

Ruby V : Machu Picchu

Chapter 18 – Guerrilla Warfare

“Despite feeling scared, she had to be somewhere that gave her a view of the car park. It was like blocking someone on social media, but constantly looking at their posts. She had to know what was going on, even if it terrified her.”

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They'd had about a twenty minute warning, though Lorenzo doubted if anyone at the dig site had been sleeping. The wunderkinds had picked up the general activity and agitated minds, before the cult reached them. Eugenie had known and given him the bad news, before going off to tell others. Twenty minutes didn't sound a lot of time, but it enabled Lily and him to be in their homemade bunker, as the Colonel's heavy trucks came crashing through the trees. Three trucks by the look of it, all using every halogen spot lamp they had. It wasn't exactly a high tech attack, though it was alarmingly effective. Lorenzo's first thoughts, were a little mundane.

“I just hope the layer of mud had time to dry out.” He said.

“I hope the assault rifles work.” Said Lily. “We never did get to test them properly.”

“Mitch said they're new and thoroughly checked over.” Said Lorenzo.

“So.....We're trusting our enemies now ?”

Lily was worried and in a mood, which he could understand. Lorenzo merely looked at her and shrugged, which made her laugh. Mitch was still an enemy combatant, currently duct taped to a seat in their bus. He had asked about swapping sides, which Ruby was going to pass on to the CIA. It sounded weird to Lorenzo, but Todd told him all sorts of one time enemy fighters, ended up working for British military intelligence.

“Better than forty years in jail and we pay quite well.” Todd had once told him.

Lorenzo aimed his assault rifle at the front of a very large military looking truck, as it hit the side of a tree too huge to push over, or shove out of the way. He waited for Lily to give him permission to fire. “They're getting a bit close.” He said.

No reply and he wasn't about to unleash a hail of high velocity rounds, without her verbal stamp of approval. The cult fighters got out of the back of the now damaged truck. They were laughing and chatting, as though they were on a day out. He actually heard one of them, talking about someone called Walt being unhappy at them wrecking one of the trucks.

“We just need them to step out of the trees.” Muttered Lily.

There were a few lamps in the car park, fairly dim and solar powered. Enough to see the enemy, though their own trucks were lighting the car park up like day. Two or three of the men from the truck were on the packed down gravel of the car park, when what seemed like a tornado ripped through the trees. Sophie's handiwork probably, she'd been itching to get to grips with the Colonel's men. The tornado picked up the truck, lifting it high up into the air. It tumbled side over side, spilling several fighters out of the back. The still tumbling vehicle must have reached about two hundred feet up, when the wind ceased. It came down quickly, hitting the woods some distance away. The noise was as if there was thunder among the trees.

“Fire.....Aim low and into the trees.” Said Lily.

Lorenzo could only see a few of the cult fighters, though there'd be more among the trees and hidden by bushes. He put enough pressure on the trigger to set the assault rifle firing on automatic. A second or so later and Lily was doing the same. No feeling pity, the weapon Lorenzo was firing had been intended to be used against Ruby and her people.

"Sweep.....Side to side." Shouted Lily.

Lorenzo saw one of the cult fighters go down and after that it was all about filling the air with bullets and hoping a few of them found a target. Right across the width of the car park he fired, until his weapon was empty. He was no expert on guns, but the assault rifle seemed to have emptied a clip in no time at all. He put in a new clip and carried on firing. All the time Lily carried on firing, he'd continue emptying his weapon into the trees.

"Fuck !" He shouted.

Lily wouldn't have heard him over the deafening noise of gunfire; he hadn't heard his own voice. To their right and roughly where Spider was hiding up a tree, there'd been an explosion. Explosion was too small a word; it looked as though a tiny nuclear blast had occurred. There was even a white hot cloud of energy, rising up into the sky. Eugenie was over that way, keeping an eye of where the road turned, before entering the dig site. Something hit him, an empty cola can, thrown by Lily. She was nodding her head in the direction of the explosion. With the noise, all Lorenzo could do was shrug.

"Probably Eugenie." He yelled. Had she heard him ? Probably not.

His first thought had to be concern that his lover was safe. His second thought was a little pity for those silly enough to try and hurt her. Lorenzo saw movement in the trees and aimed his weapon at it.

