

ATLANTICA
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SHOWDOWN

WHEELS OF FURY SPECIAL



Leaning forwards with the wind whistling past her, two wheels and a roaring engine below, was perhaps the best way to get around for Rose. One thing for certain, it was the ideal mode of transport for navigating the congested city streets at night, because it was fast and efficient and could make use of short cuts other vehicles could not use.

Ahead was Elsa or as the world knew her "Emerald", her closest friend and 'crime fighting' partner. Actually, Elsa was not just her closest friend but perhaps the only friend she had these days. Never stopping for too long in one location meant friendships were a rarity.

Unlike her, Elsa chose to use her real name when they were together. In the beginning Elsa had often stated that "Emerald" felt awkward to use in a conversation, which was ironic considering that most people had difficulty pronouncing "Li Wei" without messing it up, hence it was easier if people just used her code name all the time.

Neither she nor Elsa wore a helmet despite the fact it was against the law. She was never sure of Elsa's reasons not to wear one but in her case, it helped her to be ready for any trouble which often struck unexpectedly. She was a warrior and needed to be ready for anything. Taking off a helmet would result in a small but crucial delay, and leaving it on restricted her peripheral vision.

The blonde woman looked back at her and grinned before pulling a wheelie and then slipping through a gap between two cars. The drivers were obviously none too happy at the woman in green leather zipping past since they started gesticulating wildly.

Show off, thought, Rose. ,

With the task that awaited them most 'normal' people would be more serious and have less predilection to messing around. In fact, if any

other person had done anything that stupid, Rose would never have entertained them as a partner. However, she knew Elsa well and the extreme riding was just her way of loosening up, so Rose tolerated the behaviour because when it came to deal with criminals she would rather not have anyone else by her side.

Elsa's show boating certainly exasperated her, although she chose not to say anything because she was not sure if it was down to the acts of insane risk taking that annoyed her or something personal: the fact that she felt unable to let down her guard and have fun at any time.

The streets of New Tokyo whizzed past and the building lights and night time traffic were reduced to different coloured light blurs. This was the city she often considered as her home. Well it was home in as much as she had been born here, but the bitter truth that Rose carried deep down was she no longer had anywhere to call home. A life on the run had seen to that.

She sighed as she recalled a former time when she had had no worries. Back then she had once been an extremely skilled assassin and the group she worked for protected her, but all that had changed when one of her own betrayed her and she was incarcerated and tortured by the very person she had been sent to eliminate.

As she thought about 'that' mission failure, the event that changed her life, she considered it ironic that it had occurred less than a few hundred miles from where she was at that moment in time.

Rose shook her head, as if trying to throw the memories out of her skull. They however would not be easily discarded. She wanted so hard to forget that terrible incident, but since this was the first time she and Elsa had been in the city since they had spilt from the Road Warriors, everything had come flooding back.

Sometimes she had wondered if it was a mistake to leave the group. They had after all saved her life. Even now she hated to think what might have happened if she had not been rescued from the mob boss who had taken great pleasure in putting her through physical abuse, a hell like she never wanted to see or feel again. Despite all her training, that monster had destroyed her confidence and reduced her to little more than a scared child. The Road Warriors though, had given her the support she needed. They even accepted the fact she had been an assassin and still took her in as part of their family. Since the group watched each other's backs, she had been made to feel safe again.

She took a deep breath. No, it was the right thing to do to part company with them. It perhaps was one of the hardest decisions she had ever made and a small part of her regretted making the choice. However, at the time old enemies had resurfaced and she had feared they might get to her by doing something to the Road Warriors, so she had had to protect them from her own past.

The traffic lights in front changed to red and Elsa immediately pulled a stoppie. The stunt riding helped distract her from her black thoughts. It also gave her a small reminder that whilst the path taken was difficult and dangerous, she was never alone.

Showboating of course was just one of her partner's many flaws. Stubborn and impetuous were the others and though not normally a trait Rose liked in a person, she knew for a fact if it wasn't for Elsa's nature, then she would probably have stayed with the Road Warriors instead of insisting on coming with her. One thing for certain, Elsa and her bike skills definitely put the 'Wheels' in their 'Wheels of Fury' moniker.

The name was something of a contentious issue with her. She always thought the name sounded stupid, but since they had left the Road

Warriors, and both rode bikes, they had ended up with the nickname because some idiot had chosen it for them. Normally it was the press that invented the corny labels but since they were more like antiheroes, Rose presumed it was an internet groupie that had heard of their exploits and come up with the title, which had then gone viral.

The noise of a car horn immediately brought Rose's mind back to watching the road ahead and avoid, an oncoming car. That was close. Too close. Her lack of being able to concentrate was now getting to her. Sure, the city and its locations did not help, but she had at least been able to work around the issues. Had this been the first 'mission' in New Tokyo since they had been back, she could have understood her distraction.

Something did not make sense. It was after all a night like any other. They finished work and went hunting perps. Sometimes they just went looking for trouble and sometimes they got a heads up, but nothing was out of the ordinary. Or was it?

