

Escalation
by
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INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

CONRAD, a hard edged man in bloody fatigues, slams himself into a brick wall and takes cover next to a window. Through the filthy window is a blasted industrial courtyard leading to another, similar building where indistinct movements skirt the window edges.

Conrad hefts a futuristic rifle, unconsciously caressing his face with the barrel. A wisp of smoke rises from the barrel. He breathes in heavily as dust moats float about him.

He looks down to his left and sees...

OKU, also in military fatigues. She is a striking, dark eyed woman sitting propped against the same brick wall. The top of her head is below the first window to the right of Conrad. She faces the center of the room, her legs spread out before her in a "V." She cradles two Colt 45s, crossed against her chest. Her body is in sunlight, her eyes are in shadow. She is bloodied and trying to keep conscious. Her head rises slowly, sensing Conrad's eyes on her.

Conrad looks at her and then his head turns as he shifts his gaze to a thin man with perfectly trimmed, black, lamb chop sideburns. His name is JIMMY. He is on his knees below the far left window. Shielded from the courtyard beyond by the brick wall, Jimmy can peer over the sill into the battleground. He wears a cowboy hat, holster and a six shooter at his waist.

He also holds a sniper rifle, butt against the ground. Sitting on his heels, Jimmy turns to acknowledge Conrad. His every movement is deliberate. He is not bloody or bruised, but he too, breathes heavily.

They all wear headsets to communicate.

Conrad breaks eye contact with Jimmy and looks at Oku. He puts a finger to his ear and whispers into his headset.

CONRAD

Whatever you do, don't deviate from the plan. Do it exactly and precisely as we laid out. You ready little sister? On three. One, two...

He brings his rifle down to shoot when there is a click and a door on the right wall opens. A small figure is in shadow behind the door.

Startled, Conrad swings toward the door, his rifle coming into firing position.

Oku aims her double guns at the unexpected intruder.

The door opens a bit more and a meek face peers in. It's a blond, blue eyed, 12 year old girl named HANNA. She wears a school uniform. Her hair is in long thick braids that reach past her waist. She is not dirty or out of breath.

Conrad lowers his weapon.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Hanna!

HANNA

We're out of milk.

Conrad looks annoyed, skeptical. Oku is surprised. Jimmy grins.

CONRAD

There's still a full gallon in the fridge.

Hanna gives a teenage shrug.

Conrad remembers the enemy across the courtyard and he pulls back into cover.

Hanna swings the door open wide. She smiles mischievously and hefts a shoulder mounted laser cannon. It is nearly too big to hold and wavers in her hands.

HANNA

I got an upgrade!

She flicks a switch on the cannon and it jerks in her hands as though it has an internal gyroscope. At the tip of the barrel, a small red ball of energy indicates it is ready to fire. It hums dangerously and she can barely keep it steady.

JIMMY

Easy cowgirl.

CONRAD

Wait...

Hanna steps into the room, aims out a broken window and shoots a baseball sized, red ball of fire at the building across the courtyard. The cannon bucks violently in her hands. An explosion blows out a section of the wall.

HANNA

Yes!

A red glowing symbol floats down from the ceiling above Hanna's head that says, "Violation."

OKU

Whoa!

JIMMY

There goes the plan.

CONRAD

You can't use that here.

All is deathly quiet for a moment.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Move back!

A fullisade of bullets tear through the room from across the courtyard. We see Hanna quickly step back into the gloom. Conrad, Oku and Jimmy take cover from the bullets, the breaking glass and flying debris. The tall windows are being blown to bits.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 ACROSS COURTYARD - DAY

SAM, a fighter in a window across the courtyard, ducks behind the sill. He puts down the smoking M16 he was shooting and talks to his team through a headset.

SAM

So that's how their playing it.
This is NOT going unanswered.

He pulls out a canister bomb. It has an evil, grinning bunny logo on the side. Sam presses a button on the canister and a bright blue pulsing begins - then a high pitched whine.

A red glowing symbol descends above Sam's head, proclaiming that he too, is now in "Violation."

Sam inserts the pulsing canister into the launcher. With a loud "thump," he fires it toward the window where Conrad is standing.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

The pulsing canister clatters into the room.