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Professor Ellie Nicholas was in the dark, inside her trailer. The lights from the trucks had caused shadow effects through the windows and then the explosion had lit her home up like a summer's day, for a few seconds. The massive sound had followed the flash and she would have sworn to feeling her home vibrate. The trailer did feel like home, she'd lived in it for months. Ellie cowered in a corner, hoping it would all soon be over. No one had told her the best place to hide in her trailer. That mattered when bullets were flying about and you lived in a home largely made of plywood and aluminium. Strangely, the sound of Lily and Lorenzo firing from their bunker, made her feel better. They were on her side and their bullets were aimed at the enemy.

"Ruby should have told me where to hide." She mumbled.

Despite feeling scared, she had to be somewhere that gave her a view of the car park. It was like blocking someone on social media, but constantly looking at their posts. She had to know what was going on, even if it terrified her. She'd seen the truck being thrown about like a toy, as its lights had gone tumbling across the sky.

"Be over.....Please let it stop." She muttered.

Sunrise was at five forty six, she knew that for a fact. When it's important to utilise every second of daylight, you knew when the sun came up. Sunset was at just after six pm, though hopefully, it would all be over by then. A quick touch on her phone inside cupped hands, showed her it was fifteen minutes after four and a long way from sunrise.

"Fuck.....I knew all that money from Ruby was too good to be true." She muttered.

Not a truck, the vehicle coming up behind her trailer, was smaller. It had bright lights and a spot lamp aimed through her windows. Did they know where she was ? There had been all those reports of men seen in the woods. At that moment, Ellie decided no one was going to use her as a hostage. Her method of getting around her home was to roll, very carefully. She rolled over to her bed and

wedged herself between the bed and a three drawer pedestal she used as a bedside table. When someone rattled the door, Ellie was ready, with her gun resting on the top of the pedestal.

"I will use the gun.....I will shoot them." She mumbled.

Sarah had given her the large pistol, handing it over as though she was giving her custody of a loved one. A few instructions had followed, mainly about the safety catch and holding her breath as she pulled the trigger.

"Keep firing until they hit the ground." Sarah had told her, with a smile.

Despite all the other noise going on, Ellie could clearly hear someone giving the door a serious rattle. When they began to bash the door, she aimed the gun roughly where they'd enter her home. She heard voices, though gunfire from the bunker made the words impossible to understand. Two of them.....She should have expected that.

"Go away." Ellie yelled. "Leave me alone."

Why had she yelled ? It made no sense and Ellie was annoyed with herself. They were trained soldiers from what Ruby had told her, not the sort to go away if you shouted at them. No reply, though the bashing against the door, now sounded as though someone was kicking it.

"It's my home." Mumbled Ellie.

She placed her finger on the trigger of her borrowed gun and waited. There was another bright explosion somewhere to the left of the car park; the light showed her the door being forced open. She saw the man as he walked into the trailer. He was holding a gun similar to hers, though he was probably more experienced at using it than her.

"I heard her.....She has to be in here."

He was heading towards the living area; where there was a TV hooked up to a DVD player. There was a small sofa and several lamps, though none of them were on. It did look like the centre of her home. As he walked past her, Ellie fired three times, aiming at his torso. On the third shot, the man went down. She heard him groan as he hit the floor, he was that close to her.

No calls, no profanity, the other man came in fast and firing at where he thought she was. Three times he fired; one bullet hit the pedestal she was wedged up against. He had her position slightly wrong; the other two shots seemed to hit the wall on the other side of her bed. There was a flash outside and Ellie could see his face and he could see her. Enough light to briefly turn the monochrome of night into colour. He had a green jacket on and his hair was ginger. As his gun came round, Ellie thought she was dead.

"Bastard." She yelled.

Her one shot she had time for, missed him and he wasn't likely to miss her. Another large explosion and there was enough light to see something Ellie would rather not have witnessed. Someone had shot the man in the back of his head. The left side of his face looked as though it was unzipping, coming apart along invisible seams. As his eye came away, along with a staggering amount of blood, she did the unforgivable. Ellie closed her eyes and lowered her head; until she heard the man's body hit the floor.

"Don't shoot, Professor Nicholas.....It's me, Caleb.....Sophie's friend."

For a second or two there was brain fog, as Ellie's mind refused to think about anything other than her just killing someone, with a gun.

"I'm coming in.....Don't shoot." Yelled Caleb.

"Yes, come in." Shouted Ellie.