Now, like a bullet to the brain, it came to her why her head was in the clouds. She was using her past to gloss over what was really bothering her. Elsa had made a new friend recently.

By chance they had come across Anatoly fighting with the big ball buster thug known as Ten Men and had helped save him from a kicking. Though he was certainly dressed to take on super criminals with all over body armour, there was no doubt in Rose's mind that had they not intervened he would have probably got mashed into the sidewalk.

Afterwards they had all met for a drink since it became obvious they were in the same 'line of work'. Elsa seemed particularly infatuated with Anatoly, but she did not really like him. At the time she put it

down to the fact that she did not like anyone but as Elsa kept seeing him afterwards, she had tried to accept the friendship.



In secret she had of course done a couple of background checks and that was when Elsa learned what she was doing, which had caused them to argue.

To maintain their partnership, she had planned to back off but before she could do that, Elsa had received information from Anatoly regarding the location of a drug deal. This was where they were going now, and this was the thing that was playing on her mind.

If Anatoly was the 'super' vigilante he claimed to be, then why had he not either taken on the 'job' himself or offered to come with them? The more help, the greater chance of success after all. Elsa had simply

excused that by saying he wanted to earn their trust by proving he was reliable.

Maybe there was truth in that. Rose had tried to believe it and so in the previous two days she had tried to convince herself that she was just being jealous of the fact Elsa had managed to make a friend and she had none.

Rose of course liked the fact that Elsa had found someone since it was the first time she'd ever really seen her that happy in a long time. Perhaps this was why Elsa was showing off more than normal. Well whether she liked him or not, if the tip off was right, then she would have to admit she was wrong.

By now the bright lights of the central areas had given way to the muted colours of part of the city that slept at night. It was one of the many districts in New Tokyo that Rose did not know, although that fact did not really bother her. Just like the other mega cities, such was their size and scale, she estimated it would take the average person months to visit every single street.

Elsa made a sharp left turn between the oncoming traffic. She's certainly in a rush tonight, thought Rose. Though she had no problems with taking risks, when it came to ludicrous games of chance she preferred to keep a cool head, hence by the time she made the same turn safely, Elsa was some distance ahead.

With a relatively empty road ahead, now was the time for a little bit of fun, thought Rose as she gunned the throttle and hurtled towards the red tail light of Elsa's bike.

As the roads and buildings flew past on both sides of her, the further she travelled down the highway the darker the area became.

Residential gave way to warehousing and Rose guessed she was in one of New Tokyo's many industrial zones, but probably not the most auspicious areas for the lighting seemed poor to protect property at night and she did not see much evidence of any of the premises having any form of security patrol. Certainly, the area was ideal for anyone wanting to perform some illegal activities since she reckoned it must be one of the few areas of the city that was devoid of human life.

Ahead of her Elsa slowed and then pulled off the road and started trundling across what Rose guessed as wasteland since the rear light started bouncing all over the place indicating rough ground.

Rose followed and soon had that confirmation for it felt like her teeth were trying to be smashed out of her skull. She was tempted to shout at Elsa and ask if they were going in the right direction, but thought better of it for any attempt would just make her sound like she was yodelling or performing a Native American war chant.

Thank god for that, thought Rose as Elsa's bike finally came to a stop and the rider dismounted. She pulled up by the side of her.

"I gather this is the place," she asked as she stared dead ahead at a dark ramshackle building that was probably once a warehouse at some time.

"Supposed to be," replied Elsa.

"Looks a little deserted."

"It should be, we are ahead of time."

Rose knew that, but it still did not fit. Rarely when criminal parties exchanged 'goods' did they both show up at the same time. Normally

at least one party would arrive early to make sure the area was secure but there were no signs of vehicles in their immediate vicinity. Again, she considered her thoughts were down to the fact that she did not trust Anatoly so tried to ignore them.

She looked in her headlight beam and studied the ground. Didn't look like anything had ridden over it in some time. That meant either one of three things, the tip was wrong, Anatoly was having a joke at their expense or something even worse, which she hoped she was wrong about.

Finally, she decided to come clean about her concerns and risk causing another argument but as she went to speak to Elsa, she realised her partner had abandoned her bike and vanished out of sight. The lack of caution and impetuous nature was definitely one of Elsa's most irritating traits.

"Where the hell are you?" shouted Rose. Actually, it was more like a husky cry since she was both trying to shout and not to shout at the same time.

"Over here!" said a voice in the darkness.

She tracked the source of the sound and could just about make out a silhouette in the moonlight standing by an opening in the side of one of the warehouse walls. Fuming, she marched over to the location. Old industrial wasteland was filled with all sorts of crap and it took her some time to navigate to the destination since she was trying to avoid objects that would trip her up and perhaps break her neck.

Then when she finally got over to the opening, Elsa had pulled a disappearing trick again. This was getting a little beyond a joke now.

Guessing that Elsa had gone through, Rose felt she had little choice but to do the same and, once on the inside, she noticed her partner walking around the expanse like she was lost.

The building was as empty and foreboding on the inside as it was on the outside, and about the only thing it had going for it was there was slightly less rubble and trash in the inside to avoid.

