
Episode 437 – It is indeed great news for all readers

It was a nice apartment, well-lit, spacious and well furnished. A pair of nice, plush leather couches set the scene, arranged in a neat L-shape, with a small coffee table between them. What dominated the room, however, was the massive flat-screen against one wall, so big as to loom over all else around it. By comparison, the broad windows with views out over a strangely futuristic metropolis and the other doorways leading away to gods alone knew where seemed like afterthoughts.

"I didn't know that Lynne was in to street racing," Rick admitted as he and Natasha entered the apartment.

"Oh yeah," Natasha nodded. "Street racing, highway racing, dirt racing... really, she'll take any opportunity to put her foot down and tear it up."

"Any?"

"Totally. That girl can tear it up in a ride-on lawnmower."

"So how did she do in her last race?" Rick continued.

"Won, of course," Natasha replied with no small degree of pride. "Which is extra cool given that the race went through the middle of town, straight past city hall and all that. She placed first, didn't crash into anything and didn't get arrested, so I think that's pretty damn good of her."

"Fantastic," Rick beamed. "You'll need to tell me next time she's going to do some more."

"So you can come along and steal ideas," Natasha smirked.

"But of course."

"Tell you what though," Natasha considered. "There was one newcomer in that last race who did pretty well. She seemed oddly familiar somehow..."

"I can't imagine why," Rebecca commented as she and Matt entered.

"It's actually quite interesting to hear all this," Matt added. "I really don't know Lynne or Trabe beyond when they show up to do the odd musical number."

"Yeah, Lynne's got quite a lot going on beyond just the band," Natasha nodded. "And racing. She is the best mechanic I have ever met, and can fix just about anything."

"I imagine that comes very much in handy with all your salvage work."

"Totally," Natasha beamed. "She keeps all our stuff running from the barges to our diving frames to all our recovery gear and the like. And it works pretty good too."

"So she does a good job then."

"Well I haven't drowned yet, so I'd say so," Natasha noted. "Plus she does a lot of work with the material we recover. You know, when it might be too sensitive to just chainsaw open."

"And what about Trabe?" Rebecca asked.

"Trabe's a woman of... many talents," Natasha managed.

"How so?"

"She can read a scene like nothing else and pick up on clues that others would miss," Natasha explained. "She can track a target though anything and stop even the most dogged attempts at escape or evasion. And she's the best shot I've ever seen."

"But?"

"She once got lost in her own apartment," Natasha sighed. "It was a one-bedroom apartment."

"I see what you mean."

"Good morning everyone," the Voice began, crushing the conversation under its intrusion.

"And good morning to you too, Crud," Rick replied.

"Well, we might as well get this over and done with," Rebecca spoke up before anyone could add anything. "By the simple fact that we're all here, I can only assume that we're going to be reading more Storm Force."

"That is correct, yes," the Voice confirmed.

"I hate it when I'm right," Rebecca sighed. "Actually, that's a lie. I love being right, but this time I will make an exception."

"So while we try to avoid the pit of self-loathing," Matt offered, "What is our story for today?"

"And does it have mutant spider goons?" Natasha asked. "Because that's what I look for in a good Storm Force story."

"Isn't 'good Storm Force story' a contradiction in terms?" Matt asked.

"It might be," she admitted.

"Today's story is called 'K-Squad'," the Voice explained. "It's only four weeks long, so we'll be covering it entirely in one review."

"Well that's interesting," Rick considered.

"Wait, Storm Force is interesting?" Rebecca shot back.

"Oh yes," Rick explained. "This is the very last Storm Force story that ran in Battle before its merger with Eagle," he explained. "And on top of that, it was the last original material in Battle as well, given that the rest of the book was nothing but reprints by that point."

"That is interesting," Matt noted.

"And there's a whole bunch of stuff on top of that too," Rick noted. "Given the history of comic mergers past, what would happen to Eagle after that and so on."

"Um, not to intrude," the Voice cut in, "but while all this is very interesting, we do have a review to get on with."

"Damn it, I was hoping he wouldn't notice," Natasha sighed.

"I guess we have to," Rebecca admitted as she took her place on the couch. "It's what we're here for and all that."

"At least this one is only four chapters," Matt added as he and the others joined her. "So if nothing else, it has brevity on its side."

"Which is good," Rebecca finished as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format. "Because there's only so much Storm Force a human being can take."

> STORM FORCE

Matt: A lineage of comic books going back to the nineteenth century has come to this.

> [Three Soviet tanks advancing towards a soldier with an eyepatch in a trench, burning building in
> the background]

Rick: A typical morning in the Caucasus

> Security Classification Alpha. Security Clearance 277/Z/A. Location: Salisbury Plain, England.

Rebecca: And yet you never see this sort of thing in quaint English travelogues.

> The deadly shapes of three enemy battle tanks move forward to wipe out all resistance...

Matt: In case you missed it, tanks

> Tank [V/O]: Ha! Another of the British pigs has had enough. He is about to surrender to our
> invincible might!

Matt: So Rick, since you're the expert in these matters I'd like to ask you a question.

Rick: Fire away

Matt: In these old war comics is it normal for random soldiers to talk like supervillains?

Rick: Happens all the time

> [Soldier firing rocket at tank]

Natasha: Or that could happen, I suppose

Matt: There you are, marauding some random guy and then suddenly he pulls out a rocket launcher from nowhere. What kind of a world have we come to when you can't just drive around in your tank, minding your own business anymore?

> But the man wasn't giving up. Far from it!

Rebecca: But at the same time, best not to think about where he was keeping that rocket launcher.

> Soldier: This should slow you down...

Natasha: As exploding often does.

> Tank [V/O]: Swerve away, driver!

> [Trio of tanks; center one exploding]

Rick: I think we can consider him to be 'slowed' at this point.

> Tank 2 [V/O]: The lead tank is finished! Go round and crush the attacker!

Natasha: Kill the man who's killing you? Brilliant plan right there and then

Rebecca: That guy's Combat Leader material with that level of genius

> [Second soldier jumping out of tree onto tank]

> But then...

Rick: They were attacked by Ewoks

Natasha: Yub nub

> Tank 2 [V/O]: Another one dropping from the tree!

Rebecca: If you don't harvest your soldiers while they're in season they'll rot on the branch and go to waste like this

> [Soldier throwing mines at tank]

Matt: Throw explosives at the bad guys? What a novel and unexpected strategy

Natasha: Clearly we're dealing with elite operatives here.

> Tank 2 [V/O]: Revolve the turret and knock him off!

Rick: Now I'm no expert, but don't tanks usually have machine guns for exactly this sort of a reason?

> Soldier 2: Too late! My limpet mines are already in position!

Rebecca: Well thank you for that timely update.