He didn't have a light either, as he slowly entered the trailer. For a moment they both looked at each other, by the steady flash of explosions going on outside. Caleb hugged her and she hugged him back.

"You need to leave here, Professor Nicholas." Said Caleb. "I'm set up in one of the new trailers. No one will know you're there."

"We've hugged; I think you can call me Ellie." She said. "Can't I stay here, in my home?"

"There must be a lot of blood on the floor....And worse. When the sun rises, you'll probably want to leave here. Best to do it while it's still dark."

"Yes, good point." Said Ellie. "I'll follow you."

Ellie put the safety catch on and shoved the heavy gun down the belt on her jeans. It was a friend now, just like Caleb. Both of them had saved her life that night. Once outside, Caleb stopped just a few feet from her trailer.

"We move in the dark, Ellie. If there's a flash of light, we freeze."

"Right, I understand."

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Cal was still learning, though she knew there were latent powers inside her. Sometimes she was going to use a hand gesture, or use a group of words in a language unknown to her. So far, she resisted the urge to use gifts she didn't understand. Sending the guava fruit to limbo had changed her, once she'd realised it was beyond her ability, then, to bring it back. Her curiosity about the unknown, those latent forces, might get someone killed. She'd levitated to the top of a tree not that far away from Spider. Then again the dig site didn't cover a huge area and nowhere was that far away. Cal could see Spider as a small orange dot, though he couldn't see her. She was sat in the fork of a tree, determined to follow Ruby's instructions.

"Firstly, do everything you can to keep the students safe, Cal." Ruby had told her. "Second priority is dealing with the cult soldiers, in any way you think best."

Dealing with meant killing them of course and Cal had no problem with that. They'd hurt people she thought of as friends and still seemed intent on killing Ruby. The tree Cal had chosen meant she could cover an area of the road that no one else appeared to be observing. Sarah was there, about fifty yards away from Spider's tree, with its nice comfortable platform and supplies. All Cal had was rough wood to sit on and a water bottle. Sarah had put herself behind some rocks and was in a reasonably defensible location.

"You've got a good one there, Spider." Cal muttered.

Eugenie was another dot, way out towards the car park entrance, while Sophie was behind Cal, right across the other side of the camp. Ruby was probably with Todd and they were.....

"Wow Eugenie.....You don't fuck about." Cal muttered.

The gunfire from the Lorenzo and Lily's bunker had been going on for a while, but the truck going up above the trees....That was new and something very different. Eugenie had taken the gloves off and was using her special gifts. The truck was turning, spinning, side over side. Cal saw two cult members fall out of the back. Then the truck dropped for a height of at least two hundred feet. The noise it made hitting the ground, was amazing, awesome. It excited Cal, leaving her with a need, a hunger to use her own super skills.

"I just need an enemy truck on my bit of the road." She muttered.

Cal was talking to herself a lot lately; it came from hours spent in her research tent. Tilda had told her talking to herself was fine, as long as she didn't start arguing with herself. Cal liked Tilda, though

not in the way she sensed, Tilda liked her. It had the potential to be a friendship destroying problem, though it could wait until after the colonel had been taken care of.

“Oh, small.....But it'll do.” She mumbled.

A small vehicle, probably a jeep, had left the road and was heading through the trees. It was making for the car park and firing in the direction of the bunker. Cal felt safe in assuming the jeep belonged to the enemy, the opposition, the bad guys as Sophie liked to put it. She was angry and made a gesture with her hands that she hadn't intended to make. It was like unleashing hell on the jeep. It vanished in an explosion of fire, so hot that a mushroom cloud formed above it. So bright, it left Cal's eyes dazzled for a while. When she could see again, that section of trees was gone, leaving just a few areas of burning debris. It was scary and amazing in about equal measure. Spider was firing; the cult had to be attacking on foot. Cal saw the orange dot of one enemy soldier go dark, as Spider's sniper rifle's sight found him in the dark.

“Well done, Spider.” She mumbled.

It was no good; she had all those super skills, but wasn't using them. Spider was a muggle, yet he was hunting the enemy in his own way, doing what he was good at. Cal dropped from the tree, slowing herself down just enough to hit the ground without damaging her joints. She then ran off towards where the jeep had been. Cal went hunting for bad guys.....