"I'm gonna kill Anatoly when I see him," announced Elsa.

She raised an eyebrow.

"Okay not literally, although that's tempting!"

"Maybe wherever he got his info from that was wrong," she suggested. Rose had been tempted to say, 'told you so' but chose not to. Clearly Elsa was upset and disappointed.

"Yeah but I wanted to show you he could be trusted."

"There could be a whole lot of reasons for bum information." There were not many she could think of but now was not the time for petty scores. "Look I'm sorry I gave you a hard time, so if you forgive me then I'll learn to like him...deal?"

Elsa eyed her up suspiciously like she was trying to ascertain if she was being genuine or putting on an act. The seriousness then dropped from her face and became a weak smile before she approached and gave Rose an awkward sort of hug.

"Deal," muttered Elsa.

Rose was relieved that they had repaired their friendship and it was worth suppressing her concerns for the sake of that.

“Yeah but I’m still gonna kill him,” said Elsa as she walked away.

For the next few minutes Rose simply stood where she was and sharpened her blades whilst watching Elsa pace up and down.

“Well then I guess that’s it then,” said Elsa looking at her watch.

“We’re here and there’s definitely nobody else around so we...” she stopped short and cocked her head on one side. “Hey, you hear that?”

Rose heard nothing at first and then picked up the distinct purr of an engine in the distance, getting louder. The louder it got, the more familiar it was because it was the noise of sports bike. Actually, it was more than one, two perhaps, no three. A very nasty thought entered her mind

“We gotta ge—” Her words were cut off by the noise as the bikes crashed through the wall behind them and entered the floor space in single file. It was now she remembered her earlier thought regarding the situation. The tip wasn’t wrong. Nobody was having a joke at their expense. This was definitely something worse. It was a trap.

Rose immediately reached over her shoulder and unsheathed her Katana as the three bikes circled her and Elsa like they were corralling cattle. The trio, a male and two females, then leisurely parked their bikes and proudly walked over.

Elsa appeared to go for her guns, so Rose immediately put her hand out to stop her. There was a reason the trio acted so arrogant. They were the Silent Tigers, one of the assassin teams that worked for the Twelve and the one she once belonged to. They were the people she

had spent years trying to avoid, but it seemed her past had well and truly caught up with her. Having now stood her ground, she knew it would be taken as accepting their challenge. Maybe it was a good thing, maybe it was bad, but either way she knew it was time to finally stop running.

“Are they—”

“Yes,” answered Rose. She had never kept her past a secret from Elsa nor the reasons why the Tigers wanted her dead. Elsa had also been made aware that if they ever faced each other, then the fight would be done with traditional weapons.

“Then what do you want me to do?”

“You should leave, else you may be seen as an enemy of the Twelve.”

“And leave you alone with these three. That’s suicide!”

“It has to be your choice.”

“Then I’m staying!”

The male walked forwards.

“You know why we are here.”

“Yes I—”

“So we doing this or just getting chatty then,” interrupted Elsa brandishing her two short swords.

The trio immediately took out their weapons.

One way or another this is going to be over, thought Rose.



When it came to combat nothing tried Elsa's patience more than people wasting time grunting and sizing each other up as they tried mental games.

If there was going to be a fight, then what was the need for all the pompous gesturing first? It achieved nothing in her opinion other than giving her a headache.

That's why she was pleased her comment had triggered a reaction.

Okay things were not going quite to plan now as the entire area had exploded into action.

She had watched as the one called Scorpion, the male, had made a beeline for Rose so that had left her with Lotus and Nightingale as her dance partners.

A slight numerical disadvantage, perhaps, but nothing she had not dealt with before, thought Elsa.

By now the adrenalin was flowing through her body creating the effect of slowing time. A past conversation with Rose popped into her head and she remembered her friend stating that each of the Silent Tigers had a weakness that was specific to the individual. She had also been made aware of who had what flaw, but to take advantage of that she needed to know who was who.

Since they were both wearing identical charcoal grey body armour, it would have been tricky to tell the women apart if it were not for the fact that Lotus had long hair and Nightingale short hair. Lotus was supposed to prefer straight attacks and could be outflanked, whilst Nightingale tended to attack fast and withdraw making her weak to a quick counter. That information could come in handy, but for now the pair were simply targets that needed to be neutralised.

The perception of time may have slowed for Elsa, but it seemed to have stopped altogether for her opponents. They were literally doing nothing. What the hell are they up to?

Impatience got the better of her again.

She advanced on her foes. Though a rash decision, Elsa considered that perhaps it was not as reckless as it seemed because in a two against one

situation it was best to move quickly as it prevented enemies formulating an organised response.

Swords were good, but bullets were better, and it was incredibly tempting to simply throw down the blades and fill the air with projectiles. She had been a merc and that's what mercs did. It may not be pretty, but it got the job done!



Rose though had always told her if they ever crossed paths with the Tigers they would have to fight with traditional weapons as that was how old scores were settled and failure to adhere to those rules would see the entire Twelve organisation hunting them. This was all a bit of an annoyance for Elsa but she chose, against her better instincts, to carry out Rose's wishes.