> [Tank explodes while soldier leaps away]

> [Trio of soldiers surrounding tank]

Matt: Yes, stand around the tank in the open and walk slowly towards it. Surely nothing can go wrong with this plan

> Soldier: Forward squad! Attack from all sides!

> Tank 3 [V/O]: Three more appearing! Cut them down with cannon and machine-gun fire!

Natasha: You want me to shoot the bad guys? I would have never thought of that myself.

> [Soldier with flamethrower emerging from hole and firing at tank]

Matt: He was well prepared in case that tank happened to be in exactly that one spot. Five feet to the left and he'd have just wasted all the time he spent digging that hole.

> Soldier 3: You're not going anywhere!

> Tank 3 [V/O]: Flame-thrower!

Rebecca: In case you missed the point, here it is again.

Rick: Flamethrower it is.

> [General and Mole in room, soldiers and destroyed tanks in background]

Rebecca: Mole interacting with the plot at more than just the opening infodump level? This is an unexpected twist

> Training exercise complete: General Alexander J. Monmouth, chief of army special operations,

Matt: Commander of the nonspecific division.

> is satisfied.

Rick: Adequate!

> Monmouth: Impressive, eh Mole? Three of the latest battle tanks wiped out in seconds!

Natasha: For a very generous definition of 'seconds'.

> Mole: Yes, sir – but remember they were computer operated so this cannot be counted as a real
> test!

Rebecca: So if they were computer controlled tanks, then were they somehow programmed to shout out stock battle dialogue that yet was perfectly responsive to the situation? Or were the shouts coming from remote operators that were being needlessly broadcast to the tank?

Matt: We're reading a comic that features a man who wears a suit made out of knives and this is what you're worried about?

Rebecca: I just like to know these things, that's all.

> [Mole and Monmouth; Storm Force in background]

Natasha: Storm Force, now featuring Storm Force

> Monmouth: Rubbish, Mole! It must be obvious to even you that my K-Squad are a thousand times
> better than your Storm Force!

Matt: Let's see how many white trash ninjas your team has and then call me back.

> Mole: With the greatest respect, general, it isn't! Let's ask my combat leader and the others what
> they thought of them!

Rebecca: Yes, the opinion of the obvious psychopath who sticks a flamethrower to his arm is going to count for so much.

Matt: Well when you put it like that...

> [Storm Force, Mole and Monmouth]

> Storm Force: The most experienced anti-criminal team in the world.

Natasha: Their leader is twenty-two years old, one of them is apparently a teenager and they have been together for only a few months, so you're kind of stretching it here.

> Formed by the Mole to fight evil everywhere]

Rick: The bottom of the ocean, the dark side of the moon, the... who am I kidding? They probably will be to some of these places before we're done

> Storm: They're good, sir, but not up to our standard... they wouldn't stand a chance against some of
> the villains we've been up against!

Matt: And given the people Storm Force has fought so far, that's a very damning statement in and of itself.

> Monmouth: Codswallop! Their combat files make you lot seem like amateurs!

> [Soldier with eyepatch in jungle shooting terrorists]

Rick: Meanwhile in Fighting Mann...

> Top Secret: Alpha One Security Clearance only. K-Squad Combat Files.

Rebecca: So instead of Mole expositing at Storm, the comic just skips the middle man and exposit's straight at the reader. It's a change, but I'm not sure if it's a good one.

> The leader: Captain Hight Kilcline.

Matt: Winner of the obvious fake name contest.

> Vietnam veteran, active operations in the Lebanon,

Natasha: You know, the Lebanon

> Libya, Iran.

Matt: But is it the Libya or the Iran?

> Expert with all types of weapons.

Rick: The Harmonica Gun, the Urumi, the Zulfiqar... all weapons

> [Large bald man throwing men in the rain]

Natasha: You pick a fight with an old-timey strongman and this will happen

> The Strong Man: Maximillian (only known name). Former Olympic weight lifter.

Rebecca: So how does nobody know his name if he was an Olympic athlete? Did he somehow compete under an assumed name? Did he change his name after retiring? Did the IOC manage to lose all of his records? We need to know this.

Matt: Are you still hung up on those robot tanks?

Rebecca: I am.

> No-one has ever beaten him in a fight.

Rick: This is because he is an avowed pacifist

> Once, with his bare hands, fought off six enemy agents who tried to kill him.

Natasha: Why yes, this is just a huge setup to have him fight Magnus. Why do you ask?

> Maximillian: GRRRAAAAAAH!

> Man: NAIEEEEE!

Rebecca: There's the Storm Force I was missing.

Matt: Really?

Rebecca: No.

> [Woman with sniper rifle shooting officer]

Rick: A typical Colombian election.

> The Assassin: Kreela Van Dross. Brilliant sniper. Totally emotionless.

Natasha: Show her pictures of cute kittens and she won't bat an eyelid

- > Responsible for killing of
- > mass murderer Colonel Mikhail Reskev during mission in Eastern Europe.

Matt: He'd poured hot water onto so many anthills.

- > [Homeless man; two soldiers and a missile launcher in background]

Rick: They put a missile launcher right on top of Nick Nolte's squatting dumpster

- > The Undercover Man: Lewis Shelly.

Natasha: His name is far too boring for this team

- > Former member of both the Royal Marines and SAS.

Matt: As well as a stint as a barista at a local Starbucks.

- > Has taken part in over sixty operations behind the Iron Curtain.

Rick: He's been to Darklonia, Pottsylvania and Belgistan

- > Deadly with knife or gun

Natasha: Moderately annoying with anything else.

- > Soldier 1: Who's that over there?
- > Soldier 2: Just a filthy old tramp, Karl. Ignore him... he is no danger.

Matt: Unless the stink gets to you

- > Shelly [thoughts]: Fools! The West is about to learn the secrets of the Mongrad multi-purpose
- > missile!

Rebecca: Good thing those guards in a totalitarian police state weren't at all concerned about a homeless man wandering around near a sensitive piece of military hardware

- > [Bearded man pushing button on remote; ship exploding in background]

Matt: Take that, AsuShin.

- > The Explosives Expert: Duncan Hurlson. Designs, builds and uses his own grenades and other
- > explosive devices.

Natasha: Has lost several fingers and his eyebrows.

- > Ex-SAS, Scots Guards. No target is too big for him to destroy.

Rick: So they recruited Crazy Harry from the Muppets.

- > Man: AAARRRRHHHHH!

Rick: I regret being in whatever place this was!

- > [Man with flamethrower setting fire to fighter planes and shooting soldier]

> The Flame-Thrower Operator: Franklin Ferrick.

Rebecca: Franklin Ferrick the fastidious flamethrower from Flatbush

> Former fire fighter turned fire maker.

Matt: He figured he'd skip the middle man.

> Successful

> missions include burning of whole squadron of Soviet MiGs on ground at Kabul Airport, Afghanistan.

Rebecca: Blowing up planes at Kabul airport. Every part of that aged badly.

