

The disembodied voice of Santana, codename: El Diablo, buzzed throughout the windowless room like an angry wasp. "Traitor!" he said over and over between the intermittent pops and distortion-laden booms that accompanied his flaming attacks.

Of the eight small monitors arranged in two rows of four on the concrete wall, only one currently displayed an image. The rest were just popcorn static. Digital noise that told Waller that most of the team had either died or, more likely, had destroyed their headsets in an act of defiance. The last working display contained the label "Col. Flag." It was unsurprising that the colonel's feed would be the only one still active, and his audio was now being fed through a small set of speakers mounted above the monitors.

In the fuzzy, digital-artefacted video stream, Waller could see that Flag was holding his ground behind a cement truck, occasionally firing bursts of semi-automatic rifle-fire towards the unmistakably menacing form of El Diablo, the audio of which translated to an unlistenable drumroll of extremely loud static.

"Mute," Waller said, and the audio cut out.

A flash of white light consumed the screen for a moment before Flag turned away from the fireball and began sprinting the opposite direction in silence, looking for new cover from the powerful meta-human's flaming onslaught.

It was war. Task Force X had fallen apart at the seams, and The Joker was there to remind her.

"Why can't they all just play nice?" he said, punctuated by a disturbing titter. "Why, your commandos are a regular suicide-squad aren't they?"

She glared at him a moment before nodding to the two AR-16-wielding guards standing to either side of the deranged clown. They both dutifully kicked his legs out from under him and pressed the barrels of their guns to the green hair on the back of his head. He laughed again, louder this time, his ghost-white face stretching into a cartoonish mask of sadistic glee.

She reached into the inside pocket of her jacket and grabbed the last cigarette out of the crumpled pack of Silk Cuts. She casually put it to her mouth and lit with a match while watching the monitor, all the while trying to ignore The Joker's insidiously growing laughter.

It was galling, being stuck in this bunker with the likes of this man, if you could call him a man. Unfortunately, she was forced to take drastic measures and sequester herself and her prisoner in a room immune to the Enchantress' powers. It was a quirk about the thick walls and old lead paint that Task Force X had discovered entirely by accident: as long as she was in this

room and the Enchantress was somewhere out there, the witch wouldn't be able to affect her mind.

On the monitor, Flag turned back and lobbed a grenade towards El Diablo. It exploded mere feet from the pyromancer, but he casually directed the blast away from himself and back towards Flag. The concrete room shook slightly, and dust fell from the cracks in the ceiling.

The Joker's laughter subsided, and he said, "Awful close, don't you think, Miss Waller? Maybe it's time you take Agent Skull-y and the colonel out." She didn't need to look at him to know that he was referring to the black metal box sitting on the desk beneath the monitors. Inside were several toggle switches, each labeled with the name of a different member of the team. She eyed it for a moment, but turned to The Joker, putting on a grim face.

"And what if I decided to take out Dr. Quinzel instead?"

Predictably, he laughed at this. "Maybe you should have put one of your fancy little bombs inside the witch's head, though I will say that this is much more entertaining, watching them fight against themselves on pay-per-view." More laughter. For a moment, Waller regretted missing her opportunity to shove a chip inside this asshole's brain, but then she remembered that she didn't need it.

"Kill him," she said coldly.

Both of her guards cocked their weapons, and a flash of genuine panic flew across The Joker's face. It was the most satisfying thing she had ever seen.

"Eighty-six that," she said immediately, and the guards obediently stood down. The maniac looked to either side, breathing heavily, before he started laughing again,

"Oh you're funny!" he said with a tone of glee. "I underestimated you."

"You'll find that I am completely in control of this situation," she said, turning back towards the monitor, which now displayed Colonel Flag sprinting down a very familiar back-alley. *What's he doing coming this close?* she thought to herself.

"Control?" The Joker asked with a laugh. "What about your boy scout? Flag was his name? He's gone a wee bit rogue it seems. And doesn't he have his own killbox?"

She wasn't sure how he knew about Flag's box, but she nodded.

"And aren't you afraid he's going to use it?"