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When Thio heard he'd been assigned to look after the students in trailer four, he thought Christmas had come early. It was one of the new comfortable mobile dormitories, where everything not only worked, it worked well. Clean toilets, showers with hot water and best of all, for a young man who was perhaps a little naïve.....About seventy percent of the students were female. Ruby had understood, she'd known it wasn't going to be a cushy assignment.....

“Trailer four is behind the trailer where Todd and myself are staying.” Ruby had told him. “Fairly well shielded from any shrapnel and not an obvious choice for the Colonel's guys to attack. Your main problem will be the students, Thio.”

She'd gone on to mention the general flakiness of young people away from home, for what may well be their first time.

“Keep the blinds closed.....Sit them down and keep them sat down.” Ruby had said. “Never, ever let them start peering out of the windows. The trailer has to look lifeless, empty would be perfect. No music playing, no loud noises, nothing that will get trailer four noticed.”

Keeping the students sober was mentioned, though Thio had no idea how he'd be able to achieve that. No mentioning any concerns to Ruby though, she already seemed quite wound up. No fooling around with the female students was mentioned at least three times. Todd had been there and he'd called it fraternising, which made it sound like treason.

“Leave the women students alone, Thio.” Todd had muttered. “Even if they try to initiate something.”

“Especially if they initiate something.” Ruby had added. “You're there to protect them.”

No booze and no fraternising with the students. It all began to sound less and less like Christmas come early. Ruby had given him a verbal list of instructions he knew he stood no chance of remembering. Todd adding the occasional comment hadn't helped. By the time he was warned about the dire consequences of a student being hurt, Thio was wishing he'd remained in his old life as a restaurant waiter.

“Keep them safe for me, Thio.” Ruby had said. “The slightest scratch and Ellie will probably call the Peruvian law enforcement agencies. She’ll probably tell them everything. That would be very bad, Thio. I really do mean it when I tell you to protect them with your life, if it comes to that.”

“Not a scratch on any of them.” Todd had added.

When Thio arrived in trailer four, he realised the nature of the problem; all the students seemed to be at least half crazy. There were a couple of older students who were there to finish a doctorate of some kind, or help supervise the flaky youngsters, but the average student was nuts, insane and seemingly intent on doing something that would get them shot. Add on the amount of booze everyone seemed to have drunk the night before and Thio really did wish he was back in his old bed above the restaurant. Then there was the steady movement of students from other trailers, as though it was all some kind of game of musical chairs. Yelling at them probably meant not having to worry about the whole fraternising thing, but Thio yelled, fumed and made himself generally hated. Then the sun rose just before six in the morning and it was like firing a starting pistol.....

“Please stay away from the windows.” Said Thio. “We want the cult fighters to ignore us. Let them go and annoy someone else.....But not us.”

“But.....We can see them now the sun has come up.” Said Penny.

Penny was from New Zealand, a place called Wairarapa. Jim had given him a few details on the students in trailer four, before wandering off into the night. It was like that, an attitude that nothing bad was going to happen to them, mixed with equal parts of craziness and booze. Penny had the blinds pulled to one side, while she looked outside. Thio dragged the blind away from Penny and straightened it up. The look of dislike on her face.....No, fraternising wasn’t going to be an issue.

“Alright.....No need to be a dick about it.” Said Penny.

“Yeah.....Lighten up, Thio.” Said Mars.

Tilda was on his side, she rolled her eyes and tapped the side of head, as if to say all her fellow students were nuts. Tilda was the perfect example for the duration of the battle. Quiet, never fiddled with the door or windows and.....She was keeping low by sitting on the floor. A dozen or so like Tilda and his job would have been a lot easier.

“They’re still firing from the bunker.” Said Tilda. “Then there is a trailer between us and the bunker.....It’ll take a lot for the cult to get to us, Thio.”

She was right of course. There was another trailer behind them, one of the old ones. Not as comfortable as the new ones, but heavy, with a lot of solid walls. Their bus was also shielding them against bullets and shrapnel from the rear. As positions during a small war went, it was just about as good as you could hope for. Not that Thio was going to tell the crazies that. Tilda handed him a glass of something that smelled like tequila.

“Go on.....To take the edge off.”

“Thanks.”

There had been flashes outside before, some followed by the trailer walls vibrating. Every flash seemed to necessitate a few of them messing about with the blinds, to get a look outside. This explosion was different; it was close, the flash and the boom arriving almost together. It happened behind them, probably just beyond their bus. The students ran towards the windows on that side of trailer four, which meant going through people’s rooms. There were personal bags to fall over and the occasional student in bed to annoy. It was chaos, just the sort of thing Ruby was relying on him to control.