> Soldier: AGGGHH!

> Ferrick: Keep covering me, guys! There's a few more planes left to torch before we head for the
> hills!

Natasha: It occurs to me that if you wanted to blow up a squad of planes on the ground that there are more efficient and discreet ways than having a man walk around slowly setting fire to them. It also occurs to me that they're not nearly as much fun.

> [Storm Force, Monmouth and K-Squad]

Matt: So to summarize, K-Squad has a sniper, an infiltrator, a bomb maker and a man with a flamethrower. That strikes me as being a little more useful than a circus knife thrower, white trash ninja and a kid who looks like Napoleon Dynamite in a jumpsuit.

Natasha: Well when you put it like that...

> Storm: Facts, figures and tales of heroic glory don't count for much in my book, general...

Rebecca: Storm does strike me as a 'facts and logic' type.

> why not put our teams up against each other to see which is best!

Natasha: This Sunday, only on pay-per-view

> Monmouth: What a splendid idea!

Rick [Fake British]: Smashing! Jolly good show, I say what?

> Do you agree, Kilcline?

> Kilcline: Of course, sir... I wouldn't miss an opportunity like this!

Matt: And none of this is a setup at all.

Rebecca: No sir.

> [Storm Force handing over weapons, Kilcline in foreground]

Natasha: That eyepatch means either he's evil or he is a pirate cosplayer. Not sure which one would fit the story better

Rick: That's the beauty of Storm Force

> Killcline: All K-Squad have blanks in their guns and our real explosives have been used up, Storm!

Matt: And none of us have any evil plans

Rebecca: Not one bit

> Storm: Don't worry, pal... we'll ditch our real weapons to make sure no-one gets hurt!

Natasha: Presumably Porcupine will use rubber knives and Stiletto will throw off-brand imitation shoes.

> [K-Squad marching, Storm Force in background]

Matt: And so as our two near-identical teams part ways we ask the big question: how do we know which one is which?

Natasha: Well one is led by a guy with one arm, and the other is led by a guy with one eye

Matt: I can't tell if you're serious or not

Natasha: To be honest, neither can I

> Storm: As you're the underdogs, Storm Force will give you a ten-minute head start before we come
> after you!

Rick: They'll cover their eyes and count to a hundred.

> Kilcline: A most generous move, Combat Leader, but you'll soon regret it... K-Squad is going to be
> waiting for you!

Matt: Just to remind you that they have a sniper, a bomb-maker and a guy who's job is to be hidden and sneaky. Storm's crossing the line between overconfidence and utter stupidity.

> [Monmouth waving, Mole with him. Storm Force walking away in background]

> Monmouth: Good luck and good hunting, my friends!

Natasha [Monmouth]: By the way, I don't have any evil plans.

Rebecca: Don't you think that's a bit premature?

Natasha: We've usually met the villain by this point in the first week anyway, so I figured it had to be him.

Rebecca: I'll give you that.

> Mole: Try not to injure them too much when you find their hiding place!

Matt: Please limit yourselves to only light bodily harm.

> Mikron: Don't worry, boss... the only thing that'll be injured is their pride!

Rick: It's a very safe battlefield.

> [Mole headed for building, Monmouth drawing pistol]

> Mole: This should be very interesting, General!

Rebecca: Something that nobody has ever said about Storm Force.

> Monmouth: Indeed, Mole – but I regret you will not be able to watch what happens...

Matt: It's exclusive to a streaming service you don't have. Sorry.

> [Monmouth shooting Mole in back with dart gun]

Natasha: Told you

Rebecca: Entirely fair

> Monmouth: ...it's time for you to go to sleep!

Rick: You go snooze now.

Natasha: SNOOZE.

> Mole: "Sleep"? I don't... urrrgghhh!

Rick: ...hang on, did we just fall into Dinobot's Old Technology by mistake?

Natasha: I'm not sure, and that scares me.

> [Monmouth on radio, unconscious Mole in background]

Matt: Like every other Storm Force story, Mole is done with the set-up exposition and now can sit out the rest of it. This time he's just taking a more pro-active approach to the situation.

> Monmouth: Monmouth calling Kilcline! I've just received information that Storm and the others have
> sold out to a foreign power! They're a bunch of traitors! They're out to kill you!

> Kilcline [V/O]: Wh-what do you want us to do about them, sir?

Rebecca: Hm, well, they're trying to kill you. What do you think you should do?

Matt: It's leadership like that which got Kilcline where he is today.

> [K-Squad hiding behind wrecked tank]

> Monmouth [V/O]: Eliminate Storm Force! If word of this got out, Britain would be a laughing stock...

Matt [Monmouth]: Also they're trying to kill you or somesuch. You know, little things like that.

> none of them must leave here alive!

> Kilcline: You heard the general! The training is cancelled... this is for real now!

Natasha: No more play murder. It's time for real murder.

> Keela: Right sir... now we use real bullets and real grenades!

Rebecca: So what do you suppose Griffin and Porcupine were meant to do on this exercise?

Rick: I suppose they're going to use prop knives or something

Rebecca: Fine, then what about Magnus? His weapon is his exo-skeleton and he attacks by punching and wrestling things.

Rick: Well maybe he's not going to use his suit or something.

[Pause]

Rick: Not worried about Mikron's meant to do?

Rebecca: It's not like he does anything anyway.

> [Monmouth on radio; K-Squad and wrecked tanks in background]

Matt: I like Storm Force for the exotic locales

> Kilcline [V/O]: Spreads out behind the tanks! As soon as those scum are in range, open fire – and
> shoot to kill!

Natasha: Thanks for clearing that up, boss. Otherwise I was going to shoot to mildly inconvenience.

> Monmouth [Thoughts]: Excellent! Within minutes, every last member of Storm Force will be dead.

> Britain's enemies will reward me well for this!

Rick: He'll get a nonspecific reward from Britain's nonspecific enemies

> Next week: Death trap!

> ----

> STORM FORCE

Matt: This outcome was probably inevitable

> [Storm force advancing on wrecked tank]

Rick: I wonder if Garth Ennis wrote in to complain about the artist drawing the wrong tank here.

> Security Classification Alpha. Security Clearance 300/4/Q.

Matt: Read, then destroy, then reread for good measure.

> Location: Salisbury Plain, England.

> Storm Force Status: Involved in training exercise against the recently formed K-Squad combat unit.

Rebecca: So far K-Squad have had a couple of Zoom meetings and have postponed their planned face-to-face twice.

> Current situation: K-Squad told that Storm Force are traitors

Rick: K-Squad are also fans of obscure Spider-Man villain, Apatasaurus Ajax.

> and they must be eliminated. A corrupt

> British Army general is responsible for spreading these lies,

Natasha: General Monmouth is trending on Twitter right now

> but John Storm and his team are unsuspecting as they walk into a death trap!

