again. She reached the doors to the dining room - the glass was gone; shot out by the gunfire. She gripped her submachine gun tightly and she raised the powerful weapon to her shoulder, just as she had been taught. Only then, did she enter

the room. It was like those games Christopher liked to play on his Xbox. She could see the enemy - in her mind she saw the man who had killed her parents, her finger tightened on the trigger, then the vision faded and she saw clearly as she squeezed the trigger . . . once . . . twice. She switched target . . . once . . . twice. Two men dead. She could hear the radio in her ear.

"*Ajax is engaging!*" Stripe yelled happily as he saw Ajax drop two men with apparent ease.

"*Assault Team Three - hold!*" Q ordered.

Then Ajax froze as the two men dropped to the ground - dead by her hand.

..._...

"Fucking move!" Stripe yelled as he saw two bodyguards appear to Ajax's left - her situational awareness sucked!

The boy dove through the air and he shoved the girl to the ground just as machinegun fire traced across the wall behind her. Nemesis ran past, sending deadly fire into the bodyguards who were even then just reacting to the fact that some of their comrades had been gunned down from their blind side. Ajax looked up into the masked face of Stripe who looked down at her. She felt his body on top of her own and her breathing quickened for a moment before Prowl appeared, hobbling slightly. She gamely pulled Stripe back to his feet as she shook her head in disgust.

"Now is not the time for fucking, you two," Polaris growled as she too limped into the room, her combat suit almost white with plaster dust from the collapsed ceiling. "Well done, Ajax."

"Thanks," Ajax muttered as she regained her feet and brought her weapon up.

Assault Team Three: Scorpion, La Terreur, La Coccinelle, La Chat Noir, Forager

"*Assault Team Three - Akuma - stand to!*"

The combined British/French vigilante team started back up the slope in line abreast just as *Scourge* hovered atop them and fired her second AGM-176B Griffin missile of the evening. The electric gates were blown apart, cutting down several men, just as the assault team ran towards the house, crossing the road and gunning down anybody they saw moving.

"Stop!"

A soaked and shivering Susan Cummings glared up at Scorpion who held the muzzle of her weapon mere inches from the woman's head. The woman was muddy from the waist down and Scorpion grinned as she indicated for her to stand. The reluctance and hate in the expression was menacing but it meant nothing to the angry vigilante. She knew what Cummings was to *Vengeance*, Scorpion had heard the story about the seaborne invasion of the bitch's mega-yacht. Crimson and Nemesis had met the woman previously onboard that yacht - before they sank it, of course!

Forager ran ahead and he pushed open the front door, holding it open for Scorpion to lead Cummings inside the house and out of the driving rain. In the lighting which was just snapping on, the woman looked beyond bedraggled.

Central England

The CCTV screen went blank just as the last man fell.

"What happened to the feed?"

"Checking, sir!"

"Well?"

"It keeps coming back with the same error, sir: 'file not found'."

"Well, bloody find it!"

"Yes, sir . . .! Hold on, sir!"

The man turned as the screen came back to life once again. He braced up, unnerved by the masked face with red markings which filled the screen.

"We're coming for you . . . maybe not, tomorrow . . . maybe not, next week . . . but we are coming for you - sleep tight!"

The electronically enhanced voice had hissed out of the speakers loaded with venom, then the screen went blank for the final time.

Kirk Michael

Isle of Man

Cummings found herself being dragged into the lounge where a chair had been procured from the dining room and she was unceremoniously strapped to the chair.

"So, Susan, we meet again," Crimson stated as she studied the unhappy woman.

"I have *nothing* to say to scum like you."

"I have no real desire to even be in the same hemisphere as you, but we all have to lower our standards from time to time," Crimson growled back.

"How's the yacht?" Nemesis asked in an even tone.

The look she received was worthy of Hit Girl herself.

"Too soon?" Nemesis laughed.

"What do you want in my home?" Susan Cummings growled angrily.

"Information, honey!" Crimson replied.

"My lips are sealed."

"No problem - we don't need you."

..._...

The sights were too much for the young girl.

Ajax staggered to the kitchen sink just in time as she ripped off her mask and then threw up violently. Prowl stood by the older girl as she puked, offering moral support. Ajax had just executed her first double-kill and the sight of the blood and dead bodies was something which was hard to adjust to. Prowl felt for the girl - as a brand-new vigilante with little training under her belt, she had done well and she had stood up when needed, despite her fear. Prowl knew what it was to be scared so badly that you could not control your bodily functions. Prowl could smell the urine over the smell of sweat, puke, and God only knew what.

"Hang in there, Ajax."

..._...

It took barely ten minutes for every item of useful technology in the house to be seized and packaged in special Faraday bags which would block all and any electronic signals.

