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"How the hell did Anne talk me into this shit?" Randy asked Penny who was sitting beside him in the passenger seat of the helicopter. "The chances of a ship stopping for a helicopter are absolutely nil. Hopefully they haven't left the dock yet."

"At least you'll have tried," Penny tried to reason with him. "Isn't that the idea? If I remember rightly, you used to use small inflatable boats the last time they dumped nuclear waste at sea."

"That's Velocito's favourite pastime, dodging barrels. He got quite depressed after they stopped dumping them. He had to make do with avoiding Japanese exploding harpoons instead, and they call me the crazy one."

"There's the ship now," Penny reported. "I'll climb into the back again before they see me."

"Charge!" Randy shouted. "Diddy lit, diddy lit, diddy lit, lit, lit," he continued in an attempted to imitate a seventh cavalry bugle charge.

The ex-British army scout helicopter skimmed the wavetops as it headed for the French dump-ship. This helicopter was one of eleven that were purchased after the Hong Kong unit was sold off in the late 1990s. The scout helicopter had become obsolete but was more than suitable for the Environmental Challenger's needs. Of the eleven, three had been cannibalised for spares and the remaining eight were either in action with other protest ships around the world or in storage.

This particular scout helicopter was under the control of Randy Sowers, a shell-shocked middle-aged Vietnam vet. Although appearing quite lucid and reasonable most of the time, Randy's trigger was a combat situation. Even an argument in a bar could trigger off the undesirable side of him. Anne had known this and realised that all she needed to do was get him into a confrontational situation and let his psychosis do the rest.

"Tally ho chaps. Bandits at twelve o'clock low," Randy attempted to imitate a world war two British pilot. "Let's teach these Jerries a lesson. Red leader, where are you?"

Penny sat motionless on the stretcher behind him, frightened by this sudden change in what she'd decided was a lecherous Yankee pervert. The realization that he was a crazy lecherous Yankee pervert had made her think about whether she was safer in the Amsterdam shop window. The biggest problem was that she was starting to like this loony American pilot, even if he might end up getting her killed in a helicopter crash.

On the bridge of the French dump-ship Francois Bévúe and Louis Fidèle watched carefully as the black speck on the horizon gradually became larger as Randy flew his helicopter at full speed towards them.

"What is it?" Louis asked. "Maybe they've launched a wave skimming missile at us." He could have been partly right with this theory.

"They're environmentalists, they wouldn't risk causing a nuclear spillage by firing explosives at us," Francois argued. "Well, whatever it is, it's approaching fast and we're nearly ready to cast off. How's the loading of the last few barrels coming on?"

"Fifteen more minutes and we can get underway."

The black speck had grown now to the size of a tennis ball and the clattering of the rotors could clearly be heard in the distance. Repainted from its army khaki and earth green camouflage, the new colours of blue, green and yellow were symbolic of the environmental movement. They represented the sea, land and sun respectively and the two officers instantly recognised this aircraft as belonging to their sworn enemy.

"Get on the radio and get us some air support," the captain ordered. Randy by this time was only a hundred metres from the ship.

Pierre Matraque had also heard the clattering of helicopter rotors and had initiated his own plans. A bunch of civilian protesters waving placards was one thing, he couldn't really get away with shooting them, but a military helicopter was another matter entirely. Identified as an army scout helicopter, Pierre had elected to ignore the colourful paintwork and assume that an invasion of the facility was underway. His men had already started running towards the dockside, automatic rifles cradled in their arms.

While the Cap de la Hague security were running around like headless chickens, Randy had climbed his helicopter to a more reasonable height and pressed the record button on the video controls beside him. The sophisticated recording equipment started whirring as the crew of the dump-ship hurried to cover their illegal cargo with a thick tarpaulin. From the dockside, Pierre Matraque's security officers started firing at the circling helicopter and despite their appalling accuracy, a few bullets zinged through the cockpit walls. Thankfully nothing vital had been hit and Randy decided that he'd recorded sufficient footage for Anne to use. All he was required to do now was unload the cargo slung in a tarpaulin bag beneath his helicopter. One side of the bag was fixed to the belly of the scout while the other could be released by pulling the locking pin, which was linked to a button on Randy's control stick.