Those guns kept calling her though, like a Siren song.

Whilst Elsa had been warned that this day would arrive, she still had issues with the whole affair. She could accept that Rose had broken a rule of the Twelve in getting captured during her mission, and the fact that her own team, the Silent Tigers, had to carry out the punishment. What she could not wrap her head around was the fact that the leader of the Twelve, the Jade Emperor, had become aware that the failed mission had been compromised from the outset by a traitor who warned Rose's target in advance. Surely killing someone over a matter of honour could hardly be fitting when the source of that dishonour was a traitor?

Of course, there was the slight issue that once on the run Rose had exposed the existence of the secret organisation which sort of broke the most important law, but perhaps if the Twelve had been checked for traitors then none of it would have happened. There again if Rose had never left the Twelve, then she would have never become a 'hero'. Too many thoughts hurt her head and in thinking about them Elsa realised she had got distracted and allowed her opponents the time to organise. Well then, whatever the reason the trio had for honour killing her friend, it was not happening on her watch.

As the pair advanced on her, Elsa watched to see if they had a strategy. Nightingale went for a quick couple of thrusts and then Lotus jumped in.

Both attacks were fended off with relative ease.

The cheap shots were a chance to gauge her opponents' fighting strengths and tactics, only in the case of the latter, there were none.

What is going on?

They should be taking it in turns to wear me down, not going at the same time.

Well then, I guess it's my turn!

She felt the adrenalin begin to pump. Something like fire started burning inside. Elsa still had the old anger deep down. It powered her and kept her going when others would give in. She had been kidnapped and used as prostitute. Vengeance had seen her become a mercenary out for revenge and that same fury would now serve her in protecting her friend.

Assassins or not, the pair would know they had been in a battle. With an almighty scream, she let go of all that aggression and let it flow down her arms. A sword in each hand would serve as the focus for the fire. It was time to go to work.

Rose eyed up Scorpion. They had danced this dance before, only in the past it was as friends in training. This time they were now on opposite sides. Unlike Elsa who would use every trick in the book, even if some were dubious, Rose knew she would have to fight clean. As a previous member of the Twelve, certain protocols needed to be obeyed.

Since they were both skilled assassins and this was a duel, it was going to have to be by the rules for defeating him any other way would be seen as a form of dishonour and someone else would come after her.

As was customary in such situations, she bowed her head, expecting Scorpion to follow suit and signal the start.

A second later she felt a rush of air and instinctively ducked and rolled to the ground, catching sight of the first of a pair of blades whizzing past which would have decapitated had she remained immobile. She knew he was angry at her, but for him to blindly cast aside the ancient duelling rituals of the Twelve was as big a betrayal as what she had done in the past, meaning her opponent was little more than a hypocrite.

She slowly made it up to her feet, never taking her eyes off him. Rose expected to see a cold stare being returned, only it appeared he was looking through her rather than at her.

Momentarily she was confused by his lack of discipline and total disregard for the rule book, which caused her to lose focus and by the time she realised her mistake he was on the attack again. This time instead of horizontal slashes he made pair of forward strikes, like he was trying to run her through.

Such an attack stunk of desperation, especially at the beginning of a fight, and she was easily able to deflect both incoming blades out of harm's way.

Where were the cold precise attacks she was expecting? Was he making mistakes due to his anger? This did not feel right.

Advancing from a guard stance, Rose played a hunch and made a straight lunge between his swords, and the attack nearly succeeded.

It was like she was fighting someone with no skills and though she could capitalise on Scorpion's unexpected lack of fighting ability, she was suspicious that another element was in play and whatever it was meant that if she did kill him then she would still be classed as being dishonourable.

"Elsa, something's wrong here. We can't harm them!" she warned.



"Are you freakin' serious, they're trying to kill us!" shouted Elsa as she blocked an attack from Lotus.

Having survived several attacks from her opponents, she had actually worked out that the Silent Tiger's fighting style was a little off. Trained assassins simply did not make the rookie mistakes like these two jokers were doing. They used accuracy and wasted little energy.

With Lotus out of the way, Elsa now saw Nightingale trying to charge her. She guessed the intention was to simply skewer her like meat on a kebab, but the move was so well telegraphed that she simply sidestepped and kicked her opponent out of the way.

There was not time to relax for Lotus was already running at her. Separate uncoordinated attacks were reckless at best and stupid at worst and further evidence to support the fact they were not acting like assassins.



Lotus chose for a simple downward power strike, so Elsa countered by crossing her blades, stopping the incoming weapon dead.

What was wrong with these two?
Had they gone stark raving mad?

No sooner had Elsa thrust forwards, sending Lotus backwards onto her ass, then she noticed Nightingale attacking again, this time from the side.

In dodging that attack, the woman nearly took out her own partner.

So full of aggression, but instead of using it the pair were simply attacking blindly. A drunk in the pub would have fared better. Elsa now knew that this fight needed to be ended sooner rather than later because even drunks in pubs got lucky.

