

*Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wondered.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre stroke
Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.*

retribution

/rɪtriˈbjʊːʃ(ə)n/

noun

Punishment inflicted on someone as vengeance for a wrong or criminal act.

Friday, October 28th, 2016

For Police Constable Gwyneth Jones, something was 'going down' but her instructions had been very cryptic, to say the least.

She was to ensure that no civilians were injured during what was described as a military exercise. What the devil the military was doing in Dale in the early hours, she had no idea, but reports were coming in of something going on at the beach north of Dale - something about tanks.

As if!

PC Jones stomped on the brakes and her Peugeot slithered to a halt on the B4327 as something monstrous thundered towards her. She swerved into a small lay-by, just in time, and with a momentous clatter, it was past.

"That was a bloody tank, that was!" she exclaimed as yet another 75-tonne behemoth belted past at almost forty-miles-per-hour.

She was certain that they were exceeding the speed limit by a wide margin - not to mention being way too heavy for the road in question. But how in the devil did you pull over a tank? Before PC Jones could consider that, four more tanks - smaller ones, thundered past.

'Talk about blinking rush hour!' she thought.

Radford Air Facility

Everything was happening all at once as the sound of powerful diesel engines filled the early morning amid the shouts of men and the roar of machines.

Helicopters appeared out of the steadily lightening sky and they dove on the airfield. Radford was appalled by what was happening. He had never quite understood how pissed off the Prime Minister was and how far she might take her retribution. He had expected an attack, but nothing resembling a major assault from the air and sea. He looked up as a pair of objects streaked overhead, the four EJ200 afterburning turbofans driving the pair of Royal Air Force Typhoon

FGR4 fighter/ground-attack aircraft at over 620-knots - Mach 0.95 - at a little over a thousand feet of altitude.

"Fuck!" he growled as he hunkered down in his armoured Panther.

The Royals sprang to life once the assault was visible.

Tiredness and anger passed very quickly and everybody, including *Vengeance*, were ready to fight again. The armoured vehicles belonging to the enemy began to shift backwards, fast, but not before a sinister shape unmasked from behind a nearby hanger and its 30-millimetre chain gun shredded a Husky and blew the right-hand track off a Scimitar before it swiftly vanished from sight as heavy-calibre rounds sought out the armoured helicopter. The sound of the Army Air Corps Apache AH.1 as it accelerated to a different attack position filled everybody with courage - they were no longer alone. A second Scimitar blew up a hundred yards distant as a Hellfire missile from a Wildcat struck it on the turret, destroying the vehicle completely.

Cavalier Two-One and *Cavalier Two-Two* remounted their vehicles and sped off to attack the headquarters buildings. *Cavalier One-One* and *Cavalier One-Two* attacked the remaining pair of aircraft hangers - the other pair, between which they had been hiding were already clear. *Cavalier One-Three* remained between the hangers for protection as Q provided guidance for the teams. *Cavalier Two-Three* remained with *Cavalier One-Three* to provide close protection. Over to the east, there was the resounding blast of a large gun as the L30A1 120-millimetre rifled main gun of a Challenger II main battle tank emitted a single L27A1 armour-piercing fin-stabilized discarding-sabot (APFSDS) round at over 1,500-metres-per-second. A little over a mile away, a Scimitar light tank blew up in a decidedly spectacular fashion as the single round detonated the stored ammunition. The tank accelerated in reverse, the 26-litre 1,200-bhp Perkins CV-12 V12 diesel roaring to power the 75-tonne monster as the main gun sought out a new target. Providing escort for the Challenger II, a pair of FV510 Warrior armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs) flew over the rough terrain, their 30-millimetre L21A1 RARDEN cannons striking out at anything which moved - man or machine.