Before bouncing to a stop (large in the center of the frame), Hanna dives, hands outstretched, toward the explosive. She grabs it, still horizontal, spins around on her back and hurls the canister out the window.

It explodes outside and a fireball enters the window while the four duck for cover. Hanna struggles to her feet.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 UPSTAIRS - DAY

KALYN, a tough looking sniper on Sam's team, attaches a bright red scope to her rifle. When it clicks into place, the red "Violation" symbol settles down over her head.

KALYN

Game over sweetheart.

She aims the rifle and somehow, the scope sees Hanna through the brick wall. There are three flashing words above the crosshairs, "X-ray Vision Enabled"

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Hanna comes into the crosshairs. A single, high powered shot is fired. It rips through the brick and Hanna is hit in the chest and knocked to the ground. She lies there very still.

Conrad spins around - teeth clinched. Oku and Jimmy wince.

CONRAD

Your mother would kill me.

Conrad turns toward Building #2 and vanishes in a flash of fluttering particles.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 UPSTAIRS - DAY

From the second floor window, Kalyn looks up from her sniper rifle with a satisfied smile, then hears something and turns in alarm. Conrad rushes into the room with a red "violation" symbol above his head. Instead of the doorway, he runs through a brick wall. He points his finger at the floor beneath her and a black, gaping hole opens. Kalyn falls through.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Another shooter, WINSTON, aims an assault weapon at Conrad's team from a downstairs room. From across the room, he sees Kalyn fall through the ceiling and disappear through another hole that opens in the floor.

EXT. BENEATH INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 - DAY

Kalyn falls through the bottom of the 3D model of Building #2 and drops into endless, black space.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Conrad runs through the wall next to Winston and guns him down. He then jumps up through the ceiling...

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 UPSTAIRS - DAY

...and lands on his feet next to Sam on the second floor.

Sam sees him and disappears.

Conrad looks around a moment and then, he too, disappears.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Jimmy sees Hanna re-spawn in a flash of blue light at the back of the room. She runs forward toward the windows. Conrad reappears next to her. He is angry.

CONRAD
Disconnect now!

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Winston dances from foot to foot. Working up his courage, he makes a decision and runs directly at the brick wall like Conrad. But instead of going through, he smashes into it.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Hanna is appealing to Conrad.

HANNA
I want to be part of the team.

CONRAD
No.

HANNA
Mom would have let me.

OKU
She would have, you know.

Oku pulls the trigger on her Colt 45. Across the courtyard, Kalyn's head snaps back as she falls into the dark room. The conversation doesn't pause.

CONRAD
You stay out of this.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Winston tries to run through the wall a second time and succeeds.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

JIMMY
Easy Conrad, she's just saying...

Winston appears in the room, running directly at Jimmy. Winston looks surprised and happy that his trick worked and brings his rifle up to fire.

Jimmy leans his sniper rifle to the side and casually shoots Winston in the head.

Hanna looks at Conrad in a pique and disappears.

All is quiet for a moment. Conrad, Oku and Jimmy aren't sure what just happened.

Then they hear two gunshots from the building across the courtyard. Conrad gives Oku a grim look.

He disappears too.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Hanna is sitting in a wooden kitchen chair about ten feet from the back wall of Building #2. Her legs are spread in an un-ladylike fashion, elbows rest on her knees and in each hand she holds a pistol.

Kalyn re-spawns in a flash of blue light and in that moment between her complete re-spawn and her ability to move, we see her eyes widen as Hanna raises her left gun and shoots. Kalyn drops in a heap.

Winston re-spawns three feet to the right and Hanna shoots him in that same moment of frustrated paralysis. Winston drops to the floor.

Hanna presses a button on the side of her headset, casually taunting the other team.

HANNA

Hey Sam, we're in your base and
killing your dudes.

Far across the room, under an old boiler, Sam crawls along in the dark. He mutters to himself.

SAM

Damn that kid, this was supposed to
be a straight game.

Conrad appears next to Hanna. His rifle at his side. He is calm, annoyed and a bit confused.

CONRAD

What are you doing?

Kalyn re-spawns and she's mad this time because she knows what is going to happen, but she still can't move until she's completely re-spawned. Hanna raises her left gun, waits for the right moment as Kalyn begins to move and shoots again. Kalyn's second body falls on top of her first.