She was.

Flag sprinted through a door to get out of the alley, and right up to a feminine figure that appeared to be smoking at the seams. For a brief moment, the video feed was filled with the hauntingly beautiful, yet distorted face of Dr. June Moon.

*Not Moon*, Waller reminded herself, *The Enchantress*. *Moon isn't steering this ship anymore.*

"Volume up," she said aloud, and the audio feed returned to the little room. She only caught the tail end of whatever Flag had been saying.

"-won't let them hurt you!" he said, trying to catch his breath. Before Moon could respond, however, a roaring burst of static filled the speakers, accompanied by another flash of light on the screen. This explosion was so close, that Waller could feel the rumble below her feet. Flag gave a pained scream, and the light on screen made way for darkness as he covered his face to protect himself from the flames.

El Diablo's voice rang out again. "Hiding, Colonel? She can't protect you. I've been let loose! A timebomb ready to blow! I'm more powerful than her in every conceivable way!"

After a moment, the image brightened again and a very familiar black box appeared in frame, held in front of Flag's face by his gloved hands.

"He's going to take out the baldy," Joker said calmly from behind her. "Better stop him or the witch wins the day." He laughed quietly to himself with apparent relish.

The box opened, and an identical set of switches to the one on Waller's desk appeared in the small monitor. Although the feed was not of high quality, it was obvious that this box was the exact twin of Waller's own.

Save for one small detail.

She looked down at her own killbox, noting the additional, unlabeled switch below the others; the one that she hadn't told Flag about.

"Flag doesn't have a brain chip," she said aloud. It wasn't a lie. Colonel Flag had been assigned leadership of the rag-tag team of superpowered criminals, but he himself was not one of them. He wouldn't have to endure the indignity of having a small explosive device placed inside his skull. That didn't mean, however, that Waller had refrained from creating safeguards in case Flag's position became compromised.

Her finger hovered over the unlabeled switch, waiting for Flag to force her to use it. It was a worst-case contingency to be sure. If she decided to pull back the clear plastic cover and hit the switch, it would all be over. She hesitated.

"I knew you were soft," El Diablo taunted again as he slowly walked closer and closer to Flag, the skull-tattoo on his face looking like the very spectre of death in the dancing light of his flames. For the first time, Waller could see that the entire facade of whatever building Flag and Moon had taken shelter in had been torn away by the meta-human's flames, and the other

members of Task Force X stood at a distance, watching stoically from the street. This struck Waller as odd.

*Why are they holding back?* She wondered, glancing at the distant figure of Floyd "Deadshot" Lawton, holding his sniper rifle non threateningly to the side. *Deadshot could take Flag out in his sleep. And why isn't The Enchantress fighting back?*

"I could kill all of you right now!" Flag shouted, desperation in his tinny voice. Quinzel, Harkness, Lawton, Jones, and Yamashiro, all stood motionless in the distance. No reaction whatsoever. If Waller wasn't inside this tiny room, she might have suspected that Moon was playing with her mind.

"But you won't," El Diablo said in a voice that was quieter and more calm than any Waller had yet heard him use. "Because you're not one of the bad guys, Colonel, so you can't do what bad guys do: kill each other."

And at that moment, Waller knew he was right. Until now, she had been hoping that Flag's betrayal had all been a feint; a method with which to gain Dr. Moon's, no, The Enchantress', trust in order to get the heavy-hitters close enough to take her out. The pieces were all in place, after all. Here they were, all in the same room, and the all-powerful Enchantress was apparently non combative. *He won't stand aside*, she thought, *and he definitely won't kill Moon himself*. She flipped open the plastic cover that protected the unlabeled switch.

The Joker's voice jarred her. "I'm dying to see what your little toy will do, Waller." He had no idea how accurate that sentiment really was. She gripped the switch between her thumb and forefinger. This was it.

