

**Thursday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Southern England**

The two vehicles approached the house at speed, splashing through the muddy puddles seemingly without a care.

Both were Range Rovers, and both were armoured. They made directly for the house, pulling up sharply directly opposite the front entrance. Doors opened, and men armed with Heckler & Koch G36K assault rifles jumped out. Three men exited each vehicle, leaving the drivers who took the vehicles off down the side of the house. The six men moved swiftly up the decaying wooden steps and through the open front door. Inside, they were met by the masked Drift who escorted the men through into what had once been the main dining room.

Two of the men smiled as they saw two of the room's occupants.

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"Daddy!"

"Grandpa!"

The masked Rigour dived at her grandfather and jumped into his arms while Mary did exactly the same thing; Royal Protocol be damned.

"What are you doing here?" Princess Mary demanded of the Prince as she regained her feet.

"I am here to speak with *Vengeance*, Mary, and to hear what you have found out for yourself aboard *Caledonia*."

While Drift, Crimson, Scorpion, and Nemesis took seats to one side of the table, while the Prince, Commander Haig, the Princess, and Rigour sat down on the opposite side of the table. Ginny along with the Prince's personal protection officer: Sergeant Pete Hind, and two of Commander Haig's SO15 men stood guard around the walls of the room. The rest of *Vengeance* guarded the perimeter outside the house. After introductions, the meeting began.

"I understand you named the yacht, Mary," The Prince commented. "Well done."

"Thank you," Mary replied, blushing at the compliment.

"I also understand that you had a brief visit to the Isle of Man," The Prince continued.

"We shot in and out," Crimson commented.

"Quite," the Prince replied dryly. "Mary, your comments?"

"From what I have observed, *Vengeance* bears no resemblance to the organisation which the Government has seen fit to destroy," Mary began. "Despite being renegades and on the run from the state, they have continued to be the disciplined organisation which has taken down some very bad people. They are not a bunch of psychotic killers as those blowhards in Whitehall suggest. . ."

"Learnt some new terminology I see, Mary?" the Prince commented with a raised eyebrow.

"I believe the term is accurate," Mary said as she blushed badly.

"Unofficially, I might agree," the Prince chuckled. "Please continue."

"They have a strong morality which is unwavering. The teamwork is perfect. Every member of *Vengeance* plays their part from the youngest *Predator* to the adults. They do not kill indiscriminately, however, they are at war. Some

idiots declared war on *Vengeance* and now those same idiots are reaping the fallout from that declaration. William Fraser - as I have understood it, he deserved to die. That man tried to hurt kids younger than me. I heard, first hand, about a program called *Urban Predator*. I talked to the victims of *Urban Predator*. I met an eight-year-old girl who was trained to be an assassin and I've witnessed her and her friends at work. I always thought that I had a hard life, but the troubles of my own life are nothing compared to what these boys and girls have endured at the hands of our own government. Rigour here, is one of those youngsters who had their childhoods destroyed by men like William Fraser. I believe that there is something much bigger going on, Daddy. I see this attack on *Vengeance* as a sideshow, a distraction if you will. Something really big is going down and every one of those bloody idiots in government is too fixated on the hunt for *Vengeance* on spurious charges that they can't see the bloody truth before their very eyes!"

Mary was steaming with anger by the time she had finished her speech, however, her father was chuckling.

"What's so damn funny?" the angry thirteen-year-old demanded.

"You always were a fiery little girl," the Prince replied. "I'm very proud of you; you accomplished your task with distinction, Mary. Shame about some of the other habits you've picked up, but you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs, I suppose. You have come to the exact same conclusion that I have from my own, independent, sources. Commander."

"Indeed, there is a plot brewing. It is getting remarkably difficult to find secure sources to obtain accurate information from. I have been able to identify certain government ministers who have nothing to do with what is going on - however, there are some on their staffs who we believe to be complicit with whatever is going on. The operation to uncover what we believe to be an attempt on the highest sections of government, a coup if you will, has been codenamed: *Tarantula Hawk*. Currently, only those in this room know of that codename and I hope for things to stay that way. My assistant, Sergeant Woodward is currently attempting to track down how far up in the government this traitorous behaviour has reached."