Driving directly for the airfield, six Vikings of the Royal Marines Armoured Support Group powered across the rough terrain. The twin-cab, fully amphibious tracked vehicles were armed with a .50-calibre M2 Browning and each carried eight Royal Marines towards the combat zone. The first pair came under fire from a Foxhound vehicle with mercenaries in support. The two vehicles slithered to a stop and the sixteen Royal Marines deployed from the rear cabs and took up positions, engaging the mercenaries while the M2 Browning heavy machine-guns engaged the Foxhound. The second and third pair of Vikings were attacked directly by the better-armed Scimitar light tanks and a much more sinister shape which came forth from one of the vehicle maintenance hangers at the north end of the airfield. The four Vikings accelerated for cover as the Challenger II - a virtual twin of the pair nonchalantly laying waste to just about everything on the airfield; one had just squashed a Wolf Land Rover flat - powered in their direction. As of that day, no Challenger II had ever been destroyed in action and to be honest, nobody had a clue how to destroy one - however, two against one were positive odds.

While the three tanks danced around the airfield, everybody else did their best not to get squashed inadvertently while the Warriors protected their superior armoured cousins from attack by the mercenaries with anti-tank weapons.

Aircraft & Weapons Storage

Cavalier One-One: Crimson, Nemesis, Glide, Prowl, Ajax

Cavalier One-Two: Drift, Stripe, Harrier, La Coccinelle, La Terreur

The first hanger was large and had a mezzanine level.

The two teams were required to take the hanger which was protected by at least a dozen bad guys. To make things more difficult, the hanger was occupied with what appeared to be three RAF Hercules C3As in deep maintenance. Crimson and Prowl went first, firing off short bursts of nine-millimetre ammunition from their SIG Sauer MPX submachine-guns. Prowl grinned beneath her mask as a man went down, two bullets blowing apart his face. There was a whoop of joy from Ajax as another guy went down.

"I got one!" she exclaimed happily.

"Bloody hell!" Stripe growled, but he grinned none the less.

With two of their number down, and another wounded, the team protecting the access doorway retreated inwards. Drift ran forwards and he kicked open the access door, dodging the hail of gunfire which welcomed his unwanted appearance. La Coccinelle cartwheeled past Drift and she threw out a pair of disc-shaped devices from her utility belt before diving for cover beside the doorway.

"Feu dans le trou!"

Drift got the message and he dived down as the two flashbangs detonated causing the steel-clad hanger to resonate and clatter from the explosion. La Terreur, Glide and Ajax dove through the access door and they ran inside the hanger, taking cover behind one of the thirty-metre long Hercules transport aircraft. The mercenaries were beginning to recover, and mounting gunfire came in the direction of the vigilantes. Crimson and Drift returned fire, covering Nemesis, Harrier, and Prowl as they ran forwards. They, in turn, provided covering fire for Glide, Ajax, and La Terreur as they moved over to the right to cover more of the large hanger.

Crimson and Drift ran forwards with La Coccinelle and Stripe, penetrating deeper into the hanger.

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Nemesis grabbed Prowl and Glide and the three girls ran forwards under the covering fire of Crimson and Drift.

They bounded up a maintenance stair where the sure-footed and surprisingly nimble Glide scrambled up onto the top of the cockpit before running aft along the spine of the aircraft then onto the starboard wing. The youngster saw a head appear below her and she blew it apart with a single bullet before running along the wing and diving across to the wing of the next aircraft. That took her behind a group of mercenaries who were then caught in a crossfire between Glide and Prowl with the added support of Nemesis. La Terreur joined in the action as she followed in Glide's footsteps before diving off the wing of the second Hercules and she swung around the refuelling probe hanging over the nose of the third Hercules before she landed on top of the cockpit. The French youngster ran along the spine of the Hercules to the wing, targeting more mercenaries from above but receiving a spray of bullets in her own direction, one of which caught the girl in her chest, knocking her backwards. La Coccinelle ran forwards and with vengeance in her heart, she shot down the man who had struck her own girl down.

"Tu as blessé?" La Coccinelle called up to the wing.

"Non, je vais bien."

La Terreaur rolled over onto her front and she scrambled back to her feet waving down at La Coccinelle before running off along the wing.

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As Prowl ran to support Glide, many men appeared on the mezzanine level, towards the rear of the hanger - apparently via a rear door.