Suddenly, the heavy steel door at the back of the room clanged open, and a small blur of motion shot in front of her. Amanda Waller did not possess reflexes acute enough to actually see the speeding object, but half a moment later she discovered that her cigarette was no longer in her mouth. Were she to witness the event with the aid of a high-speed camera, she would have been able to see with perfect clarity that the speeding blur was a run-of-the-mill wooden boomerang thrown by none other than Digger Harkness, a man who, according to the monitor Waller was staring at, was currently outside on the street impassively watching Colonel Flag threaten to blow up his brain.

The speeding boomerang, in a feat of amazing precision and dexterity, spun directly towards Waller's mouth and slid underneath her last Silk Cut cigarette with enough force and friction that it popped away from her red lips and clung to the boomerang as it spun away from

Waller's unharmed face and back towards the door. As it returned to Harkness' hand, it passed his own waiting mouth, and deposited the still-lit cigarette there as if placed by an invisible hand. The entire trick took less than a second. Harkness grinned.

"G'day mates!" he said jovially as Waller and The Joker reeled from the sudden onslaught of stimuli. The intruder sucked Waller's cigarette down to the filter, flicked it away, then said, "I bet you all didn't expect to see Captain Boomerang here to-." But he was cut off as his skull exploded outward with the force of a quarter stick of dynamite.

Waller let the toggle switch return to the neutral position as Harkness' body slumped to the floor, his boomerang still held firmly in his dead hand.

It was all apparently too much for the joker, who doubled over in hysterical laughter.

In another blink, two gunshots rang out like cannons in the tiny concrete room, and both of the guards that had been standing to either side of the Joker lay dead on the ground, their bodies slumped on top of what remained of Harkness. The Joker was overcome by another violent fit of laughter as the tall, dark form of Floyd Lawton, codename: Deadshot, stepped into the room, both pistols trained on Waller.

"Okay, so you do have your own death box, huh?" he demanded as he stepped over the corpses he had just made and closed the distance to Waller. He seemed to notice Harkness' body, but just shook his head and moved on.

Waller blinked. She gave Lawton an appraising stare, then turned to look at the tiny monitor on the wall. There, in the fuzzy display, looking as if he hadn't moved at all, stood another Floyd Lawton standing behind El Diablo, sniper rifle still in-hand. Furthermore, he still appeared to be standing next to a perfectly in-tact Digger Harkness. *What the hell?* she thought, her mind spinning.

"Only one of me is real," Lawton said coolly, as he closed the gap between them, bent down, and pressed his forehead against hers. Waller was so surprised by this that her grip tightened instinctively on the killbox, her finger still on the switch.

"Not so fast, Waller," Lawton continued, shiny bald head still pressed against her. "You flip that switch and blow up my noodle, I'm taking yours with me." He then pressed the barrel of a handgun to the underside of her chin. "Same goes for any of those other noodles."

Waller thought fast. He was right. If she hit the switch marked "Lawton," it would be suicide. The headless mess that was Harkness was enough proof of the explosive power of the brain chips.

She cursed to herself, realizing that although The Enchantress was unable to affect her mind while they were separated by the lead-laden walls, that didn't stop her from magically affecting what appeared in front of Flag's head-mounted video camera. *But how much of the video feed is illusion and how much is really happening?*

The Joker continued to cackle like a hyena at the center of the room, Harkness' blood pooling at his knees.

Waller knew she had been outmaneuvered, but if she could flip that unlabeled switch before Lawton killed her, she might still manage to save the day. It would be violent and chaotic, and she had no way of knowing if the Enchantress would actually be destroyed, but then again, Waller wouldn't be around to care about the outcome. Her superiors would probably dismiss her for her apparent lack of follow-through, but what other option did she have at the moment? The contingency was created for just such an occasion as this.

In that last moment, with Lawton's bald head pressed against her hairline and the Joker gasping for breath between violent fits of laughter, she couldn't help but think about The Enchantress. The witch had projected ghost images of all of the members of Task Force X in front of Flag so that the team could sneak up on Waller without arousing suspicion. The possessed woman had clearly had some sort of change of heart and had begun helping them. But why? Was it because Waller had gained custody of The Joker? Did Quinzel goad her into helping somehow in order to get back to her "Mr. Jay?" What did this, quote, suicide squad do to calm the old witch's fury and turn her powers of illusion to their own benefit?