Matt: It strikes me that even if this was still an exercise, Storm would be leading his team into an obvious trap.

Natasha: Remember, Storm's number one qualification for the role was his missing arm.

> Storm: Spread out and keep low! The opposition will be somewhere close by!

Rick: Like behind the nearby large object that affords them excellent cover?

Rebecca: You might be on to something there

> Griffin: Right boss! We're ready for whatever they throw at us!

Matt: They've fought mutant spider goons, a man wearing a suit that was permanently on fire, a Zombie with a nuclear arsenal and a robot wizard. After all that, half a dozen guys with guns seems somewhat irrelevant

> [Keela aiming sniper rifle, Kilcline in foreground]

> Kilcline: Storm is the danger man, Keela... take him out!

Rick: No, Patrick McGoohan is the Danger Man. You're not even close.

> Van Dross: A pleasure Kilcline! The fool is already as good as dead!

Rebecca: If it's a pleasure, does that mean she's being emotional?

> [Storm in crosshairs]

Natasha: Day of the Jackarse.

> [Storm Force near tank, flash of light in distance]

> Storm: Hold it, team! Sunlight's reflecting off something behind one of those tanks!

Natasha: It's probably Maximillian's shiny bald head

> It could be a sniper's sight...

Matt: It could be somebody's backyard telescope. You never know!

> [Storm ducking as shot grazes him; Magnus and Mikron in background]

> Storm: ...it is!

Rebecca: And after he blindly led his squad into danger, Storm is saved by a random chance. Well done, I guess.

> Mikron: Ye gods! Those K-Squad goons are using real bullets!

Natasha: Snakes, lightning bolts, lasers and rocket propelled spiders he can deal with. But bullets are a bit much

> [Hurlson on tank throwing grenade at Storm Force]

> Storm: Magnus and Griffin take cover! That grenade could be real as well!

Rick: Have you ever considered that maybe they just don't like you?

Matt: If I was in Storm Force, I'd just assume that of everyone

> [Mikron and Magnus leaping away from explosion]

> Mikron: Stewth! These guys play for keeps!

Rebecca: They intend to permanently kill you, as opposed to just temporary death.

> Magnus: They mean to kill us all!

Rick: Remember when Porcupine was the token evil team member who was going to kill Storm?

Natasha: Not at all

Rick: Me neither.

> [Storm and Griffin on ground; Kilcline perched on tank in background]

> Storm: Cut it out, Kilcline! Our training's meant to involve the use of blanks and dummy grenades!

Matt: Oh, he knows. But he also doesn't care.

> Kilcline: That's true, Storm – but traitors like you deserve to die! This is for real!

Rebecca: This is for real he said to the team that includes a man in a suit made out of knives.

> [Kilcline firing; Storm and Mikron in foreground]

> Kilcine: ...so have a load more hot lead, courtesy of K-Squad!

Natasha: Well that's awfully nice of you to... hey, wait a minute

> Mikron: Someone's set us up, Combat Leader!

Matt: Could it have been the obviously evil officer who deliberately tried to antagonize our two forces earlier?

Natasha: You might be on to something there.

> Storm: Too right, Mikron... this is now a battle for survival!

Matt: And let's be honest here, Storm was just looking for an excuse to kill them

Rebecca: He hadn't murdered somebody in cold blood all day and was getting impatient

> [K-Squad behind wrecked tanks, Stiletto and Porcupine running in distance]

> Kilcline: Everyone reload! Hurlson can keep Storm Force pinned down with grenades!

> Stiletto: Come on, Porcupine! Run and weave for the nearest tank!

Rick: Serpentine! Serpentine!

> [Stiletto and Porcupine running at Keela]

Rebecca: Don't ask how they got here without being shot. They just did.

> Stiletto [Thoughts]: Made it! As our guns are useless, I'll have to make use of my throwing heels!

Natasha: The most impractical part of that weapon would be walking in heels on dirt and grass.

> Porcupine: You behind the tank! Stop hiding and start fighting!

> Van Dross: Swine! Kreela Van Dross is going to blow you away!

Rebecca: She'll blow you swine away completely emotionlessly, of course.

Matt: Of course.

> [Stiletto throwing knife, hitting Keela's head]

Rick: So since this is an exercise, shouldn't Stiletto have had fake shoes?

Natasha: When you consider how impractical they already are, why would you bother making them even worse?

Rick: This is also true

> Stiletto: No chance, honey! Go and take forty winks!

Rick: TIME FOR GO TO BED!

Natasha: Shouldn't that be Maximillian's line?

> Keela: AARRRGHHH!

> [Storm crouching in bush, Mikron holding lit stick of dynamite;

Matt: I was going to ask where he got that from given that this was intended to be an exercise and all.

Then I realise that he already lit it, and I really begin to worry.

> wrecked tanks in background]

> Storm: That's one taken care of! Now we need a diversion so the rest of us can get closer!

> Mikron: Will a stick of dynamite do? I always carry some for use in emergency situations...

Rebecca: This tells me a lot about Mikron. Mostly things that I didn't want to know.

> [Mikron throwing dynamite at Hurlson, Kilcline in background]

Rick: I can only assume that Mikron throws as well as he hacks computers.

Natasha: But he's never hacked a computer.

Rick: My point.

> Mikron: ...this should knock some fight out of them!

Matt: Being blown up often does.

> Kilcline: Look out, Hurlson!

> [Tank exploding, Hurlson being knocked away]

Rebecca: It already exploded, but let's explode it some more.

> Hurlson: YEEEEEEEEHHHH!

Rick: And suddenly it's an episode of CSI.

> [Kilcline and Ferrick]

> Kilcline: You'll pay for putting Hurlson out of action... you'll pay in blood!

Matt: So is he dead? Incapacitated? Lightly injured? Mildly inconvenienced? We may never know.

> Ferrick: Stay cool – getting carried away with hatred won't help us to beat Storm Force!

Natasha: It will lead you to the Dark Side, however, which is a path to powers that some consider to be unnatural.

Rick: Do you think that would help beat Storm Force?

Natasha: Well they didn't work out too well for Mortak, did they?

> [Kilcline and Ferrick]

Rebecca: Two richly developed characters whose deaths, while inevitable, will doubtless still be deeply impactful

Matt: I'm surprised you said all that with a straight face

Rebecca: You're not the only one

> Ferrick: Our advantage of surprise has been lost! We need some new cover to mount our attack
> from...

Rick: Like, say, the other two wrecked tanks?

Natasha: Hm, you may be on to something there.

> Kilcline: And you can provide it! Switch your flame-thrower pack to producing smoke, Ferrick, and
> let K-Squad disappear!

Matt [Ferrick]: Thank you for explaining to me how my own weapon works. I would have never figured it out otherwise.