Hanna looks up at Conrad. All humor gone.

HANNA

She died.

CONRAD

I know.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Jimmy and Oku are listening in on the headsets from across the building. Now that they know what's going on with Hanna, their concern shows.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

HANNA

And she left us. And it could happen to you too. And I won't be with you when it does. I won't get to know you.

Winston re-spawns, teeth gritted, gun pointed at Hanna. Hanna raises her right gun casually and shoots him before he can move. He drops onto his first dead body.

CONRAD

I'm not going anywhere.

HANNA

And I'll be all alone.

A grenade clatters on the floor between them. Sam tossed it from across the room. He ducks. Conrad looks down at the grenade and frowns at the interruption. It explodes and father and daughter are blown away.

Kalyn and Winston spawn, this time looking resigned to getting shot again and surprised and pleased at surviving. They step over their own dead bodies and run toward the front of the building.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Hanna and Conrad reappear in a blue flash at the back of Building #1 and run up to the window.

CONRAD

You're reckless, Hanna. Just like her. You're not ready.

They peer past the windowsill and see...

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

...Sam walking to the middle of the courtyard. He is surrounded by a glowing blue sphere and carries a huge, golden glowing mini-gun. The "Violation" emblem still hovers above his head.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Conrad, Oku and Hanna raise their weapons and take aim simultaneously.

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

Winston and Kalyn run out of Building #2 into the courtyard with their guns at the ready.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

JIMMY

How long are they going to let us go
on like this?

Jimmy unscrews a small bottle of party bubbles, pulls out the wand and blows bubbles into the air. They float slowly out the window and across the courtyard.

Conrad, Oku and Hanna open fire. Winston and Kalyn take cover behind Sam. Jimmy joins the fire fight.

Although the noise from Conrad's team makes a terrible din, the ordinance bounces off the glowing blue figure. It continues, but Sam stands there grinning, one hand on his hip, "Violation" symbol spinning gently above his head. Eventually, they stop firing.

Winston steps out from Sam's left and Kalyn steps out from Sam's right. They wave their hands and three duplicates of themselves form next to each of them. Now there are four Winston's and four Kalyn's. They all take aim.

Sam revs up his mini-gun and they all begin to fire at once. He swings and strafes the building.

Conrad pushes Hanna down and away from the gunfire.

Bullets rip into Conrad, jerking his body and knocking him back.

Jimmy takes a direct hit to his forehead and his head snaps back. Sam continues to strafe the building with bullets.

Hanna stays huddled down behind the cover of the brick wall with Oku. The enemy gunfire stops.

HANNA

Am I like her?

Oku peers up over the windowsill at the enemy team outside. They watch Jimmy's bubbles float slowly toward them.

OKU

Yes. You've got her spirit - and
you make me laugh just like she did.
Duck!

The bubbles finally reach their targets and boom, boom, boom, boom, all four Winston's and all four Kalyn's explode, one by one.

HANNA

I want to be part of the team.

OKU

I think you're really good, but it's
up to your dad.

Jimmy spawns and runs back to his window, pushing his own
dead body out of the way.

Conrad re-spawns in a blue flash at the back of the room.
He looks up and sees Hanna and Oku crouched below the window.
Then Hanna looks up at him and in a tousel of blond hair,
it's suddenly JEANNIE, his wife. She looks at him and grins,
just like Hanna. With a jerk of her head, she invites Conrad
to join the game.

He runs up beside Hanna and looks down at her. He seems a
little shell shocked. Hanna looks up, questioning. Oku
looks at Conrad.

OKU (CONT'D)

You look like you just saw a ghost.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #2 DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Kalyn and Winston spawn in a blue flash at the back of
Building #2. They stop for a moment, wave their hands and
each clone themselves twenty times.

Two battle lines of Kalyn's and Winston's run laughing toward
the front of the building and then right through the wall
into the courtyard.

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

Sam grins as forty soldiers come to a halt next to him in
the courtyard facing Conrad's building. They line up two
deep and are spread the width of the buildings.

Sam doesn't see anyone else in the windows and becomes
uncertain. The mini-gun winds down.

All is quiet. Dust swirls. Sam breaks the silence with a
yell.