"I may not speak for everyone here," the Prince said in a guarded tone. "But the worst that these people can get is life imprisonment - however, should they meet *Vengeance* before the proper authorities. . ."

"Of course, your Highness," Drift said coldly.

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Outside in the trees, Ajax stood watch with Polaris.

The two girls were getting bored. It wasn't exactly a warm day, but the combat suits kept them warm as the hours wore on. It was early afternoon and the meeting had been ongoing for over two hours. Polaris was hungry and getting grumpy, however, her discipline kept her brain on track and she was the first to hear engines approaching them - several large diesel engines.

"This is Polaris - we have incoming up the track; multiple vehicles."

"*Vengeance, stand by!*" came the radio call from Nemesis as she jumped up from the table, drawing the meeting to a very rapid close.

Those present in the room drew weapons as the Prince and the Commander were escorted towards the back of the building in the direction of where the vehicles were parked.

"Contact, contact, contact!"

The sound of gunfire could be heard a couple hundred yards away - not a big problem as the vehicles were right. . . The sound of turbines and spinning rotor blades drowned out all other sounds as a helicopter came into the hover, almost immediately behind the house. Thick ropes appeared and men dropped out of the helicopter, descending fast to the ground. Within seconds, eight gunmen had cut off their escape route.

"Move!" Rigour ordered as she pushed the Prince away from the exterior wall, her pistol raised and pointed at the impending entry point.

While the Prince appreciated being placed behind somebody in body armour, he recognised the irony that Rigour made a very small human shield. That point was made clear as Crimson took up a position between Rigour and the Prince, while Drift covered his daughter. The Commander received the protection of Scorpion. Nemesis produced a backpack from under the table and she quickly passed out SIG Sauer MPX-K submachine guns and extra magazines to each vigilante present.

"Brought these just in case," she explained as she saw the Commander's raised eyebrow.

"Good thinking, Nemesis!" he commented.

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### ***Polaris and Ajax, Prowl and Glide, Stripe***

Out by the main track, Polaris was firing her own MPX-K submachinegun at the three BMW 4x4s which bounced down the track.

Her attention was briefly taken by the sight of the helicopter and the men who were rapid-roping down to the ground in an obvious effort to cut off the escape route for the Prince and Princess. Further up the track, an ambush was prepared with Prowl and Glide manning four strategically placed Claymore mines. As the first BMW X5 sped past, the two girls squeezed the clackers and there was a succession of four loud explosions and the BMW was pounded by the anti-personnel weapons. However, Glide growled as she saw the vehicle continue for a moment, its tyres wrecked, and the bodywork pounded to hell and back as were the windows. Unfortunately, the tyres were run-flats and the bodywork and windows armoured. Nevertheless, the five men inside were suitably stunned by the explosion that they were unable to immediately respond to the attack and were effectively neutralised - but not for long.

The second X5 drove directly at the two girls as they bounded out of cover and they fled, as per the plan, towards the second ambush point where they dived into a carefully prepared pit and the X5 drove directly over their heads before coming under sustained fire from the heavier weapon of Stripe who was firing a .40-calibre Heckler & Koch UMP submachine gun. The vehicle drove directly at him but crashed into a tree as the driver found his windscreen turning opaque with all the bullet strikes.

The third X5 moved to provide covering fire for their stalled companions and five men jumped out, pouring covering fire towards Stripe and anybody else within range.

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### ***Sleuth and Akuma***

Sleuth steadied his weapon and he held a head in his sight.

The aiming reticule was spot on as he squeezed the trigger of his Heckler and Koch HK241 rifle and death in the shape of a 7.62-millimetre bullet took the head clean off one of the gunmen beside the second X5.

"Target!" Akuma said calmly as she checked the battleground. "Right two-degrees, gunman!"

Sleuth adjusted, and he gently squeezed the trigger again.

"Target!"

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### ***La Terreur, Overrun, and Harrier***

They had one task and one task only.

Should the vehicles be compromised, preventing escape, they were to 'de-compromise' the vehicles. The newbies were very scared, but they were well-drilled, and they were with a veteran. The helicopter had been a rude surprise but not an altogether unexpected one. Two SO15 officers were engaged in a gunfight with four armed men - the remaining four who had descended from the helicopter were entering the house via windows, blasted open by shotgun breaching rounds.