> [Ferrick spraying smoke,

Rick: After their stint as a top secret governmental kill squad didn't work out, K-Squad moved into the fumigation business

> Kilcline behind him; Stiletto holding Keela at gunpoint in background]

> Stiletto: Forget that idea, Kicline!

Natasha: Already have.

> Drop your weapons now or Keela gets a bullet from her own gun!

Rick [Kilcline]: Is it okay if Ferrick keeps spraying? Only you didn't mention him before.

> Keela: Don't listen to Stiletto, sir! I know the score about being captured...

Rebecca [Keela]: You have to let me call my lawyer. It's the rules.

> [Keela kicking Stiletto's gun away; Porcupine in background]

Matt: I can only assume that she could have done that at any point

Rebecca: I'd take the risk of being shot to get away from Porcupine

> Keela: ...K-Squad members always have to free themselves!

Rick: And that's why they recruited Harry Houdini for the team

> Stiletto: AAGGGGHHHH!

> [Keela kicking Stiletto; Kilcline firing at Porcupine; Ferrick in background spraying smoke]

Matt: Ferrick's fine just doing his thing. Don't mind me.

> Kilcline: Back, Porcupine! Let the two ladies complete their own fight!

Rebecca: Is Keela a female operative?

> Keela: HIYAAAA!

Natasha: Hi-keeeba!

> Stiletto: You took me by surprise just now, Keela, but you won't do it again...

Matt: Stiletto has so far managed to avoid being taken prisoner or held hostage in this story. Let's see how long that lasts.

> [Stiletto kicking Keela; Kilcline watching; Porcupine in background]

Rick: This is about Porcupine's usual level of contribution to the story

Natasha: He peaked with Man on Fire, and it's all been downhill from there

> Stiletto: ...go back to sleep!

> Keela: NEEEGGGGGGGHHHH!

Rebecca: So far, Keela's main talent is getting hit in the head.

Matt: But she does such completely without emotions

> Kilcline: Congratulations on your victory, Stiletto! Unfortunately, it does not stop you and Porcupine
> becoming my prisoners!

Rick: Admit it; you could have stopped that fight at any time, but you were just too lazy.

> [Storm, Mangus and Griffin in smoke]

Natasha: They're in the middle of a typical Australian summer

> Magnus: It's gone very quiet in there, Storm!

Rick: Nary an overwrought death scream to be heard.

> Storm: Like the grave, Magnus! Let's move in and find out what's going on!

> [Storm, Griffin, Magnus and Mikron running through gunfire]

> Griffin: A light machine gun opening up... Mikron's hit!

> Mikron: I... I'll be okay! You three keep going!

Matt: He was shot with a machine gun, but he'll be fine

Rebecca: I'm beginning to doubt K-Force's credentials

> [Storm and Griffin in smoke]

> Griffin: What a pea-souper!

Natasha: Thick oily black smoke. Just like a fog.

> Storm: Try and stay close together! You can hardly see your hand in front of your face!

> [Maximillian punching Storm]

Rebecca: Sudden Old-Timey Strongman attacks were common during the eighties

Matt: You couldn't go outside without being accosted by some guy with a handlebar moustache in a leopard print leotard.

> Maximillian: Correct, fool – but you should be able to see my fist!

Natasha: Guest dialogue courtesy of a subtitled Shaw Brothers film

> Storm: Maximillian... GUUURRGGG!

Rick: And he went FAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRT

> [Maximillian grabbing Storm]

> Storm: UUUHHHH...

> Maximillian: Beaten already Storm? Such a pity... I'd hoped you might make a decent opponent for
> my strength!

Natasha: Maybe you should have challenged him to an arm wrestling match instead

Rick: Isn't that kind of cheating against Storm?

> [Maximillian lifting Storm over his head; pile of mines in foreground]

Matt: Fortunately we had this pit full of live explosives here ready for this training exercise.

> Maximillian: Never mind! I shall put you out of your misery... Farewell, John Storm!

> Storm [Thoughts]: Mines at the bottom of the trench... he's going to hurl me right on top of them!

Rebecca: So he's so stunned that he can't move, but also alert enough to make an accurate assessment of his situation and the likely outcome

Matt: John Storm is a man of many skills, all of which are dubious

> Next week: Battle of the giants!

Rick: You have two characters who have a claim to being the world's strongest man. It's inevitable.

> ----

> STORM FORCE

Matt: That's a nice comic you have over there. It'd be a shame if someone was to merge it.

> [Maximillian lifting Storm over his head; pile of mines in foreground]

> Security classification Alpha. Security clearance Z11/6/N.

Matt: Induce vomiting if swallowed

> Location: Salisbury Plain, England. Storm Force Status:

Rick: They're Storm Force, really. There's no other way to put it.

> involved in training exercise against the newly formed K-Squad. Current situation: K-

> Squad have been convinced by a corrupt general that John Storm and his team are traitors.

Rebecca: One look at Porcupine should convince you that they're shifty

> Now Storm faces death at the hands of the giant ex-weightlifter Maximillian...

Matt: Quitting weightlifting to be on a secret government death squad does seem like something of a sideways career move.

Rebecca: Niche career choice. When you have transferrable skills, take advantage of them.

> Maximillian: You have lost the fight, weakling, so now you must die!

Natasha: Death by 'do you even lit, bro?'

> Storm [Thoughts]: He's going to throw me into the trench... right on top of those mines!

Rick: Death is certain. Time to exposit

> [Magnus running at Storm and Maximillian]

Rebecca: It occurs to me that Magnus is about the most useful member of the team.

Matt: It occurs to me that is a very low bar to clear

Rebecca: This is also true

> Magnus: Stop, baldy! No-one kills the leader of Storm Force with me around!

Natasha: If Magnus isn't there then feel free to kill Storm at any time

> Storm: Magnus... thank the stars!

> Maximillian: GAAAAH! You interfering fool!

Rick: He's annoyed that his attempted murder was interrupted.

> [Maximillian throwing Storm at Magnus]

Natasha: You wanted him to put Storm down, but you never said where or how. This is entirely on you.

> Maximillian: ...take that!

> Magnus: OOOOFFFFF!

> Storm: YUUUURRRRGGGG!

Natasha: AAAAAAK BLARGH!

> [Griffin pointing sword at Maximillian, Storm and Magnus in background]

> Griffin: That's enough, Maximillian! Get your hands up fast or I'll be forced to use my samurai sword!

Rebecca: Presumably that's a non-lethal training Samurai sword.

Matt: It's got an orange cap on it so you know it's safe.

> Maximillian: Ah, Griffin, the expert in the ancient martial arts!

Rick: He knows everything there is to know about Pankration.

> [Maximillian grabbing Griffin's arm]

Natasha: Well I see that martial arts knowledge is working out well for him

> Maximillian: ...you should have killed me when you had the chance, idiot!

Matt: I assume pointing his sword at someone doesn't count or something

Rebecca: Griffin is a tad useless, isn't he?