Prowl dived down onto the ground as dozens of bullets peppered the white-painted concrete floor around her - despite her training, she was scared, and every bullet strike unnerved her. Then, she felt a reassuring hand on her clothing and she felt herself yanked to her feet and she was pulled up the open rear ramp of the nearest Hercules. Prowl fell to the aluminium deck of the transport and, on turning to look up at her saviour, the youngster was very surprised to look up into the masked face of Ajax.

"Hi," Ajax said simply as she covered the ramp with her SIG Sauer sub-machinegun.

"Hi - thanks," Prowl replied.

"Don't mention it!"

Ajax was very tired, but the adrenalin was flowing and that alone was keeping her going, despite the intense fear which she felt. Her mind was telling her she was in danger and that she needed to find safety - basically, to run away, but she was not abandoning her friends.

"Scared?"

"Fuck, yeah!" Ajax replied.

"Me, too."

"You?" Ajax was astounded.

"I'm a *Predator*, not stupid."

Ajax laughed as she squeezed off a short burst when she saw a mercenary move past the open ramp - she caught him in his right side and the man fell scrambling for safety. Another bullet came from somewhere, putting the poor bastard out of his misery. Ajax jumped as she heard a thump on the top of the aircraft above their heads. They both ran down the ramp and looked up above them. Glide was facing off against a man who was maybe five or six times her size.

They both ran to clamber up onto the mezzanine to then dive onto the top of the Hercules in support of their younger pal.

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Glide was not happy, but she went with it.

Despite a warning shout from Nemesis, Glide had run towards the men and one of them had seen the eight-year-old vigilante as an easy target. The man was large, and his size had always been a bonus when it came to intimidating people. He was an American and he had a thing about hurting people - the main reason behind him being given the boot from the US Army some years before. He was also angry having lost some friends to *Vengeance*, just a few days previously during an attack at sea. The scrawny masked wretch in combat gear before him was a tempting target and an easy one. The girl reached up and over

her shoulders, bringing her hands back down, each filled with a modified climbing axe.

"These belonged to my friend," she growled. "I think it is time to bloody them and I am going to use *your* blood."

"In your fucking dreams, you little whelp!" the man responded with a smirk as he drew a large Bowie knife.

Glide took up a fighting stance at the rear of the wing with the twin axes ready. The man strode towards her down the length of the starboard wing. He struck out with his right fist missing Glide as she dove towards the front of the aircraft, swinging an axe at the man's leg as she passed. The bastard dodged, laughing as he kicked out, catching Glide in the side. The girl yelled out in pain, full of anger as she turned and flew at the man. He was surprised by the swift move and he received the four-inch toothed blade in his left calf as a reward for his hesitation. The man yelled like an enraged bull and he lashed out at Glide smashing the girl down onto the wing. Glide yelled out in pain, but she kicked out and leapt to her feet, just as mad as her opponent. She drove forwards, lashing out with an axe which was parried aside by the blade which came very close to striking Glide - the bastard's arms were a lot longer than Glide's, giving him a distinct advantage.

But before either Glide or her new friend could reattack, there was a tremendous roar from directly outside the hanger which then shook violently before the closest steel wall exploded inwards as the backend of a Challenger II tank burst through striking the Hercules with a glancing blow. The mercenary Glide was fighting fell from the wing, landing on the rear deck of the main battle tank. Unfortunately for the man, the tank kept moving, swivelling the rear away from him and he rolled backwards scrabbling for a handhold, but his hands found nothing as he rolled off the right-rear quarter of the tank just as the backend reversed its movement and then Glide winced as the man was quite-literally squished, a massive pool of blood spreading across the formerly immaculate floor.

"Clean-up, aisle five!" Glide shouted as the tank wrenched itself loose from the hanger and it roared away.

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As the teams left the hanger and remounted their vehicles before heading west, the Type 45 destroyer in the bay, *HMS DUNCAN*, came onto the radio net.

"All Cavalier units . . . all Cavalier units. Air raid warning red . . . air raid warning red . . . Inbound aircraft, two-six-eight!"