Below him he could still see French deckhands running around, finishing off the job of covering their cargo from prying eyes. They were just pawns in this game, even if they were willing well paid ones at that. The officers appearing out on the wings of the bridge were a different kettle of fish though. With bullets still flying around his cockpit Randy aimed the helicopter towards Captain Bévúe and his bridge officers. It wasn't long before he was in a perfect position and pressed the little red button on the top of his control stick. The locking pin on the tarpaulin bag released and the contents of the bag headed earthwards under the effects of gravity and the scout's rotor downdraught.

"What's he doing now?" Captain Bévúe asked. "It looks like we're going to get a delivery of leaflets on what bad boys we are," he laughed.

While the captain laughed, the cargo descended down and shimmered golden brown in the bright sunshine. Randy banked the scout towards the sea and dropped back to wave top height, heading in the direction of the open ocean. Captain Bévuc and the rest of his officers watched the cargo descending towards them. The leaflets didn't seem to flutter in the wind like they usually did. They just continued on their earthward journey like a ton of bricks. Within seconds the flying bridge and entire superstructure of this massive ship was covered in brown debris and yellow liquid. The stench had become overpowering to say the least and even the security guards on the dockside were caught with the spray. Nobody moved as they'd been frozen to the spot with surprise at the contents of Randy's cargo and the first mate was knocked unconscious by a direct hit with a suspicious looking solid brown log.

"Was it a successful mission?" Karl asked.

"Operation 'green flush' was a total success," Randy replied. "We took them totally by surprise. You should have seen that froggy captain looking straight into my sights... oh, sorry Jacque," Randy apologized noticing that the old Frenchman had just appeared on the aft flight deck.

"It's all right Randy, I hate the froggies just as much as you do, I just happen to be one that's all."

"How close to sailing do you think they were?" Karl asked, bringing the conversation back to the current situation.

"We'll have to study the video from the chopper but from my reckoning, they were almost ready to leave. It didn't take them long to cover the cargo with a tarpaulin either. This crew's obviously been well drilled."

"In that case we'll just have to be better then, won't we?" Kia added.

"Ten out of ten for Vis's idea though," Randy added. "It'll take them hours to clean that mess up and I can't see them sailing with the stench they have at the moment."

"And it saved us emptying the septic tanks as well," Kia commented. "A perfect example of recycling. You could say that we really pissed on their fire this time."

Vis had come up with the idea as an adaptation of some of the prisoner's antics when she'd spent a few weeks in Holloway following her arrest during treetop protest on the route of a proposed bypass. It was common practice for inmates to attempt to land a shit parcel on a patrolling prison officer's head from a third floor window. Vis together with Anne had just upgraded the idea to use a helicopter and a French dumpship with a more than desirable outcome. Together the pair made an excellent team in more ways than one and they decided to celebrate their success in the darkroom. Once again the little red light was shining brightly above the door.

Captain Bévuc wouldn't have described the outcome as desirable at all. He'd actually described it in very flowery language, unfortunately it lost its impact because it was very difficult to get the right emphasis when swearing in French. Unlike German and Russian, French doesn't have the guttural sound to it that enhances any abusive

situation. Although his officers understood the meaning, if Randy had heard the words intended for him, he'd only have laughed at them.

Soaked from head to toe with stale urine and splattered with little brown lumps, Captain Bévuc decided to postpone the departure time until he'd taken a shower. The ship's medic had taken a look at Louis and an ambulance had been summoned from the neighbouring town of Cherbourg.

"Why hasn't the dump-ship left the dockside yet?" Marcel Pouvoir asked Pierre. "That protest ship is on its way from Alderney and if he doesn't leave soon, they'll get here first."

"Captain Bévuc has gone to take a shower and change his clothes. The first officer is unconscious and probably going to be hospitalised. If you can persuade him to sail out of the docks while smelling of shit, then be my guest. If I hadn't let my men go and get changed, I'd have had a mutiny myself."

The clattering of helicopter rotors broke the silence. "They're back," Marcel exclaimed and ran to the window, pulling it closed. "No point taking chances," he explained to Pierre.

"They're not likely to try the same trick twice, and anyway they're not environmentalist helicopters. It's our own air force arriving to protect us."

"Only twenty minutes late. I'm glad it wasn't a terrorist invasion or we'd have been occupied by now."

Randy by this time had tied down his helicopter and the deckhands were playing high-pressure hoses on the belly of the craft to clean off the residue from his bombing run. Penny had remained hidden during this time and was only disturbed by Paul poking his head through the passenger door while nobody else was looking.

"How's it going in here?" he asked. "Is Randy treating you all right?"