Matt: I suspect that the only reason he looks good is because he's standing next to Porcupine and Mikron

> Griffin: What the...?

> [Maximillian throwing Griffin in pit of mines;

Natasha: He spent hours digging that pit and carefully filling it with mines and he's not going to let it go to waste.

> Storm and Magnus in background]

> Maximillian: HAAA-HAAAAAA! Give my regards to those nice mines!

Rick: They're very pleasant explosives.

> Griffin: NAAAAHHHHH!

Natasha: Yeah, no.

> [Griffin sticking sword in side of pit to stop fall; Maximillian in background]

Rebecca: So was there any reason why he dug such a deep pit anyway?

Matt: This is one of those things that gets worse the more you think about it. [Pause] Which is actually a pretty good summary of Storm Force as a whole, really.

> Griffin: Tough luck, Max! As long as I've got my sword, I stay living!

Rick: He takes that whole 'live by the sword' thing very seriously

> Maximillian: But once I take it away, you shall die, Griffin!

Rebecca: Griffin's beginning to regret that whole 'from my cold dead hands' thing

> [Magnus advancing on Maximillian, Griffin and Storm in background]

> Magnus: Wait! What's the point of wasting your strength on others when you can fight me? Let just
> the two of us fight!

Rick: Old Timey Strongmen are fiercely territorial and need to establish dominance

> Maximillian: A good opportunity to test your power...

Matt: This is going to be all about arm wrestling, isn't it?

Natasha: If it's not double elimination, I don't want to know about it

> [Maximillian striking Magnus in the face with a whip]

> Maximillian: ...and cunning!

Rick: Yes, this truly is a clash of the intellectual titans.

> Magnus: A whip... YAAHHHH!

Natasha: He took Devo's advice on the situation

> [Maximillian tacking Magnus; Storm helping Griffin out of pit in background]

Rebecca: Would asking Storm for a hand be considered a little cruel?

> Magnus: GURRRRRNURRRFFFF!

Rick: Are they stealing my being punched in the stomach joke?

Natasha: Given that you stole it, I figure that it's fair

> Maximillian: I'm going to teach you a lesson, feeble man! In the battle of the giants, there can only
> be one victor...

Matt: The Fleshlumpeater

> [Maximillian kicking downed Magnus, Storm and Griffin in background]

Rebecca: In case you missed it, Maximillian's kind of a jerk

Rick: And yet, he's also got the strongest characterization of all of K-Squad so far
Rebecca: I think that might be a bit of a strong word.

> Maximillian: ...and I am he!

Natasha: What are the rules for old-timey Strongman fights?

Matt: I'd imagine that grabbing your opponent's handlebar moustache is considered foul play.

> Magnus: AAAAGGGHHH!

Rick: I love Storm Force for its witty repartee

> [Maximillian lunging at downed Magnus, Storm and Griffin in background]

> Storm: The fight's over! Maximillian's about to deliver the killing blow!

Rebecca: I mean, you two could do something about it rather than just standing there and all...

> [Magnus tackling Maximillian]

Matt: Take away Storm's weapon arm and he gets easily defeated and can only lie around and whine.

Take away Magnus' suit and you still have the strongest man in the world. Makes you think.

Natasha: So what do you get if you take away Porcupine's knife suit?

Matt: Porcupine, really.

> Magnus: Wrong, boss! The killing blow comes from me!

Rick: Magnus gets the kill but you all share in the XP.

> Maximillian: YUUURRRROOOOFFFFF!

Natasha: Being tackled by a strongman, or throwing up after a bad night at the pub?

> [Maximillian falling into pit as Magnus rolls away;

Rebecca: Momentum or something, I suppose

> Storm and Griffin running in background]

Rick: Their contribution to this comic in a nutshell

> Maximillian: NOOOOOO! The mines!

Matt: Maybe he should have put them somewhere safe and out of reach. Like, say, on his own petard.

> Storm: Scatter, Storm Force! His weight will detonate them for sure!

Rebecca: It's kind of missing the point of land mines if he doesn't

> [Exploding pit; Magnus, Storm and Griffin rolling away]

> Maximillian: AIEEEEEEE!

Rick: He died as he lived; bald and sweaty

> Storm: Blazes! Maximillian certainly went out with a maximum bang!

Rebecca: I'm sure his grieving family will feel so much better knowing that.

> [Storm shouting; Griffin and Magnus in background]

Matt: Storm shouting while Griffin and Magnus are just kind of there really is Storm Force in a nutshell

Natasha: What about Stiletto, Porcupine and Mikron?

Matt: My point.

> Storm: Surrender, Kilcline! Two members of K-Squad are already dead!

Natasha: When did that happen?

Rick: Just assume it did and move on. The story already has.

> Don't allow the others to go the same way!

> Kilcline [V/O]: Thanks for the kind offer, Storm...

> [Griffin being shot; Magnus and Storm in background]

Rebecca: Kind of makes Maximillian's whole pit full of mines thing seem a little pointless, doesn't it?

> Kilcline [V/O]: ...but our answer shows we're not interested!

Matt [Kilcline]: I strongly considered the merits of your proposal and weighed up the benefits that it offered you against the risks involved. And then I decided just to shoot you anyway.

> Griffin: NEEEGGGHHH!

> Magnus: Keela the sniper's in action again...

Rick: No, she's in Battle. Action merged in over decade ago.

> Griffin's hit!

> [Griffin throwing sword to Storm;

Rebecca: He's hit, but not hit badly enough to stop him from accurately throwing his sword to Storm.

Matt: I'm beginning to doubt Keela's credentials.

> Magnus in background]

> Griffin: I'm out of it, combat leader! Take my sword and go get them!

Rebecca: For all the good it's done you so far, Griffin. Or, for that matter, ever.

> Storm: You can count on it, pal! Come on, Magnus!

Rebecca: So I just realized something about the logistics of this panel.

Matt: Hit me.

Rebecca: Okay, Griffin's just been hit. Mikron was taken out earlier. And Stiletto... Well, she's been captured, of course.

Matt: Gotcha.

Rebecca: So that whittles Storm Force down to just Storm and Magnus, to go take on the rest of K Force on their own.

Matt: Yeah, that seems to be about it. So what's up?

Rebecca: Where's Porcupine?

> Let's find K-Squad and start hitting back!

Natasha: They're going to start hitting back now. Killing two of them was really just a warmup.

> [Magnus and Storm in smoke; wrecked tanks in background]

> Magnus: The smoke's clearing rapidly!

Rebecca: The smoke's moving a lot faster than the story.

Matt: Is there actually a story here? Be honest.

Rebecca: Sometimes I wonder.

> Storm: Bad news! Out here in the open we'll be sitting ducks...