The destroyer had broadcasted numerous warnings over all the usual emergency radio channels prior to issuing her air raid warning. However, the rules of engagement issued by the Admiralty were very clear. As the *DUNCAN* accelerated hard to move clear of the land, there was a roar along with a belch of flame and smoke as four Sea Viper surface-to-air missiles blasted clear of the Type 45 destroyer's vertical launch system before tipping over and diving onto the approaching sub-sonic contacts. In the operations room, the Chief Petty Officer at the Sea Viper console monitoring the Sampson radar watched his missiles streak towards the contacts at Mach 3.5 without the contacts even knowing that they were being targeted until the missiles were far too close. The four Airbus H145M helicopters were still over the sea as they jinked, and flares erupted into the sky along with clouds of chaff - all to no avail as pair by pair, the chief watched his four missiles and the four contacts fade from his display.

Four more contacts were closing on the mainland but before the chief could re-engage, a pair of scheduled aircraft flew high over the Irish Sea and the DUNCAN's principal warfare officer ordered, "Weapons tight!"

*Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell.
They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.*

TWILIGHT & SCOURGE

Scorpion was in her element as she led the four Wildcat AH1 helicopters around the airfield with *SCOURGE*.

It was getting difficult see what was going on below as columns of thick black smoke rose into the sky. Below her, the Apache attack helicopters were making a complete nuisance of themselves as they roamed around the airfield, apparently without a care in the world. Scorpion's flight targeted important vehicles and buildings, which included destroying the aircraft control tower with a single well-placed Hellfire missile from *Cavalier Three-Four*.

"Cavalier Flight, this is Sentry one-zero-one you have traffic coming from the north at angels two. Classified as bogey at this time."

The RAF Boeing E-3D Sentry AEW.1 was cruising at an altitude of 35,000-feet, somewhere over eastern England. It's rotating radar dome scanning for hundreds of miles in every direction.

"Cavalier Flight copies," Scorpion responded.

"Devil Flight, this is Sentry one-zero-one, turn onto two-seven-one and increase speed to eight-hundred, maintain angels ten."

Scorpion grinned as she heard two loud claps of thunder several miles away over the water as the two Typhoons punched through the sound barrier as they intercepted the inbound bogeys. The Chief pointed downwards to where a pair of Jackal 2 vehicles zig-zagged their way across the airfield. Readily visible flying from each vehicle was the deep-blue flag with the twin sabres forming the 'V' of Vengeance.

Scorpion dived to escort her comrades towards their target.

Cavalier One-One: Crimson, Nemesis, Glide, Prowl, Ajax

Cavalier One-Two: Drift, Stripe, Harrier, La Coccinelle, La Terreur

Before their arrival, the airfield had been clean, tidy, and very smart.

However, in the past hour, the runway was pitted with the damage from explosives and littered with the components that had once made up a complicated, expensive military vehicle before a shell or a missile had reduced

said vehicle to beyond its component parts. Ajax grimaced as she spied various body parts which while recognisable gave no idea how they had once been joined together. She willed her stomach not to empty itself and embarrass her. She looked up as a helicopter flew past - she instantly recognised *TWILIGHT* and grinned. They slowed as a Husky appeared up ahead with a man holding an anti-tank rocket to his shoulder sticking out of the turret. The man turned as he heard a roar from his right and the man fired off his rocket. The rocket collided with the turret of an approaching Challenger II tank which was fresh from its successful battle with Radford's own Challenger II which had been abandoned by its crew once both sets of tracks had been destroyed. Then the warhead detonated. Talk about a red flag to a raging bull! The tank was undamaged, naturally, but the crew were pissed. The main gun elevated, and the turret came around somewhat speedily. The unfortunate cunt who had fired the rocket only had time to shout a warning to his driver before the massive tank bucked on its suspension as the rifled 120-millimetre gun recoiled backwards. The shell took mere seconds to travel the short distance and it totally obliterated the errant cunt along with his vehicle.

Another Husky appeared, and Scorpion brought *TWILIGHT* around to attack but the vehicle blew up as *SCOURGE* shot past, the M134 minigun still spinning.

Target One

The castle was old, but it had been rebuilt many times over the past two-hundred years.