However now she did not want to kill either Nightingale or Lotus. Defeating a compromised opponent was too easy, a hollow victory. That said, Elsa considered if she and Rose defeated them and spared their lives, then if the truth got out the Silent Tigers would lose status in the Twelve, whilst at the same time the trio would owe them a blood debt thus ending their path of revenge.

She liked that idea. Now all she had to do was try to get her opponents to accept her plan by knocking themselves out, only that was not likely to happen!

Her only problem now was dealing with fatigue.

Fighting two at once was difficult, but not being able to eliminate either from the game meant the fighting was going to get reduced to will power.

She needed to catch her breath.

No such luck.

Lotus was on her feet and charging again.

She tried sidestepping her enough, so she could strike her opponent with the side of her right blade on the head and hopefully stun Lotus.

The tactic worked, and Lotus crumbled to the floor.

Now it was going to be a fair fight.

Being occupied with Scorpion meant Rose could not assist her partner. In between his attacks, she was able to get the odd glance to the other side of the warehouse and started to notice that Elsa seemed no longer intent on going for the kill.

It seemed that she had heeded her warning. That gave her one less thing to worry about. In the back of her mind she knew she should not have doubted Elsa since trusting your partner was not an option but a necessity.

He came at her again, so she just struck his blades and returned a strike using the side of her sword, so she did not cause any serious injury.

That should knock the wind out of him, she thought. It also gave her time for a breather. Though his attacks were all over the place, he seemed to have the energy to keep making them, not unlike a shark in a feeding frenzy.

Technically he had trained her and should have been the master in this exchange, but instead he was attacking her like he was felling a tree, and one that he seemed to get more annoyed with the more it refused to go down.

Rose though knew she had to be patient, and wait for the optimum time to counter attack. All it would take was a decent set of blows in quick succession and he would be on the ground and once there she knew about ten ways in which she could stun him.

Scorpion rushed her again with his twin blades trying to do a double strike to her chest.

He overstepped, and Rose knew this was her chance.

Taking advantage of him being completely open and out of position, she powered her blade round in a large arc and slammed it into his body.

Scorpion's body armour as expected prevented the blade entering, helped by the fact Rose deliberately twisted it at the last second to strike with the back of the blade.



In a graceful motion Scorpion was lifted off his feet. He hung in the air for a few seconds, seemed longer due to the adrenaline, and then he slammed back down onto the floor.

With him out of the game she had to help Elsa. She had never forgot about her partner during the time she was fighting Scorpion and had feared that if Scorpion's wild strikes were tiring to fend off, then it had to be worse for Elsa since she was dealing with double trouble.

Just as she turned to her partner, she heard an ear-piercing scream from the other side of the warehouse. She did not need to even look to know it was Elsa, and she was too late.



Having just watched Lotus go down, Elsa lost sight of Nightingale.

Where is she?

Quickly she spun around, thinking that Nightingale would attack from the same direction as before, but her opponent was not there.

Then out of the corner of her eye, she saw Nightingale's blade charging at her.

No time to defend....not even enough time to panic.

She felt the cold steel entering her chest.

As the air rushed out of her body, she let out a scream.

The blade advanced further into her body.

Pain and panic now acted together.

Breathing rapidly became difficult.

She tried to force herself off the intruding metal, but Nightingale held it firm.

She saw the blood trickling from the area and with every drop the world seemed to grow darker.

The last thought in her mind as her eyes closed was, "It can't end this way...no...not.....like....this."

The guttural cry was perhaps the worst sound Rose had ever heard in her life.

Thoughts raced through her mind, flash backs of their time together. As an assassin for the Twelve, Rose had been trained to abandon her emotions and accept death, even her own if the situation demanded it.

However, when she and Elsa had been with the Road Warriors they had become more than friends. The entire unit had become a family. Her original training of a cold-blooded killer had been lost.

She had learned to "feel" and she had learned to care about people for the first time in years. They may not have been related, but they were sisters in every sense of the word. Now all she felt was intense anguish and helplessness as she watched Elsa collapse to the floor, knowing there was nothing that could be done to stop what had happened.

The sudden pain in her stomach, snapped her out of her thoughts and expelled all the air out of her lungs. Learning to "feel" had its disadvantages for it allowed for distraction. Rose now realised too late that she had forgotten about Scorpion who had now managed to get back to his feet and deliver the almighty kick to her midsection.

Gravity did the rest and she could not stop herself from staggering backwards and falling on to her back.

As soon as she sat up, the first thing she felt was a blade touching her throat.

Rose knew she could not expect and mercy.

Perhaps it was better to go out like this, together with Elsa in a blaze of glory.

Scorpion though did not run her through.

He did not say anything.

In fact, he looked totally confused as if a switch had been turned on inside his head and he could not work out what he was doing and why he was there.

Anger at Elsa's demise filled her mind.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" she screamed, "Just get it over with!"



Oblivion was perhaps the best way out.

A brief moment of pain on the outside would mean she would not have to deal with the intense pain she felt inside.

She closed her eyes and waited for the strike.

By now there was a huge amount of adrenaline pumping through her system.