The gunfire from the three masked, miniature vigilantes was very welcome from the perspective of the outnumbered SO15 officers. Under the intensive fire, two of the enemy fell, but one got back up again - he wore body armour. Overrun screamed in horror as she saw one of her bullets strike a man.

"Do that again!" La Terreur suggested.

Harrier was fixated on the enemy - it was kind of like the games he loved to play on his PlayStation - but real combat was an eye opener as bullets whizzed past and he could feel them, smell them, and hear them.

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### ***Scourge***

#### ***Raptor and Chief***

The enemy helicopter, an Airbus H145 T2 was circling the area seemingly oblivious to the small helicopter which flew just above the trees having been hiding in a clearing a few miles away.

Raptor pointed his command directly at the Airbus and he closed before popping up and . . .

"Holy shit!" Raptor breathed as he pulled *Scourge* into a hard right turn as another helicopter popped up from a clearing directly into his path.

Raptor had caught sight of the flashes coming from the twin machine gun mounts and the stream of weapons fire followed *Scourge* as the helicopter fought to avoid being struck. Nobody had expected an attack helicopter - it was another Airbus product, an H145M. It had been a wake-up call which had not been appreciated. The H145M was no match for the MD530F, however, *Scourge* was flying with a limited weapons wing as she was out in daylight. Needless to say, she was not exactly disarmed as she carried a pair of GAU-19B .50-calibre Gatling heavy machine guns, but no rockets or missiles.

Raptor twisted the helicopter around while Chief kept an eye on the other helicopter as it attempted to get a bead on *Scourge*.

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### ***The Prince, the Princess, the Commander, Crimson, Drift, Nemesis, Scorpion, and Rigour***

The explosions as the windows were blasted open had been loud and dust had exploded outwards, covering everything and everyone.

Out of the dust cloud had come four men, with assault rifles to their shoulders. They moved purposely but they did not blanket the room with gunfire – that fact alone indicated that they were a snatch squad. Rigour switched positions and she stuck to the Princess like glue. Crimson, Drift, Nemesis, and Scorpion all opened fire as one, sending the attackers diving for cover.

"We need to move!" Nemesis called out as the attackers returned fire, peppering the walls with neat round holes.

The exit via the door was impossible to make without being gunned down, so, Drift improvised, and he took a leaf out of Kick-Ass' book. With a resounding crash, Drift smashed through the wall behind them and he pulled the Princess and Rigour through with him into the living room. Mary coughed as she tried to empty her lungs of dust and plaster. Her clothing was covered in that same dust and plaster, but she was alive as Rigour pulled her towards the front of the house and hopefully, escape.

"Vehicles secured!" came La Terreur's voice over the radio.

Rigour was relieved as she made for the front door, keeping the Princess behind her at all times.

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### ***Sleuth and Akuma***

They had been forced to move.

Incoming fire was preventing them from being able to pick targets accurately, so they had both slunk back into the trees and once screened from the gunmen, they made for the vehicles and the house. Things were heating up, fast. Sleuth had tried to gain fire support from *Scourge*, only to receive a curt, "Unable!" in response. He could hear more than one set of rotor blades which made him worry about what was happening in the skies above him. They had expected an attack – hence they had come prepared, only they had not anticipated helicopter support – but they had come prepared. As they both approached the house, Akuma pointed and she shouted a warning to Sleuth.

"Attention!"

Four men were moving towards the house just as Rigour pushed open the door. The young vigilante instantly came under fire and she retreated back inside.

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### ***Scourge***

The MD530F was flying fast, with the H145M close behind.

Bullets whizzed past the attack helicopter as Raptor manoeuvred hard, twisting and turning. About two miles northeast of the meeting, Raptor hauled up on the collective as the other helicopter, the H145 T2, appeared directly ahead of him. The civilian aircraft was not as unarmed as he had believed – the single machine gun mount on the port side flickered as bullets streamed in his direction. Raptor had had enough and he hauled his machine around before briefly pressing the 'guns' button on his cyclic as the H145 T2 came into his

heads-up display and the aiming reticule settled on the wildly jinking helicopter.