Naturally, the gates were closed. However, a discretely placed L2A1 Matador rocket fired by Cameron brought down a large section of the boundary wall after a thunderous explosion. As the wall crumbled, the pair of Jackal 2s bounced over the destroyed rubble with surprising ease as they closed the main building. Almost instantly, the teams came under fire as they deployed from the armoured vehicles in their two teams. Obviously, Radford had kept some men behind at his home - or maybe the man himself was present; they could only hope. The wooden front door was taken off its hinges by several breaching rounds from Stripe's combat shotgun. Flashbangs were thrown into the entrance hall followed by bullets from their submachine-guns. Stripe had taken a liking to his newly-acquired Fostech Origin-12 short-barrelled shotgun and after switching out the 8-round magazine for one filled with something more lethal than a breaching round, he took great pleasure in blasting some cunt almost in half with a two-round burst. Ajax grinned as she followed her man - she thought he looked awesome!

Glide and Prowl teamed up with La Terreur as they moved out to search the expansive building. The fighting, a mile away to the north, was easily heard through the thick walls of the 'castle'. The three girls were a perfect team with almost identical *Predator* skills which allowed each one to know the others moves. As such, any mercenary they met seriously wished for a career change - assuming they actually had the time to consider that thought before a bullet scrambled their brains. Glide was angry - she had hoped never to kill again after being rescued from her former life. Only, she had killed so many times since . . . and she hated it . . . but for her dead friend, she would keep on killing, if only to avenge her death. Prowl had seen her cousin's anger growing and the little girl could get really angry when she was provoked. She was doing all she could to protect her cousin but that was not easy. La Terreur surprised a mercenary as he came down a narrow staircase behind the kitchen and Prowl drove her combat knife into the bastard's side, twisting it savagely before La Terreur drove her own blade into his neck.

Prowl fired off two rounds, double-tapping another mercenary in the forehead as she protected her friends.

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Ajax was having the time of her life as she protected the back of her boyfriend.

Stripe blew apart anything in his way, including doors, mercenaries, windows, mercenaries, and the odd door or two. Ajax figured that Stripe was enjoying his new toy just a little too much and he was on round number forty-six - Ajax was counting. She herself managed to get a couple of shots in herself, dropping a mercenary and adding to her own growing personal body count.

"You two okay?" Nemesis asked as she appeared with La Coccinelle.

"No problems here," Ajax commented as she stepped over a freshly dead body.

"Just having fun," Stripe added as he reloaded his monster shotgun.

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It was Glide who found her.

The bitch was with her father and they were both running along an upstairs landing when Glide passed through a doorway and she found herself facing the two most-wanted. She wanted to just gun them down, only, she wanted them to pay and to pay big before anything 'permanent' should occur. Prowl and La Terreur appeared on the scene and they both ran at Radford who snapped off a pair of wild shots with his pistol while Glide faced off against Scarlett who hesitated as she brought up her own pistol. With hardly any effort, Glide ripped the pistol from Scarlett's right hand and threw it down the landing.

"You are going to pay for what you did to Harper, you bitch!"

"I didn't. . ."

Scarlett was cut off as Glide kicked the older girl against the wall. Scarlett screamed at the sharp pain but she knew that she would have to fight if she wanted to live. Her father was receiving kick after kick and punch after punch from the other pair of girls. It was immediately obvious to Scarlett that she and her father could have been shot dead at first sight, but instead the girls before her were playing with them. It was also obvious to Scarlett that they were *Predators*, just like Harper. Scarlett backed up against the wall beside a staircase.

"I . . . I don't want to fight . . . I don't have a weapon - *please!*"

Glide glanced around and she yanked a mounted cutlass down from the wall and she threw it at the girl.

"Now you do."

Scarlett caught the weapon and she felt fear like she had never known before. Her hands shook violently as she took hold of the cutlass properly. Her father had ensured that the fiery thirteen-year-old could look after herself and since the age of seven, she had received training on weapons and some limited Martial Arts. Most she had forgotten as she had not been keeping it up over the past couple of years - however, she had been forced to use some of her skills to control that girl before she had succumbed to her torture and lost the will to fight back. She had not touched a sword since she was about ten - that had been when the allure of fighting had left her and she had rebelled against her

training. Her father had given up forcing her, knowing that his rebellious daughter had the basic skills which she needed to survive.