The illusions.

In a rush of clarity, it all clicked into place, and Waller would have had to reach for the desk for support if Lawton wasn't there holding her in place. She stared at the screen out of the corner of her eye for a long moment, her breath quickening. The Enchantress was much more clever, and much more powerful, than she had ever imagined. If she could project a fake Lawton and Harkness out in front of Flag's camera for Waller's benefit, then she could use those same illusions to dupe the team into doing exactly what she wanted them to do. She could maneuver Flag and El Diablo into fighting one another as a distraction. She could trick Harkness into breaking into Waller's magic-proof room. And once that door was open, Waller's own mind was putty in the Enchantress' hands.

All she had to do then was put Waller in a no-win situation. Moon knew exactly what she would do when that happened: put a permanent end to Task Force X.

She thought about the unlabeled switch and smiled.

"Dr. Moon, you are far too clever for your own good," she said smoothly, her eyes locked on Lawton's.

Lawton frowned and stared at her a long moment, pulling his head away from Waller's. Finally, in a voice that was not his own, he said, "Well, if you won't kill them, then I'll do it myself."

And in an instant, a thick black smoke erupted from Lawton and swirled around Waller, like ink striking water. She fell backwards against the desk, no longer supported by the tall man, who exploded in a fit of illusory magic and took on the slight, haunting form of The Enchantress herself. The smoke circled the room like a tiny hurricane, then cleared.

Waller spun, seeing that the two guards who had been shot in the back by the spectre of Lawton, were no longer lying dead on the ground, but appeared to be unconscious but alive, and leaning against the back wall near the door. The eight monitors, which had been all but static a moment before, now displayed six bright digital images, all of which seemed to be staring at a dark, imposing figure in a cape and, *were those cat ears?* The only two monitors that still displayed static were marked "Slipknot" and "Harkness." Waller wondered at this for a moment, but quickly saw that Digger Harkness' headless corpse was still lying there with blood pooling in frightening amounts in the center of the room.

The Joker was nowhere to be seen, but the bloody footprints that led out the still-open door and into the dark hallway beyond were explanation enough.

Dr. Moon, smoking at the seams like the embers of a dying fire, struck out with both hands, and grabbed the killbox free of Waller's grip, pushing her back wards against the side wall as if she had been thrown by Killer Croc. She struck the concrete hard, which knocked the wind out of her. She slumped to the cold floor and tried to regain her breath.

"You're smart to have given Flag a fake killbox, Waller," she said as she inspected the simple black box. "His mind was too easy to overthrow. Turns out he had a bit of a soft spot for me."

*So she's already tried to use Flag's killbox to take out the team, Waller thought, and she's going to try again with mine.*

She strained to speak through gasping breaths. "Don't!"

"So this is the master switch?" Moon, no, The Enchantress asked as she gripped the unlabeled toggle.

*She thinks the button will take out the whole team!* Waller thinks with excitement. *A master switch.* She struggled to respond, playing into The Enchantress' assumptions. "Don't. Do it. Please."

"Oh Amanda," she said, almost sounding like the old Dr. Moon again. "Grown attached to your suicide squad, have you? Surprising since you've already taken two of them out yourself. I'm just finishing the job for you."

*You sure are,* Waller mused to herself as she closed her eyes and smiled. She thought about all the details of the contingency plan that she never told Flag or the rest of the squad about, delighting in the fact that Dr. Moon had no way of knowing that the "master switch" in fact served not to set off, but to disarm all of the tiny bombs that lay within the braincases of each member of Task Force X, freeing them from bondage once and for all. On top of that, Waller was the only living soul who ever knew about the two additional explosives housed within the twin killboxes that were set to go off three seconds afterwards. She felt a brief pang of guilt for Colonel Flag's imminent fate and hoped that there was nobody else standing within thirty feet of him.

The Enchantress flicked the switch. Silence. Moon waited half a beat before saying, "I was kind of hoping for a bigger bang."

She gets it. Waller, Moon, and the little concrete room cease to exist.

THE END.