Anything which could be of even the remotest use was also seized and securely packaged. Once everything was gathered together, the items were shoved into packs for the ride back to the yacht. Crimson and Nemesis gathered everybody together out on the front drive where Scorpion, Q, and Akuma appeared with the Land Rovers. Q's Command Van was happily burning, a mile away, down a side road.

"You done?" Susan Cummings demanded as she faced Stripe.

"We are. We're going to leave you now."

"You're leaving me alive?"

"Kind of - I've called the Fire Brigade, so we'll see."

"Fire Brigade?"

"Your house is on fire," Stripe commented.

"No, it isn't," Cummings said as she looked around.

There were dead bodies, severed limbs, some more dead bodies, demolished furniture, and the carpets were soaked in blood, but there was no sign of any fire.

"My mistake," Stripe admitted as he pulled the pins on a pair of incendiary grenades. "Goodnight."

Stripe ran out the door, throwing a grenade to his left and his right.

Hull 67

Mary was pacing the deck as she awaited the teams' return.

Sarah was pacing the bridge as she awaited the return of her sister, as well as the others. She had the vessel ready to move - the engines idling. Then, she was relieved to see them as the vehicles came down the road at speed before stopping sharply. The dock was clear - it was early morning. She counted everybody aboard - more than had departed, hours before, but the figures added up.

Four minutes after the last person had set foot on the deck, the mega-yacht was backing away from the dock.

..._...

The main deck was busy as the many exhausted vigilantes struggled out of their armour.

Naomi and Harper were being checked over by Lynn while Jessica was trying to help her sister, but Jessica herself was very tired. Mary pushed through the crowded decks and she took Olivia into her care, helping her down to the cabin.

"Thanks, Mary."

"I haven't been able to do very much, so I want to help. Come on - sit down, let's get this suit off and then you need a shower . . . you stink!"

Olivia looked distinctly embarrassed.

"Don't be embarrassed, Olivia - I know what it's like to lose control of your bladder. Did it serve its purpose?"

"I killed two men, tonight . . . I didn't want to."

"Don't think about it," Mary said as she pulled off Olivia's top and set to work on her boots and trousers.

Once Olivia was undressed, Mary helped her into the shower and then sat outside while Olivia washed.

"I couldn't have done it without you, Mary."

"Yes, you could; I only helped you along."

"Without you, I might have done nothing and people would have died."

"I did what I could," Mary conceded.

Tuesday, October 4th

Liverpool, England

Position: 53.4279° N 3.1485° W

Alongside, 415nm logged

1547 hours

There had been no training that day.

Everybody who had participated in the attack had been allowed to go to bed and stay in bed as long as they wished. Lunch ended up being breakfast, so most had brunch. By one, that afternoon, everybody was up, having enjoyed a big breakfast and feeling a lot better for the rest and the hot food. After lunch, everybody generally lazed around.

The oversized complement aboard, now numbering twenty-five, had been swelled by the arrival of Trevor Lai and David Montgomery. They had escorted *Scourge* back to the mainland, via Liverpool, on a lorry before joining them aboard the yacht.

"Mum?"

"Yes, daughter."

Kaitlin grinned - she loved being called that.

"Royalty name boats, right?"

"Sometimes, yes."

"How about we get Mary to name this tub?"

"Not a bad suggestion - and a surprising one for you, girl."

"Thanks, Mum!" Kaitlin grinned.

..._...

"Mary - you got a moment?"

The Princess looked up from her intensive conversation with Olivia.

"Am I in trouble?" she asked.

"Feeling guilty?" Ginny asked pointedly.

"Nope."

Mary had been avoiding her protector ever since the previous evening's proclamation.

"No, Mary - we just wanted a chat," Keira said as she led the thirteen-year-old up a deck where Mary was offered a seat.

Sarah, Keira, and Cassie sat down facing Mary.

Behind them stood Natasha and Cameron with Ginny off to one side.

"I didn't do it?" Mary tried.

Ginny laughed.

"You're safe," Keira chuckled before she turned serious. "We would like you, Princess Mary, to name this vessel - you are royalty after all."

Mary was speechless for a moment, her mouth flapping like a goldfish.

"I . . . Me? I would be honoured."

That evening

1800 hours

It was time for a very special evening.

However, before the festivities could begin, there was an important nautical tradition to maintain. Everybody was gathered on the bow, while Princess Mary stood in the eyes of the yacht, as far forward as possible. It was not the most perfect evening - it was cold and overcast - but they would not be on deck for all that long. In her hands, the Princess held a medium-sized bottle of Champagne. As the clock ticked over to 1800, she began to speak, loudly, and precisely.

"I name this vessel: *Caledonia*. May God bless her and all who sail in her."

With that, she brought the bottle down onto the port capstan in the bow. Mary screamed as the bottle shattered and Champagne exploded over the freshly-christened yacht's bow. There was cheering and clapping from everybody aboard as Mary just blushed a brilliant shade of pink.

"I'm very proud of you, Mary," Ginny said with all sincerity.