Glide could see the fear in her opponents face and she was pleased. Her hate for the girl was immense and the mere thought of the girl suffering, at least as much as Harper had, gave the youngster the most amazing feeling. She lazily moved the cutlass, just enough to threaten but not hurt - too much. Hit Girl called it 'playing with your food', much like a cat would with a freshly caught mouse. Glide actually laughed as the tip of her cutlass ripped open the girl's blouse, drawing blood, and causing the girl to scream out in pain. Glide struck again - more blood, and another cut - and again, slashing the girl's jeans and ripping open her left thigh. The girl had had enough and with tears of frustration spilling down her face, she attacked. She brought the heavy cutlass down fast, just missing Glide but giving the younger girl something to think about as she jumped backwards and to one side.

Glide kicked Scarlett in the stomach sending the older girl flying backwards and into the wooden banisters which did not stop her momentum as she tumbled over the banister and fell down the stairs with a thundering crash.

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Glide looked at her partners who were busy attacking Radford before she dived over the bannister and dropped down onto the stairs, landing like a cat.

Scarlett Radford was in a lot of pain. Her bottom and her shoulder blades hurt from where they had struck the hardwood staircase as she had slid and rolled down to the floor below. The thirteen-year-old lay on her front sobbing, in too much pain to move. She hoped that it was all over and that she would be shown some mercy . . . only, her torture was not quite ended. With a scream, she felt her long red hair being yanked backwards, and she had no choice but to sit back onto her bottom as her head was yanked backward so that she was looking up into a face mask trimmed with black and blue. Scarlett shook with fear as she looked for any form of respite in the mask but all she found was a total lack of any emotion whatsoever - that was when the girl lost control of her bladder and she felt intense shame as the warmth spread through her jeans.

"Get up!" Glide growled in her electronically enhanced voice which frightened the older girl and to make things worse, the eyes glowed a dull green in the semidarkness of the landing where she sat in the warmth of her own urine. "Get up or I kill you now!"

Scarlett shook from head to toe as she struggled to her feet, feeling warm liquid running down the inside of her jeans.

"Pick it up."

Scarlett shook her head as her cutlass was kicked towards her. Reluctantly, she picked up the blade and she faced off against the much shorter girl. She had hoped that her father would come for her, but he was still fighting up above and she was alone. Then she heard his voice as she fought off the masked bitch.

"Scarlett!"

"DADDY!"

There was a fusillade of gunfire from above them and for a moment, she glimpsed her father as he called down again.

"I'm sorry."

"DADDY!"

He was leaving her! She was astounded. He had not been the best father, ever, but he was still her father and . . . *he had left her*. Her father had distracted her, and she had not noticed that Glide appeared to have tired of any more torture. Scarlett turned back to the fight and she saw the opposing cutlass weeping horizontally towards her. It was like slow motion to her and then like watching a horror film as she saw the blade coming into contact with her right wrist. The blade bit deep into the flesh and bone, severing the hand just above the right wrist. The girl screamed as the effects of the assault on her limb struck her nervous system before her pain centres were instantly overwhelmed. She was mesmerised as she stared down at her own hand as it fell to the ground, seemingly in slow motion, still clutching the cutlass. She sank to the floor, onto her knees before finding herself on her bottom. Her wrist looked weird and blood was pumping out and the sight intrigued her overwhelmed mind. Then she snapped back to reality and the noise, the screaming. It was her own screaming, then her mouth was grabbed by a hand and she stopped screaming.

"I am not going to kill you - that would be too good for you, bitch. Every time you look at where your hand was, each time you go to wipe your fucking twat, you will remember Harper."

The voice faded and then she felt somebody lying her down but then . . . nothing.

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Prowl and La Terreur had enjoyed the fight with Radford, only his goons had appeared at the last minute cutting off their fun.

However, they had dropped a pair of those goons before they had called in and reported Radford's escape. They had watched him climb into an armoured Range Rover alone - he had run out of goons - and then the bastard drove off towards the south. Q received the alert and he immediately notified Scorpion - she was the first port of call for everything concerning Radford. The news that Radford was in the open was the best news that the young pilot had heard all day. She had a single Hellfire missile with his name on it and it was ready to launch - she just needed a target. After a short alteration of course, she quickly identified the fleeing Range Rover as it raced south towards St Anne's Head and what could only be a helicopter sitting on the helipad close to the lighthouse.