Rick: This is the point where Storm starts quietly backing away from Magnus

> [Magnus staggering;

Natasha: Magnus suddenly regretting eating all those bean burritos before the mission

> Storm in background]

> Storm: ...for an opposition attack!

Natasha: There are bad guys and they may attack you. I can see why Storm's the boss of this outfit.

Rick: Being fair here, can you think of anyone better qualified for the job?

Natasha: No, but that's also no recommendation on Storm's part.

> Magnus: Gas grenades! Help meeee!

Rebecca: Enough contributing to the story for you, Magnus

> [Lewis leaping out of cover at Storm, Magnus in background]

> Lewis: He'll have to wait for a long time, Storm!

Rick: You go to the DMV and that will happen

> Storm: The undercover killer... Lewis Shelly!

Rebecca: Putting all his disguise and espionage skills to work, as can be plainly seen here

Matt: And yet, I'd still pick him over two-thirds of Storm Force.

Rebecca: Without a moment's hesitation

> [Shelly disarming Storm]

Matt: In the distance, Griffin quietly sighs to himself

> Shelly: Right! I'm also a knife expert who can disarm you with a single strike of the blade!

Natasha: And he's automatically more useful than Porcupine

Rick: Fair.

> Storm: YAAAGGG!

> [Shelly with knife looming over Storm;

Rick: Shelly's arch enemy is Crocodile Dundee.

Natasha: I can see how Crocodile Dundee would be more relevant to the average Storm Force story than Porcupine

Rick: It's a bit like that

> Ferrick in background]

> Ferrick: Freeze, Storm! Shelly was wise enough to bring along some back-up!

Rebecca: Shelly was wise enough not to wander off on his own when there were dangerous enemies around.

Matt: Yay for basic common sense, I guess.

> Storm: Ferrick... K-Squad's flame-thrower operator!

Rick: Since you'd all forgotten who these two are.

> [Shelly and Ferrick surrounding Storm]

Natasha: Now I'm no expert on these things, but it strikes me as not being a good idea to stand in front of your buddy when he has a flamethrower.

> Shelly: There's no escape now, traitor! You're finished!

> Storm: That's obvious! I know when I'm beaten... get it over with, Ferrick!

Rick: Which is also what Battle's editors said to their publisher.

> Ferrick: As you wish!

> [Ferrick firing, Storm leaping out of the way]

Rebecca: A plan that only works if everyone involved is a moron

Matt: But this is Storm Force we're reading here

Rebecca: This is also true.

> Ferrick: Die!

> Storm: Excuse me if I don't, friend!

Rick [Ferrick]: Would you be so kind as to die?

Matt [Storm]: If it's all the same to you, old chap, I'd rather not.

> Shelly [V/O]: YEEEELLLLLGH HH!

Natasha: And so Shelly dies of pratfall

> [Storm leaping for sword; Ferrick ready to fire]

> Ferrick: Lying rat! I won't miss a second time... Shelly's about to be avenged!

Rick: You have nobody to blame but yourself here.

> Storm [Thoughts]: I've got to reach the sword fast... If I fail, K-Squad have won!

Natasha: If you cancel your flight that means that K-Squad have already won.

> Next week: Death of a fighting unit!

Matt: That's right, from next week you'll be reading Battle K-Squad.

Rebecca: That is a dirty, dirty lie and you know it.

Rick: On so many levels.

> ----

> STORM FORCE

Matt: This is a big news issue!

> [Ferrick pointing flamethrower at Storm who is leaping for fallen sword]

Rick: It's at this point you're wondering how your life came to this.

Natasha: Yeah, I can imagine that Storm would feel like that by now.

Rick: I was referring to Pat Mills and John Wagner, who created Battle in the first place.

> Security Classification Alpha 528/I/R.

Matt: Nobody cares.

> Location: Salisbury Plain, England.

Rebecca: Home of Stonehenge, the Westbury White Horse, a world-famous cathedral and, of course, Storm Force.

> Storm Force Status:

Rick: Desperately hoping that Eagle readers will like them

> Taking part in a training exercise against newly formed K-Squad combat team.

Natasha: Those jerks from the rival school across town

> Current situation: K-

> Squad have been told by a corrupt general that Storm Force are traitors and that they must be
> eliminated.

Rebecca: And really, if you can't trust a secretive supertech strike force run by a reclusive malformed subterranean genius, then who else?

> Now John Storm is fighting for his life against flame-thrower operator Franklin Ferrick...

Matt: Storm is facing off with a hair-trigger maniac who will incinerate him given the slightest provocation. It's like he's fighting himself.

> Ferrick: Murdering rat! You're gonna get roasted!

Natasha: I suspect that pointing out that it was Ferrick that killed Shelley wouldn't help.

Rick: Probably not.

> Storm [Thoughts] I've got to reach Griffin's sword... it's my only chance to save myself!

> [Ferrick shooting sword out of Storm's hand]

Rebecca: Their master plan is to play keep-away with that sword

> Ferrick: Forget it, buddy boy! You ain't getting your hand on no weapon!

> Storm: FAAAAARRRRGGGHH!

Rick: And he went-
Natasha: Spelling.
Rick: Damn. So close.

> [Ferrick being hit by gunfire, Storm in foreground]

> Ferrick: Say your prayers... YAIEEEEEEE!

Matt: Thank you, blessed Yaieeee for this day and for this food you have placed before us. Amen.

> Storm: Blazes! He's been taken out...

> [Mikron with machine gun; Storm in background]

> Storm: ...by Mikron!

Rebecca: Okay, you have me, comic. I genuinely did not see that coming.

Matt: That's twice in this story that Mikron's been useful now.

Rebecca: No wonder this was the last issue of Battle. What can you do after that?

> Mikron: Thought I'd drag myself over and give you a helping hand, boss!

Rick: He's basically spent the last two issues lying there doing nothing.

Natasha: Just like every other story he's in, really.

> [Mikron on ground, Storm kneeling by him]

> Storm: Thanks, but you've done enough now...

Matt: Enough meaningfully contributing to the plot for you, young man

> It's up to me to track down the rest of K-Squad!

Rick: Try looking in the dollar bins of your local comic store.

> Mikron: Good luck! With Kilcline and Keela to deal with, you're going to need all the luck in the
> world!

Matt: Because the rest of K-Squad have been so hard to deal with so far.

> [Kilcline and Keela leading Porcupine and Stiletto up hill]

Natasha: Downside, you're being held at gunpoint by a pair of desperate people with nothing left to lose. Upside is that at least you're getting your steps in for the day.

> The surviving K-Squad members were fleeing with their prisoners...

Rebecca: Being held hostage is what Stiletto does best.

Matt: Is that a part of the skillset of being a female operative?

Rebecca: Sadly, it does seem to be the case.

[Pause]

Rebecca: Wait, when did Porcupine get captured?

> Kilcline: Move it! If you two slow us down any more you'll get shot!