There was a very satisfying explosion as the twin triple-barrelled GAU-19B .50-calibre Gatling guns spun, sending bullet after bullet into the unprotected airframe before the stream of bullets struck something important. The flaming wreckage of what had once been a £4-million helicopter dropped to the ground below and impacted a large open area, burning furiously. *Scourge* shuddered for a moment and several dull thuds could be heard from aft as five 7.62-millimetre bullets tore into the fuselage, striking the armoured magazine for the Gatling guns and penetrating the aircraft no further. Raptor again hauled his ride around and he shot upwards for a few thousand feet before he twisted *Scourge* in three-dimensions and he dove towards the H145M, aiming his guns directly down through the spinning main rotor blades.

Raptor only had time for a three-second burst of gunfire from the twin Gatling guns, but that was plenty of time for fifty rounds to be fired off, sending fifty bullets down the three-foot barrels of each weapon. One hundred .50-calibre rounds plummeted earthwards, passing through the unfortunate enemy helicopter, shredding the main rotor blades and the fuselage, killing the three-man crew instantly, moments before the aircraft exploded in mid-air. *Scourge* was half a mile away when the machine came apart and well away from any shrapnel.

"Chief - when we get back to base, you are directed to paint two kills aft of the cockpit . . . both sides, please, don't want anybody to miss them!"

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### ***The house***

Rigour shoved the Princess backwards and towards the stairs.

"Move!" the girl yelled, and the Princess ran up the stairs, confused about what was going on as bullets followed in their wake.

The Princess found herself shoved into a room where she tripped and crashed down into a cloud of choking dust which enveloped her, adding to the dust that already covered her from head to toe. Rigour began to send short bursts towards the top of the stairs preventing anybody from coming up. Bullets peppered the wall around Rigour, the odd one striking her armour, but the vigilante stood fast, guarding her principal. Then, after a ferocious couple of minutes, the gunfire stopped, and a voice called out.

"You will surrender before you are hurt, your Highness."

"Fuck you!" Crimson yelled in response.

"Your Highness, we need you to come with us, directly," the voice called out again, ignoring Crimson's response.

"I'm terribly sorry, old man, but I have an appointment, later on, so I could not possibly come with you," the Prince replied quickly in a calm voice.

Rigour saw her charge roll her eyes and shake her head.

"We *will* take you - if necessary, we'll use your daughter as leverage."

"Over my dead body!" Rigour yelled as she lined up a shot and deftly put three rounds in a man's head as he popped out for a look from a room below.

The shooting restarted in earnest as Crimson and Drift gave their own reply to the ultimatum.

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### ***La Terreur, Overrun, and Harrier***

Overrun was running through the mud towards the vehicles.

She fumbled with her magazine, swapping it out for a full replacement. The noise was scaring the youngster, but she was very glad to have Harrier a few feet behind her, covering her back. La Terreur was a few yards away, monitoring her charges as they fought. One of the SO15 men had reached the closest Range Rover and he was about to pull open the door when Overrun stumbled and she fell headlong into the mud. As she rolled out of the mud, something caught her eye - a flashing LED - it was reflected in the water beneath the same. . .

"Get away - bomb!" the young girl yelled, and the man dived away from the Range Rover, without a moment's hesitation, just as the explosives detonated.

The four-tonne armoured vehicle was lifted two feet off the ground as smoke and flames billowed out from underneath. Harrier and La Terreur were thrown backwards away from the blast, both landing in a heap a few yards away. The SO15 man raised his hand and he grinned at Overrun as he rolled over and began to check out the underside of the surviving Range Rover which had been peppered with shrapnel from its twin. The explosion had also blasted a hole in the side of the old house, sending wood, brickwork, and plaster falling inside and out.

The explosion had also produced an escape route which allowed the Prince to be unceremoniously thrust outside by Drift and Nemesis whilst Scorpion and Crimson covered their escape, firing into the approaching enemy who were just recovering from the explosion.

"My daughter," the Prince asked.

"She's with Rigour, your Highness," Nemesis advised him. "She'll be fine."

"Of course."

The surviving Range Rover began to move, and it edged closer through the mud and past the remains of its disabled twin and the rubble from the building. Nemesis yanked open the rear door the moment it came close and the Prince was shoved inside by the remaining SO15 officer who followed behind while the Commander jumped into the front passenger seat.

"Go!" Nemesis yelled as she slammed the door.