Time seemed to start moving very slowly. Even the process of closing her eye now seemed timeless.

Eyes tightly shut, Rose waited for the pain, but instead her sharpened senses heard Nightingale and Lotus get very excited or agitated about something. Rose knew it could not be Elsa causing the consternation and though she was now committed to her end, a small part of her hung onto hope that maybe Elsa was not quite finished.

Scorpion seemed to be taking his time about administering the final blow.

Maybe he was distracted like his team mates.

Curiosity now got the better of Rose, so she opened her eyes.

All hope vanished.

Elsa was still down, so what was the cause of the excitement?

Rose's eyes followed the two women as they hurtled across the warehouse towards a shadowy figure.

Another player entering the game?

Before the two women even reached their target, Rose saw two objects come sailing through the air.

There was a massive blinding light and at the same time a sound so large she thought her head was going to explode.

Flash-bangs, thought Rose as her ears started ringing like church bells.

What the hell is going on?



She felt a sharp pain in her neck, but it was not Scorpion's Sword. Instinctively she reached for the source of the pain and found a dart in her neck.

As her sight began to return, albeit blurry, she noticed Scorpion collapsed on the floor. A figure, a man dressed in black combat gear approached her, but that was the last thing that went through her mind as she felt very dizzy and her eyelids felt too heavy to hold open any longer. She knew she'd been drugged, but there was little she could do about it.

Elsa awoke with a start. She remembered the sword penetrating her body and could still feel the pain it had done to her. That was when she realised that feeling was a luxury since she should have been dead. Certainly the world had gone black and her body felt as cold as ice.

No this wasn't death, she was lying on something that was cold, probably metal. As she started to become more aware of her situation, she now realised that the darkness was not death but in fact something that was covering her eyes.

What was going on?

Before she even got an answer to the question, she felt a pair of hands moving over her body. She guessed the owner was a woman. At one time she had been used as a sex slave and had plenty of men's hands rummaging around her body, so she knew how to identify them. By comparison these felt soft and slender, although since she could not see there was no guarantee it was a correct guess.

As they moved in the direction of the wound, the sharp pain immediately caused an instinctive response and Elsa tried to force them away. That was when she realised that her wrists and ankles had been bound to whatever it was she was lying on. She tried to get free, but it was no use. The roughness of the bindings and prickly sensation on her skin indicated that it was probably rope or twine of some sort.

"If you want to live then stop struggling," said a man's voice.

She could not believe the gruff voice was the owner of the hands, but then thinking about it, the voice seemed too far away to be him, unless he had really long arms.

“My partner is trying to heal you and the more you fidget, the harder it is for her.”

That at least confirmed two things. The first that the hands belonged to a woman and secondly there were two of them with her.

“Who are you?” asked Elsa.

“That is not important, but if you feel the need to call me anything then call me your fairy godmother!” He paused, “Now hold still and when we have healed you, I’ll consider answering any questions.”

A second later the hands moved to her wound. That hurt like hell and Elsa was sure if she wasn’t tied down she would definitely have leapt up. Holding still seemed an impossible task, but she gritted her teeth and did her best. The hands then seemed to generate a strange feeling in the area. Was it heat? Electricity? Both? She’d never felt anything quite like it but as soon as the hands lifted off her, the pain had gone.

“It’s done,” said a woman.

The source of the voice was so quiet that it was barely audible to Elsa.

“Alright I’m going to release your bindings now, Elsa,” said the man or fairy godmother if he wanted the title, “but under no circumstances can you remove that blind fold. For the time being I cannot let you know who we are and if you attempt to look, then I will have no option but to take drastic action. Got it?”

Having just been brought back from death by a complete stranger who she owed a debt, Elsa felt obliged to conform to his instructions, and so nodded her head.

“Very good,” said the man.

She then heard a knife being unsheathed, a sound she recognised since it was a weapon she was familiar with. This was followed by a tugging on her left wrist as the rope was cut. The right wrist was next and finally the ankles.

“Now I’m going to sit you up,” he said.

Elsa now felt her body being turned around and then a pair of heavy hands pulling on her shoulders until she was in a seated position.

“So, I guess you have questions then?”

There were so many questions she did have, it was a little hard for Elsa to decide what to ask first. Certainly, he was not going to answer who he was or the identity of the woman who had cured her as he’d already said as much. Then she thought of a good starting point.

“How do you know who I am?” asked Elsa.

“Hmm not the question I was expecting, but an easy one to answer. I know of many vigilantes in my business, and there’s only a few who ride bikes. There’s also even fewer who have made enemies with the Silent Tigers, so it wasn’t too hard to work out.”

“Okay then, why did you save me?” Elsa decided perhaps it was time to ask the most obvious question.

“Straight to the point. I prefer that. Somebody out there, I call the ‘Doser’, is taking ‘super criminals’ and injecting them with Marathon and I’ve been trying to put a stop to his or her game. Since my partner can cure the effects of the drug, we’ve been acting like the clean up

crew. This is annoying as I rather hate criminal scum, but would rather have normal criminal scum on the streets rather than totally crazed criminal scum!”