“Please.....Please calm down.” Yelled Thio.

Never, ever shout at people to calm down, it always makes them worse. Thio learnt several things that morning, though that was probably the most important. Shouting for calm was a bit like pouring gasoline over a dumpster fire. Everyone seemed determined to get to a window, one that would show them what had happened. Then there was the second loud boom and something terrible happened. Thio found himself looking at an injured Mars. She was on the floor, the front of her sweatshirt turning red. By the time he reported to Ruby, he'd added facts to suppositions and notions to get a story that might not have been totally correct, but it would do.....

"There was a piece of glass embedded in Mars, in her stomach." He'd told Ruby. "I sent Penny to get the medical equipment from the tent. Then aided by Mars, who was awake all the time. I removed the glass and stitched the wound. The glass came from a broken window after the second explosion. I don't believe trailer four ever came under enemy fire."

All so simple, but it hadn't been quite like that at the time. Mars was bleeding and obviously in pain. As for him, Thio knew he'd had one job to do that morning and he'd failed. Thio learned something else, that a wounded student was better at keeping everyone quiet, than no end of yelling.

"Fuck.....Ruby will kill me." He said.

"Don't worry, I'll survive." Said Mars. "Penny.....Go and get the large bag from the medical tent."

No argument from him, Thio was now a long way from trying to control the uncontrollable. Penny rushed outside, as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Don't get shot." Thio called after.

"I won't." Came the quiet reply.

None of them understood of course, why he was so upset. Mars lifted her sweat shirt out of the way, to reveal a medium sized piece of glass, sticking out of her tummy.

"Shit.....I'm dead.....Ruby will do something awful to me." Said Thio.

"It'll be fine.....I'll talk you through the procedure."

Him....He was expected to do it ! Why not, he was probably going to be dead in a ditch, when everyone else headed for home.

"You don't understand.....Ellie will call the authorities and Ruby.....Ruby will do something awful to me."

Tilda, she of the perpetual bad mood, of all people, had her arm around his shoulders.

"Take no notice of Ellie, her bark rarely becomes a bite." Said Tilda. "Ask Vanina about that.....Hey, Vanina, how often has Ellie threatened to send you home for wandering about in just your underwear on Sunday mornings ?"

"Oh.....Must be dozens.....Maybe hundreds of times." Said Vanina.

"And how often have you been sent home ?"

"Never." Said Vanina, the blonde woman from Bulgaria.

"She's right; Ellie almost never means her threats." Said Mars. "Patch me up and I'll be all smiles when I tell her about the accident with the glass. She'll be fine.....I promise."

Penny arrived back with a large medical bag and a man Thio had never seen before. The man was carrying a few bottles of chemicals and an enormous roll of clinical wipes. Everything was placed in front of Thio, as though he knew what to do with it all. Interestingly there was another nearby explosion, which everyone ignored. Just about every student in trailer four was crammed into the small communal lounge and they were being calm and quiet, as Mars gave Thio his instructions.

"First a small jab of local anaesthetic, I'll point out the right hypodermic." Said Mars.

Several small amounts around where the glass was protruding out of her midriff. There was still so much bleeding and it worried him. As per her instructions, they waited for moment to give the jabs a chance to work.

“Don’t look so worried.” Said Mars. “You’re doing fine.”

“Yeah, a great job.” Added Tilda.

It wasn’t window glass, every student there agreed to that, although its origin was a mystery. Out of her tummy it came, with Mars just wincing once, while pulling a few faces.

“It didn’t penetrate my gut.” Said Mars. “Good.....That would have been really bad.”

More blood, as Thio used medical cleaning spray and wipes to clean the wound. It was almost a relief when the time came to stitch up the dreadful looking wound. Thio had no idea how to do it, but Mars would talk him through it and best of all.....The stitches would stop the seemingly endless bleeding.

“Are you doing alright ?” Asked Mars. “Do you need a break ?”

“No, I’m fine.....How are you doing ?” Asked Thio.

“Well....Being honest, I’ve had better days.”

The needles came ready threaded to the stitching thread, inside sealed and sterile packets.

Something else for Thio to add to his list of information learned that day. He stitched the wound and noticed that Mars had to be in pain. Her face was pale as he cut the thread and examined his handiwork.