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### ***Prowl and Glide, Stripe***

One of the damaged BMW X5s was moving again and as it closed, it appeared impervious to their bullets.

The vehicle bounced through the mud, water spraying up as it zigzagged to avoid the worst of the incoming gunfire. Prowl and Glide had been warned to provide covering fire for the Range Rover which was making a mad dash from behind the house, towards the track away from the combat zone. The X5 raced forwards, making for the very same track in what looked like a blocking move. Stripe fired his heavier rounds at the BMW, but the vehicle ignored the strikes as it came around parallel to the Range Rover, both vehicles plunging through the muddy puddles. It was not long before the two vehicles collided with a loud crunching sound as armour crunched armour. The Range Rover was forced away from the track and the relative safety which it would provide.

The driver of the luxury vehicle accelerated through the mud taking full advantage of the Range Rover's superior off-roading capabilities while the BMW trailed behind.

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### ***Rigour and the Princess***

The two girls were caught upstairs when the explosion shattered the gable end of the building.

Dust exploded from the walls, the floor, the ceiling. Mary used the arm of her jacket to cover her mouth and nose while Rigour checked out the way down – the staircase, attached in part to the gable end, had collapsed into the entrance hall below. Both girls edged around the landing, looking for another way down but their route was blocked by wreckage and neither were strong enough to move the blockage.

"You up for some fun?" Rigour asked her friend.

"Why, the bloody hell, not!" Princess Mary replied with a grin, placing her life into her guardian's hands.

"This might get a little rough. . ." Rigour stated before she threw herself over the remains of the bannister and dropped to the entrance hall below.

The armour-clad vigilante landed in a small gap between sections of wreckage and she quickly came up shooting. Two men fell to her bullets before the remainder shrank back into cover. Then two more jumped out of the wreckage and attacked Rigour. From above, the Princess had an amazing viewpoint. Rigour moved faster than Mary had ever thought possible, spinning and kicking out, catching both men by surprise with her agility. The violent kicking was only Rigour's opening performance as she jumped up onto a heap of broken wood and she landed on the shoulders of the closest man. The man tried to grab the girl, but his throat was slashed through before he could raise his arms. His colleague fared little better as Rigour drove her knife into his left eye.

"Well, are you coming down, or not?" Rigour demanded as she looked upwards at Mary.

"Err, yeah. . ." the Princess replied as she used her own agility to drop safely from the first floor.

"Will you two stop playing!" Scorpion growled from the front door.

"I never play!" Rigour growled as she seized Mary's arm and pulled her outside.

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While all attentions were on the rapidly moving Range Rover as it danced with the devil in the X5, the remainder of the team at the house, including the Princess, all boarded the Audi Q7s once a check had been made for any more explosive surprises. Once loaded, all three vehicles made for the Range Rover and the BMW X5 where the two vehicles pirouetted around one another as the Range Rover made an intense effort to escape.

Then things began to move very quickly and in a totally unexpected direction.

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### ***Polaris and Ajax***

The BMW X5 which had earlier struck a tree had been worked free and it was reversing back into play.



It was reasonable to expect that the vehicle would high-tail it out of the area, considering its damaged state, but now, it made for the two girls who dived out of the way at the last moment into the mud as the vehicle sped past. They thought they were safe as they struggled back to their feet but then they caught a terse warning in their earpieces warning them to watch out. Only the warning was not in time. Polaris never saw the man as he came up behind her and he grabbed the girl around the torso. She squirmed, and she screamed out as she fought back, but the man's grip was like iron and she did not have anything like the strength required to fight the man off.

Ajax ran forwards, but she was punched in the face for her trouble. Despite that, she fought back gallantly while attempting to help her friend escape. Prowl and Glide were running over, slipping in the mud as the damaged X5 slid to a halt beside Polaris, knocking Ajax to the ground. Polaris realised that she could not escape, and that single realisation sent a wave of fear flooding through her body as she was thrust into the vehicle. Just as the door was closing on her, she yelled out in borderline hysteria.

"HELP ME!"

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Prowl and Glide dove into action, the older girl grabbing Ajax and pulling her clear of the BMWs tyres before she was run down while Glide pulled her pistol and jumped onto the vehicle's bonnet, firing bullets into the windscreen, peppering it with chips and cracks but not penetrating.