“I gather you do not know who this Doser guy is then?”

“Or ‘girl’ and it’s getting a real grind!”

The mans voice growled a bit with the last comment so Elsa guessed he was not happy at the situation.

“I think I’m close though and maybe I’ll be that bit closer when I talk to the Silent Tigers—”

“What they’re here?” she said shocked.

“Relax, they’re sleeping like assassin babies for now, along with your partner. I do have something that is bugging me that maybe you could help with.”

“Sure,” said Elsa. She figured it was the last she could do.

“Well when I learned that the Silent Tigers had been made the next victims of my elusive friend, I was somewhat confused. Nobody goes out of their way to give the Twelve a kicking unless they want to be dead. I tried to capture them earlier in the evening for answers, but I lost track of them until they went to the warehouse. This brings me to my new problem. The Doser has always released his victims in a public place, yet it looks like the Silent Tigers went straight to a remote location. I’m curious to know how you knew to be there waiting for them.”

Elsa thought carefully before answering. Only now was she putting some pieces of the puzzle together and it all pointed to Anatoly.

"I had a tip off that there was a drug deal going on," she said finally.

"Really?" said the man sounding surprised. "And who gave you this tip off."

"Another vigilante, called Anatoly Kuznetsov." She did not want to admit that this was her new boyfriend. Actually, it was her only boyfriend in years.

Elsa now heard the clicking of fingers. There was a pause followed by a clacking of keys, like the sound of someone typing on a keyboard. Then there was nothing.

"Is something wrong?" she asked trying break the awkward silence.

"It appears that I can't find the existence of a vigilante called Anatoly Kuznetsov," said the man. "That can mean one of two things. Either he's a very new player or he does not exist."

"What!" shrieked Elsa. Anatoly had told her that he had been in the 'business' for years. "That can't be right. We've been dating for a month now!"

"I could be wrong, but my guess is that your boyfriend is not all he appears to be. Maybe he is linked to the Doser and got close to you and Rose as part of the plan. If as you say the tip off came out of the blue, then it would seem you changed from being useful to a liability and needed to be eliminated."

Elsa by now was beside herself. She had risked her friendship with Rose to obtain happiness with Anatoly and now it was all a lie? What an idiot! Should've known better that if its too good to be true, then it usually is. Now it all made sense, because the tip off came the very next day after Rose had tried finding out information on him.

"Rose tried to do a background check on him," she blurted out after finding a way past her upsetting feelings.

"Well that would certainly reveal his non-existence and draw attention and get you looking for the truth. Now maybe he has nothing to do with the Doser, but it seems unlikely that there are two people running around injecting people with that crap. I guess I need to find out who this Anatoly Kuznetsov guy really is and have a nice chat with him."

You're not the only one, thought Elsa. After earlier in the evening quipping that she wanted to kill him, she really did want to kill him. Turnabout seemed fair play.

"And now I have other places to be," said the man, "And I can't leave you here, so listen carefully. In a moment I will inject you with a sedative and when you wake up you and Rose will be elsewhere along with your bikes and weapons. Do not try and find me or come looking for me."

She felt something prick her neck

"One more thing. Don't be in a hurry to stand when you come around or else you'll probably injur—"

And that was all she heard as she felt dizzy and could feel herself keeling over.

Rose awakened to a shaking sensation emanating from her right shoulder. Her head was spinning and as she started to focus, she discovered herself slouched by a wall. Though her mind and vision were foggy, she could tell she was outside so that meant she had been moved from the warehouse. By whom and why though was a mystery.



As her vision started to clear she worked out she was on wasteland but sheltered, and the noise of traffic above her indicated that she was perhaps under a motorway bridge or overpass.

Looking across to the source of the shaking, she could now see the silhouette of a woman kneeling by the side of her, pulling on her arm.

Black and white gave way to colour and that in turn revealed green clothing. Other details followed and that included blonde hair.

Elsa?

Impossible! Nobody could survive being run through like that. Rose thought she could still be dreaming so blinked a few times and that finally cleared her sight and confirmed the woman yanking her shoulder was indeed Elsa.

“Oh, good you’re awake,” said Elsa.

“What the?” started Rose, “I mean I saw you...how are you...alive?” Her words came out as incomplete gibberish sentences.

“Bit of a long story that, but we have no time. Got to find our weapons and get out of here. I’d rather not sit here and talk if the Tigers are still around.”

Rose wanted an explanation. Actually, she wanted answers and a lot of them as well as a painkiller for her banging head but there was urgency in Elsa’s voice, so she tried to move, but her legs refused to cooperate.

“Aren’t you injured? I mean I saw you get stabbed.” Since she was going nowhere anytime fast, Rose thought she may as well ask.

“Totally cured” said Elsa opening her clothing.

It was not really the place for a show and tell, but she looked and where she had witnessed the sword enter Elsa’s body there was not even a scratch. Had it not been for the blood-stained clothing and

slashed material, it would have been hard to even believe her friend had been skewered altogether.

“It’s gotta be an Alpha that’s done that,” said Rose with her jaw hanging open in disbelief.