“Not bad, my dad couldn’t do it that neat.” Said Penny. “And he’s been a family GP for twenty years.”

“Lastly the dressing.....If you’re knackered, someone else can do that bit.” Said Mars.

“No.....I’ll finish the job.” Said Thio.

Thio would have been the first to admit that his dressing wasn’t the tidiest he’d ever seen, though it did the job. The main thing was that Mars was no longer bleeding. Someone else had noticed that at some point, the noises of war had ceased. Had they won or the cult ? Thio decided it was probably too early to be certain.

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Daylight, an hour after the sun had risen over the forest to the east. Sophie saw no reason to change her tactics for the daylight. A blinding flash was still a blinding flash, even on a bright sunny morning. Then crushing her enemies the way Ruby did it. Crushing had a definite advantage over fire and explosions, especially in a wooded area. Crushing didn’t set the countryside alight, or harm those on your side, the way fire magic could. Force magic Ruby called it and there was no risk of it getting out of control. Sophie was hovering near the top of a tree not that far from their bus. Not flying, she became angry if people, who should have known better, said she flew. It was levitation followed by forward motion, or backward motion.

“Definitely not flying.” She muttered.

The tree was giving her cover, as she watched two of the Colonel’s men, as they walked towards the accommodation trailers. A woman walked out of a trailer and one of the cult guys raised a handgun. No, Sophie didn’t like the way that course of action was likely to end. She had the power; she’d drawn it from just about every living thing within a mile radius of the dig site. Nothing would die to give her part of its life force, though the trees might not grow quite as well the following summer. The flash of light was bright, though not bright enough to harm the female student. Sophie dropped to the ground and quickly compressed the two men down to the size of something like a fox. A roadkill fox, their bodies became a mass of shattered bones and oozing bodily fluids. Two less cult

members, but there seemed to be so many of them. The numbers give to Ruby by the FBI had to be nonsense.

"Better you than us.....Better you than us." Sophie mumbled at the two dead men.

Ginger, the woman had ginger hair. Sophie remembered Sarah mentioning a student everyone called Ginger, because of her hair. Sophie remained with Ginger, until the dazzle effect from the bright flash of light had worn off.

"My own version of a stun grenade." Said Sophie. "You'll soon be fine.....No more going out though. Whatever you went out to get, can't be essential enough to die for.....Stay in the trailer."

"I will, I promise." Said Ginger.

Once Ginger was inside her trailer, Sophie had intended to head north again, back towards the road. Ruby was in her head though, saying she was at the bunker. There was pain mixed in with Ruby's projected words, a lot of pain.

'On my way.' Sophie sent to Ruby.

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Eugenie was being old school, an ear splitting explosion, rather than Sophie's thunder flash approach. Plus, Eugenie was concentrating on destroying vehicles, rather than using all that effort to take out one enemy soldier. The different styles worked well though. Sophie was working one side of the camp, while Eugenie dealt with trucks and jeeps arriving off-road. Like Sophie, she had noticed there were a lot more than thirty fighters in the Colonel's guerrilla army.

"And then there's Spider." Eugenie muttered.

He was doing remarkably well, though she wasn't counting his kills. Any cult member getting too close to Spider's tree, didn't have much of a life expectancy. Numbers mattered and every dead cult fighter, meant one less to potentially hurt Ellie and her students. There was Spider up his tree and.....He'd just sent another of the Colonel's guys off to meet his maker. As for Sarah.....She was still there, hiding behind a few large rocks. For no good reason, other than an excuse to talk to a real person, rather than muttering at herself; Eugenie dropped to the ground close to where Sarah was hiding.

"Sarah.....Don't shoot, it's me." Eugenie called out.

"I can see you.....Come inside my den." Said Sarah.

It really deserved to be called a den. A plastic cover over part of the area to keep the weather out and a large number of tins and bottles. It was obvious Sarah had been preparing her hideout for some time. The rocks seemed to be more standing stones, one or two had runes carved into them. As bullet proofing went, standing stones were probably better than Kevlar.

"I noticed Spider is doing well.....He's brilliant with that sniper rifle." Said Eugenie.

"I wish I was doing better." Said Sarah. "Four of the bastards I've shot at.....Four and I think I only hit one of them."

"You're giving Spider protection, which is important."