The BMW surged forwards, throwing Glide into the windscreen and knocking the pistol from her hand. The pistol skittered across the bonnet and vanished over the side into the mud. Glide grabbed hold of the windscreen wipers and she held on for dear life as the vehicle slithered and swerved. Glide lost her grip and she was thrown through the air as the vehicle struck a rut and she came down into some mud before she rolled into a large pool of water from where she did not show any sign of further movement. Prowl fired off the remains of her SIG magazine before pulling her pistol and sending a dozen bullets after the fleeing BMW which was quickly joined by its partner and both raced off down the track.

The second BMW had broken off its assault on the Range Rover after the three Audi Q7s had laagered around the Prince's ride and prevented any further assault by the BMW and its unknown gunmen. Nonetheless, all four vehicles took off in pursuit of the fleeing enemy who had taken one of their own, the moment everybody was aboard - there had been a slight delay while an unconscious Glide had been scooped out of her puddle by Stripe. However, as they stormed off down the track in pursuit, the front Audi very quickly ran into trouble. The Audi's route was blocked by a Dorset Police BMW estate which cut across its path. Nemesis instinctively stomped on the brakes, slithering the large vehicle to a halt on the muddy track at the same time as she leaned on the horn in frustration.

The BMW with Polaris was nowhere to be seen.

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***A little over two hours later***

***Caledonia***

Not surprisingly, Keira was beside herself with both anger and worry.

There had been a very tense standoff with the Police before Commander Haig and the Prince had stepped in to disarm the situation before anybody else was hurt.

The Police had allowed the small convoy to proceed, unmolested, away from the scene. High above, *Scourge* was attempting to track the fleeing BMWs but they had seemingly vanished and they were not seen again. The moment everybody was aboard, the *Caledonia* had cast off her moorings and she had headed out to sea before the authorities decided it was a good idea to prevent their departure. Everyone aboard was stunned by what had occurred. Yes, they had prevented the kidnapping, or worse, of the Prince and his daughter, but in doing so, they had lost one of their own. Nobody had the faintest idea who had taken Harper, where she was being taken, nor if she was even still alive. The mood was sombre as everybody changed out of their muddy combat suits and there were many tears and muttered comments. There was anger too which festered until Natasha eventually voiced what everybody was thinking.

"Why do we keep being found?" Natasha demanded to nobody in particular as she entered the galley after showering.

"We have a traitor amongst us," Keira commented darkly, her eyes red from crying.

"Well it won't be a *Predator*," Craig stated angrily. "It has to be one of the newbies."

Everybody turned to face Olivia, Jessica, Christopher, and Jeremy.

"No way!" Jeremy exclaimed.

"I tried to help her," Olivia pointed out, worried about the way things were going.

"She did," Naomi confirmed, her own eyes red with tears - both for Harper and for Kaitlin who was lying unconscious in a bunk, below.

"We would never knowingly betray any of you," Jessica stated and Christopher nodded.

"Let's go find out," Craig suggested darkly as he headed forward and below, followed by the others.

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First, Craig went through the personal affects and clothing which belonged to Christopher and Jeremy.

He made quite a mess as he went, and he was very angry to find nothing which pointed to either of them being an obvious traitor. No secret listening or transmitting devices - not that any traitor would be stupid enough to keep something incriminating amongst their own possessions, Craig knew. Jasper and Lynn had made their own feelings felt but Natasha had suggested that they keep out of it. After Craig was certain that he had missed nothing in the boy's cabins - he had even made both boys strip naked, so he could check the clothing they wore while Naomi had coldly watched, a pistol in her hand - he headed back aft.

Once in the cabin where Olivia and her sister, Jessica, slept, Craig went to town again. He pulled everything out, going through each item of clothing - bras, knickers, trousers, T-shirts - everything was thoroughly checked, much to the girls' humiliation at the sight of their underwear being handled so callously by a boy. It was only when Craig began to go through Olivia's personal effects that he found something of interest and he grinned dangerously.

"What have we here?" Craig asked rhetorically, then he looked closer at the item he had found. "What - the - fuck!"

Craig turned on Olivia, his facial expression such that Olivia stepped back away from the boy in fear for her life.

*"Traitor!"*

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VENGEANCE

END OF PART ONE