“Probably and I’ll tell you everything later. Now can we go?”

Rose really wanted answers, but now considered that Elsa’s worry over the Tigers was probably justified. Now that they knew she was in New Tokyo, they would no doubt come looking for her. After what had happened the previous evening she was in no shape to face them again, not for a while, so sitting out in the open was tactically bad.

She decided to try and stand up now that the fuzziness had finally dissipated from the inside of her head. Her legs seemed to buckle. This is ridiculous, she thought, it’s like being drunk without the pleasure or the hangover. She corrected her thought, she had the bad head from a hangover after all.

Rose started to slip backwards and would have hit the floor, but a couple of hands, Elsa’s, grabbed hold of her.

“I guess he whacked you with a bigger dose of that crap.”

The moment she tried to move she wobbled a little, so Elsa steadied her. Then using her friend as a crutch, Rose made her way along the underpass, which was no mean feat considering the amount of junk that was there. Seemed she’d had a day of walking through crap.

She had no idea where her friend was taking her until she spied her bike at the opening alongside Elsa’s. Luckily, by the time they got there her head had managed to clear and she was able to actually stand

upright without the world pitching from side to side like she was on a boat in rough seas. Now all that remained was working out where the hell they were.

* * *

Rose was amazed that she managed to ride to the apartment. If she had had troubles at the beginning of the evening that distracted her, they were nothing to the army of questions that had plagued her on the journey home.

Once safe, Elsa told her of their mystery saviour. By then she was convinced that sometime in her life as a merc she had crossed paths with him since she now recalled something familiar about the way her spoke although she could not remember who he was or when they had met. Elsa also mentioned the equally mysterious 'Doser' the man was hunting.

That was a person she really wanted to meet. However, she doubted anyone as skilled in planning to not only drug the Silent Tigers, but to arrange their showdown, would be easily found. A person like that had to be very much like a ghost.

Maybe Elsa's mystery saviour would solve that problem for them, or maybe not and if he did not get the Doser, then she really wanted to be the next in line for some payback.

Grateful that Elsa had been saved from certain death, Rose felt the joy of the occasion was marred because part of her friend had been destroyed on the inside. Elsa of course hid it well, but Rose knew the betrayal by Anatoly would hurt her more than the sword ever did. In fact, seeing her try to pretend she was not bothered actually saddened Rose as she had so wanted Elsa to get a small piece of normality.

Yes, they'd had arguments about him and damned near come to blows, but she was not now going to hold a grudge when Elsa was already feeling so bad. Seeing her nearly get killed had served as a reminder to Rose that petty victories over who was right and who was wrong meant nothing compared to their friendship.

That said, if she ever came across Anatoly, Rose could not promise she would not be tempted into reverting to her old assassin ways.

* * *

Over the next few weeks things seemed to settle down for Rose. The pair of them tried to put that dreadful night behind them although things had definitely changed, some for the better and some for the worse.

Her outcome was perhaps more positive since her whole outlook on life had changed. Having finally faced the Silent Tigers, Rose no longer feared them and made up her mind that she was through with running. If she was going to change city again, then it would be for a better reason and not to simply escape her past.

That decision was made easier when she learned from one of her informants that the Silent Tigers had vanished back into the shadows. Having been a member of that team and knowing the way the Twelve operated, Rose speculated that their disappearance might have meant an assignment and it was no stretch of her imagination that the target might just be the Doser. Just as Elsa's 'fairy godmother' had suggested riling the Twelve was not a good idea. Using them was even worse for they would keep on coming. If her theory was correct, that meant she could no longer be concerned with finding the Doser herself. Getting in the path of the Twelve would be standing in the way of an oncoming freight train.

That though caused a problem for Elsa because she wanted either the Doser's or Anatoly's head on a plate, or both. Rose had to do a lot of persuading to get her to stand down. Normal people would go for counselling, but that was not an option. She of course knew that Elsa would have difficulty coping after her troubled past. Her friend had always sworn that she would never be a victim again and Anatoly or whatever his name was had make a mockery of that promise.

Rose therefore believed the return to 'normal' nightly 'duties' as vigilantes might ease Elsa's tension and lust for revenge. However, that did not quite work out as planned for Elsa had seemed to be over compensating and really going to town on the criminals. Rose had wondered if perhaps the near-death experience had made irreparable damage to Elsa's state of mind.

In one sense it had allowed Rose a chance for a bit of a role reversal for whilst Elsa had been the strong one and supported her when hiding from the Twelve, she was now the strong supportive one.

Though she could never forget about what happened that night, the passage of time did reduce the incident to a matter of highlights as some of the details disappeared from her mind. Then things came right back to the surface when Elsa came steaming into their apartment one night after work and for a change seemed excited as opposed to depressed. When she asked what had got her so worked up, Elsa told her this.

"You remember how I said I thought I recognised that 'fairy godmother guy'. Well today I finally realised who it is!"

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COMING NEXT TIME...

**ATLANTICA
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OUTCAST

PART 1: HUMILIATED · HERO · HUNTED



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