"If you say so, Eugenie.....How are we doing? There seems to be a lot of the swine."

"Yeah, I think we were giving shoddy info." Said Eugenie. "The Colonel has more men than we were expecting. Maybe he hired a few mercenaries. From what I've seen we're winning, though Ruby has been hurt."

That caused a reaction, Eugenie knew it would. Sarah was unlikely to desert Spider though and she had to know. Still, Eugenie decided to do a little positive gas lighting.

"How was she hurt? How bad is it?" Asked Sarah.

“Nothing too bad and Todd is looking after her in the bunker.” Said Eugenie. “Ruby was shot, while trying to help one of the students. Jim it was and he’s fine, but Ruby was hit.”

“Where.....Where was she shot ?” Asked Sarah.

“I don’t know.” Eugenie lied. “The important thing is not to panic and carry on with our jobs. We need to keep fighting, Ruby told Sophie that really mattered.”

“I’m not panicking.” Said Sarah. “Ruby is strong. I’m not even sure if she can die, though I thought that about Baba Yaga. Did you know she died once, in Romania ?”

“Yes, Charlotte did mention that a while ago.” Said Eugenie.

“Ruby died, there was a funeral, a body buried.....Then she came back.”

“How do you come back after a burial ?” Asked Eugenie.

“It’s.....Complicated.”

Eugenie hugged Sarah, but she wanted to get back to the battle. Not just to fight the cult, but to get away from Sarah’s questions. Eventually she’d answer one of them in far too much detail.

“I need to get back to watching the road into camp.” Said Eugenie.

“Ok, but come back if you hear anything new about Ruby.”

“I will Sarah, I promise.”

Eugenie was hovering, waiting to shoot up into the morning sky.

“Has anyone killed the Colonel ?” Asked Sarah.

“No one has claimed a kill on him, but communications aren’t good.”

Eugenie levitated to tree top height and headed towards the road.

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Ruby had wedged herself against the back wall of the bunker, with Todd crouched quite close. Sophie had been expecting something bad and it was. Ruby was sending a jumbled flow of information into her head, as talking was just about impossible. Ruby and Todd had been trying to get Jim to safety and Ruby had put the student’s wellbeing above her own. It might have even been pure bad luck, a bullet aimed at someone else. It had passed through Ruby’s left cheek and out of the lower right side of her face. On the way it had gouged a deep wound in her tongue, before taking away a good part of her lower right jaw. It was bad, it was fucking bad.

‘Keep them fighting.’ From Ruby.

‘I will.’

Lily and Lorenzo were still firing the occasional shot across the car park, but on the whole, the battle was either over or had moved to another part of the dig site.

“She needs a hospital with proper medical care.” Said Lily. “Half her face is hanging off.....Most people would have died from that wound.”

“Ruby isn’t most people, she’s special.” Said Sophie. “She died once, we even buried the body. There was a reading of the will and everything. Yet, she came back. Charlotte is the same, I doubt if either of them can die.....At least not permanently.”

On the filthy dirt floor of a bunker, with a huge open, bleeding wound. It did seem insanity, a way to almost guarantee a massive infection. Ruby was still there though, still filling her head with jumbled thoughts. Uppermost was to find the Colonel and kill him, or it had all been for nothing.

“Ruby wants us to carry on fighting.” Said Sophie.

“Can I add my vote to getting her to a hospital ?” Asked Lorenzo.

“We’re not a democracy, Lorenzo.” Said Sophie. “You should have learned that by now. Ruby wants to stay where she is and go to sleep for a few hours. I know her, by tonight she’ll probably be healing.”

“And if she isn’t ?” Asked Lily.

“Then as now, the decision as to what to do, will be hers.” Said Sophie. “Can I rely on you to protect her while she sleeps ? I need to re-join the battle.”

“Of course you can.” Said Lily. ““We’ll look after her.”

Sophie knew what Ruby was doing to her body; Sophie had used the same tricks herself. Trigger the connections in the brain first; the ones morphine is very good at triggering. No morphine needed, Ruby could easily trigger the pain killing effects without drugs. Then something similar with the synapses that controlled fatigue and the need to sleep. Pain almost gone, so tired she’d sleep for twelve solid hours. Sophie felt Ruby fall into a deep and hopefully, untroubled sleep.

“Sorry to ask Todd, but I could do with you as my backup.” Said Sophie.

“Yes, of course.....Where are we going ?”

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