"Hi Paul," Penny greeted. "He's been tolerable, although I've had a real fight avoiding his advances. You haven't told him about my medical problem have you?"

"No, we didn't think it was advisable. He gets kind of crazy at times. Anyway, I've got some good news about your other problem. All the lads are saving up for your operation. If we get a few good shore leaves, we might have enough money before too long. How much do you reckon we'll need?"

"You certainly know how to make a girl happy," Penny replied. "The cheapest place would be Casablanca and even there you're talking a few thousand at least."

"Paul, get your head out of Randy's helicopter," the Bosun commanded. "If the captain sees you talking to yourself, he'll throw you off the ship. Come to that, if he discovers what you're talking to, he'll throw all of us off the ship."

In the mess room all the officers had congregated once again for another tactical planning conference. Anne was pleased with the results of their latest mission but after looking at the film from Randy's camera, realised just how close the French were to sailing.

"We probably only just delivered the last package in time," Anne started. "From interpreting the video of the attack, I'd say they were just starting their engines at the time. We've probably only given ourselves an hour at the most. Can we get into position by then Karl?"

"We should just make it as long as we use the diesels. We'll be just about level with the harbour entrance as they sail out."

"Any word on the French navy? Are they going to be in the area to try and arrest us?" Kia added.

"The French navy were still in the Mediterranean according to our last intelligence. We don't expect any trouble from them at this stage of the game," Anne replied.

"How do you propose that we stop this ship leaving Cap de la Hague?" Randy asked. "The only way I can see is to scuttle this ship across the entrance."

"Nobody's scuttling my ship," Karl defended. "If we had more time, we could have found an old barge, towed that here and scuttled it, but by the looks of it we don't have any extra time to play with."

"Spot on," Anne agreed. "We have no time to lose. We'll have to improvise as we go. The shit parcel trick won't work again; they'll be hiding in the bridge with all the windows closed. All I can think of is our usual tactics. Velocito, how do you feel about using your inflatables to dodge in front of their bows? Maybe they'll stay in the harbour if we keep an inflatable presence across the entrance."

"I'll give it a try Anne," Velocito agreed. "If they're as determined as we think though, they might just sail right through us."

"I'm working on getting some television cameras to cover the action," Anne added. "They're less likely to charge straight through you if the world news is watching them. Unfortunately most of the news stations regard nuclear protests as old news though."

"Is that our only battle plan?" Kia asked.

"The only other idea was Randy flying his helicopter across the bows of the ship but he doesn't think it's a good idea. It's too dangerous." Velocito gave Randy a stern look as Anne explained the additional plan.

"All right, I'll do it, but don't blame me if I end up returning in one of Velocito's inflatables. It's your helicopter. I just fly the thing. If you want me to impale it on the bows of a freighter, then so be it."

It had taken Pierre pointing a gun at the ambulance driver's head to persuade him to take the first mate into his nice clean ambulance. Not only had a solid chocolate log knocked Louis unconscious but the liquid contents of the bombing had permeated as far as his underwear. Understandably the ambulance crew, which had just arrived from Cherbourg, weren't very eager to touch their patient let alone lift him onto a stretcher. A stretcher they'd have to scrub clean later.

"He'll probably come around in a few minutes," the ambulance attendant suggested. "Maybe if we just left him he'd be better off."

"You haven't even examined him yet," Pierre observed.

"You mean you want us to touch him?"

"Let me put it this way. You either treat him or the next ambulance crew will be treating you," Pierre had raised his pistol level with the ambulanceman's temple. "Any further complaints?"

They'd complained openly no further. Gingerly they'd examined the fallen first mate and reluctantly concluded that they'd have to take him to hospital. If they were going to have to get filthy, then the hospital staff could share in their misfortune. Obviously he hadn't just fainted because the overpowering smell was stronger than the most effective smelling salts on the market. With the image of hours spent disinfecting their vehicle afterwards, they carefully loaded the first mate into the ambulance and screamed out of the gates of the power plant.

"If he stops breathing, I'm not giving him mouth to mouth," the attendant shouted through to his colleague who was driving.

"Don't look at me, I'm the driver today. It's up to you if you want to let him die and then you'll have to explain it to the security chief if you ever see him again."

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to tempt fate like that but the ambulance attendant's worst nightmare came true. Louis Fidèle's head injury had affected the respiratory centre of his brain and his breathing started to sound distressed.

"Get this bloody ambulance moving faster!" the attendant screamed. "His breathing just got worse."