SAM

Your team wants to hack, we'll give
you a hack, Conrad!

Sam laughs, but all is quiet. He becomes uncertain. Sam's
team is getting restless.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

OKU

Care to do the honors, Hanna?

Hanna looks up at Conrad expectantly. He nods his approval, reluctantly. He's concerned and a bit frightened for her.

Hanna rises to her feet, hands Oku her rifle and walks to the front door. It creaks as she opens it and light spills in.

Unarmed, Hanna, dressed in a stained, bloody school uniform, takes a last look back at her father and walks meekly through the high double doors. Her head is bowed as she comes to a stop before the crowd. They start to jeer and laugh at her. She clinches her fists at her side.

Sam smirks.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Conrad tenses up and starts to follow her out, but Oku reaches out and gently takes his arm to stop him. Without acknowledging her, he holds his position.

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

Hanna raises her head and faces the enemy, full on in defiance. Wind starts to blow Hanna's hair, whipping it out of the long braids.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Conrad's grimace is proud, expectant. Oku and Jimmy smile. She reaches over and takes Jimmy's hand.

He seems startled, but then softens.

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

With a smirk of anticipation, Sam and the forty clones raise their weapons simultaneously.

Then, like a wizard summoning a spell, Hanna whips her arms into the air. Her school uniform turns into a black cape that billows out around her body - enormous black wings flare out behind her like an avenging angel. Golden hair flows around her head - her own personal cyclone.

Sam's eyes widen as his mini-gun revs up too slowly. The forty clones scrabble to take aim.

Hanna throws her upraised arms toward Sam and the forty clones standing in the courtyard. A great wall of fire blasts forth from her, engulfing Sam, his army and the entire two story enemy building across the courtyard.

The building turns to pixel dust and blows away in a gout of smoke and flame. Nothing is left where it stood except blackness and a blue horizontal grid stretching off into infinity.

All is quiet. Hanna, her wings gone, her black cape limp on her small frame, slowly lowers her arms with a sigh.

Jimmy's laugh carries across the courtyard - a slow, rich laugh.

INT. RUINED INDUSTRIAL BUILDING #1 DAY

Oku grins from ear to ear.

Conrad proudly nods his head and holds his face under tight control.

CONRAD

That's my Hanna.

EXT. COURTYARD BETWEEN BUILDINGS - DAY

Hanna looks up as a golden figure descends slowly from the sky, arms outstretched like the second coming. He appears powerful at first, but turns out to be a man with a buzz cut. He wears a white, short sleeved shirt with a pocket protector for his pens and black horn rimmed glasses. His name is STAN. He settles next to her. His aura hums with energy, sparks crackle. She watches as he comes to a stop, floating, just above the ground.

Sam's voice echoes from the blackness where the destroyed enemy building once stood.

SAM

You guys cheated!

Sam, Kalyn and Winston, still in tattered fatigues, walk out from the black infinity of the empty grid. They are disgusted.

Sam directs his comments to Stan.

SAM (CONT'D)

They cheated, Stan.

Still glowing, Stan nods benevolently, his arms outstretched, palms up.

Conrad, Jimmy and Oku walk out of Building #1.

Jimmy and Oku are impressed, smiling ear to ear.

OKU

That's called overkill.

6'4" Jimmy slaps little Hanna on the back. She looks expectantly at Conrad. Jimmy and Oku look at Conrad too, waiting for his reaction.

He looks at her hard and then...

CONRAD

Welcome to the team, kiddo.

With a squeal, Hanna jumps up into Conrad's arms and wraps her legs around him. He pulls back at first, but then pulls her close, her head buried in his shoulder. Jimmy and Oku join them in a group hug.

The "Violation" icons spin slowly over everyone's head.

Stan smiles, his voice long suffering and pedantic.

STAN

This was supposed to be a straight game, Conrad. Your team is banned for two weeks.

Sam nods his vindication, but Hanna ignores him, still in the hug with Conrad. She pulls back and looks him in the eye.

HANNA

We really do need milk, Dad.

Conrad jabs his fingers into her ribs and tickles her mercilessly. She jerks back and screams with laughter.

Stan waves his hand and all the players disappear. Hanna's laughter seems to linger on the air after they are gone.

Stan surveys his work. Then, he too, disappears.

THE END