However, that situation soon resolved itself. Scorpion looked upwards as her eyes were attracted to a flash and then the helicopter sitting on the helipad beside the lighthouse exploded as a Hellfire missile fired from a Reaper drone, orbiting thousands of feet above her, struck the aircraft, destroying it in a cloud of flames. The explosion infuriated the man in the fleeing Range Rover. He had been outmanoeuvred at every turn by those *Vengeance* bastards. He had lost a valuable container ship - he was still very angry about that - and just that morning he had lost dozens of men and his entire organisation.

He had nowhere left to go, so he slowed slightly as he gathered his thoughts.

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High above, the Chief checked the FLIR and he pressed a few buttons on the fire control computer.

"Ready," he commented.

"*Ratchet Force*, Scorpion, I have business for you. Ground target moving at speed south of Target One, lasing on fourteen."

The pair of Challenger II main battle tanks of The King's Royal Hussars, 12th Armoured Infantry Brigade had been enjoying their morning and between squishing

bad guys and destroying enemy vehicles, they had accomplished their objectives and their mounts were undamaged. Without hesitation, the gunners slaved their fire control systems onto channel fourteen and within seconds, they each had a lock. No matter what the Challenger II did, or how it manoeuvred, the lock would not be broken. The same applied to the target for that matter - it was toast, no matter what it did, and so long as it did not drive over a cliff it remained within easy range.

"Kill it!" Scorpion announced as she fired off her remaining AGM-114 Hellfire missile at the same time as the two tanks each triggered off a CHARM 3 APFSDS L27A1 shell. "This is for you, Harps," she whispered to herself.

The missile and the shells arrived simultaneously, and the Range Rover was not simply blown apart, it disintegrated with the body of Sebastian Radford vaporised by the fiery explosion. Scorpion hovered a short distance away, savouring the hit and the flames along with the overwhelming feeling of revenge.

It was not closure - far from it - but at least it was something.

Back at the airfield, the endgame was in play.

There were heading on for two hundred military personnel on the airfield and they hugely outnumbered the pitiful remnants of Radford's defensive forces. A sweep of the entire airfield and every building was underway. The fierce fighting was still not at an end but there was no realistic hope for the mercenaries who did not yet know that the man who paid them was currently burning furiously a mile or so away from them. The Radford Group was folding. All its assets were being seized by the Government - bank accounts, buildings; everything that the man had owned or been involved with was forfeit. Ultimately, it had taken a direct order from the Prime Minister herself to commit the amphibious assault. She had overruled COBRA and she had a distinct idea who had attempted to scupper Operation Counterstrike even before it had got fully underway. The fallout from the operation and from Radford's demise would be spectacular. A DSMA-Notice (formally the ubiquitous D-Notice) had already been issued to all editors for the major newspapers and news channels including the BBC. For the moment, events in Wales would not be reported. There would be speculation and there would be conspiracy theories - there always was.

It was very possible that the citizens of the United Kingdom might never know how close their country had come to meltdown and even civil war.

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As the Royal Marines Commandos moved through the partially-destroyed buildings, checking for any remaining insurgents, a Royal Marine Corporal paused outside a solid-looking steel door that to him, appeared to be the door to a cell. He called for two fellow Royal Marines to bring some C4 explosives.

A large bang later, the three Royal Marines forced open the steel door and they moved the bright light from a torch around what was obviously a cell. They almost missed it - a shape in the gloom, covered in dust and fallen masonry. The Corporal moved forwards and he threw off several bricks and some wood from where they had rested on the shape. He hesitantly pulled back a dusty, dirty blanket and he indicated for the Royal Marine with the torch to bring the light closer. Then he looked more closely at the shape, then closer still as his mind struggled to comprehend what he was seeing.

"Medic!" the stunned Royal Marine bellowed as more of the wreckage was quickly cleared away.

*When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!*

- Alfred, Lord Tennyson