> Porcupine: Pah! Save your breath Kicline... threats do not frighten either Stiletto or me!

Rick: Porcupine has to share a locker room with Magnus. After that, there's nothing you can do or say to frighten him

> [Kilcline hitting Porcupine with rifle;

Natasha: I think that's a perfectly natural reaction to Porcupine

> Keela and Stiletto in background]

Rebecca: Set dressing is a pretty good summary of Stiletto's job.

> Kilcline: Shut up, traitor!

Rick: And I don't want a peep out of Chaos or Re-Volt either.

> Keela: Leave him, Hoight! Storm's coming after us, and it looks like he means business!

Natasha: Really? Because most people are pretty calm after you try to kill them.

> [Kilcline firing rifle; Keela leading Stiletto away]

> Kilcline: Keep going up to the observation post, Keela! I'll cover you for as long as I can!

Rick: That's also me when I'm going to a buffet.

> Keela: Okay, but watch yourself... he's a dangerous opponent!

Matt: Saying that in front of Stiletto and Porcupine is just rubbing it in, isn't it?

> [Kilcline firing rifle; Storm leaping away]

> Kilcline: "Dangerous"? Ha! The rat won't be so dangerous when I put a few bullets in him!

Natasha: I'll kill you until you die of it!

> Storm [Thoughts]: The hill's a killing ground!

Rebecca: Storm's plan was to run uphill towards the pair of people with guns. Genius.

> I need to get to Kilcline before he gets me...

Matt: Keela doesn't even rate a mention.

> [Storm throwing grenade at Kilcline]

> Storm [Thoughts]: ...and this is the best way of doing that!

Rebecca: Where exactly are these two in relation to each other?

Matt: Yes.

Rebecca: I thought so.

> Kilcline: Oh no... grenade!

> [Kilcline being thrown back by explosion]

> Kilcline: NAIEEEE!

Rick: Did he just die by 'aaah, boom'?

Natasha: I think so.

> Storm [V/O]: Exit, Hight Kilcline,

Rebecca: Pursued by a bear

> and good riddance!

> [Kilcline limping away; Storm in background]

> Kilcline: Uuuhhhh... must go on... battle not finished...

Natasha: Give Battle another page or two and we'll fix that.

> Storm [Thoughts]: My grief! He got straight up from what should have been certain death!

Rick: He was only lightly exploded.

> [Keela and Stiletto at observation post; dead soldiers on ground; helicopter in background]

Natasha: They failed to heed Arnie's advice to get to da choppa.

> Meanwhile...

> Keela: What's happened up here? Someone's shot both officers!

Natasha: Clearly this calls for a quirky detective.

Rick: I think we're a bit past that point

Natasha: How about a quirky detective that has a colourful pet?

Rick: That's more like it

> Stiletto: That someone's General Monmouth, Keela! Can't you see now that we were all set up?

Rebecca: She says based on absolutely no evidence whatsoever.

> [Keela pushes Stiletto into room; Monmouth by box of explosives; unconscious Mole in background]

Matt: Well this appears to be entirely above board and on the level.

> Keela: Cut the cackle and get inside!

Rick: Stiletto having apparently turned into the Wicked Witch of the West or something.

> Monmouth: Ah, miss Stiletto and miss van Dross... how nice that you could join me!

Matt [Monmouth]: Care for some tea and murder?

> [Keela pointing rifle at Stiletto; Monmouth in background]

> Keela: I want to know what's going on, sir! Storm force are all traitors, aren't they?

Rick: And be honest here; can you really trust a team that includes a circus knife thrower?

> Monmouth: Regretfully not, my dear! I made up that little story to get you to kill them!

> [Pilot shooting Keela in back; Monmouth in foreground]

> Monmouth: Certain worldwide criminal elements

Rebecca: And by that he means the Church of Scientology

> could no longer take Storm Force's interference in their affairs!

Rick: You know, I can actually buy that about the Scientologists

Rebecca: It makes perfect sense.

> I was paid a million pounds to arrange their... er... annihilation!

Matt: Just think; in exchange for betraying his country and getting a whole bunch of people killed, he can now afford a small suburban house.

> Keela: Then you're the traitor! I'll... AARRRGGG!

Natasha: She died as she lived; with men talking at her

> [Pilot pointing gun at Stiletto in background; Monmouth in foreground]

> Monmouth: Well done, Hoskins!

Rick: You were the best Super Mario ever.

> Now I must leave! Don't bother to try and escape before the bomb goes off... you've already seen

> what a good shot my pilot is!

Rebecca: No offence to Keela, but in the back of an unsuspecting victim at point-blank range isn't exactly a good measure.

> Stiletto: Scum! You won't get away with this!

> [Kilcline chopping pilot on the back of the neck;

Rick: Judo chop!

> Stiletto and Monmouth in foreground]

Rebecca: It's not the maimed psychopath she's usually rescued by, but she'll take it.

> Kilcline: Dead... right... Stiletto!

> Pilot: YUUGGGHHHH!

> Monmouth: Kilcline!

Matt: It turns out that his top skill is not getting blown up.

Rebecca: It is a useful one to have

> [Kilcline pointing gun at Monmouth; Stiletto and Mole in background]

> Kilcline: Get Mole... out of here, lady! Me and the... general have got some... talking to do!

Natasha: I'm guessing this isn't going to be a friendly fireside chat.

Matt: I somehow doubt it.

> Stiletto: But the bomb's about to...

> Kilcline: I said get out!

Rick: I'm sorry, but this murder-suicide pact is invite only

> [Storm running towards observation post; Stiletto pushing Mole in wheelchair away from it]

Rick: This is the most active part Mole has ever played in a Storm Force story. Treasure it.

Rebecca: It's also about the most that Stiletto has ever contributed to the plot. Make of that what you will

> Storm: Stiletto! What's...?

> Stiletto: No time to explain! We've got to get clear of here!

Matt: This is one of those situations where you're probably better off not knowing.

> [Kilcline pointing rifle at Monmouth]

Natasha: And this wouldn't even be the most hostile HR meeting I've ever had

> Monmouth: Come now, Hoight! This is stupid...

Matt: My review of this comic.

> I'm sure we can come to some sort of arrangement!

Rick: Is this the start of his time share presentation?

> Kilcline: The same sort of arrangement that resulted in the death of K-Squad? No general... I think
> not!

> [Monmouth kneeling before Kilcline]

Rick: A recreation of Battle's editors negotiating with the publishers

> Kilcline: UUUUHHHH! You... could try... begging... though, sir!

> Monmouth: Yes! I beg you! Have mercy... let me go and I promise to make you rich... v-very rich!

Matt: Just think of all the eyepatches you could buy.

> [Kilcline collapsing; Monmouth running for door]

> Kilcline: HAAA-HAAA! It's... too late, sir... See you in hell!

Rick: That's also the way my fiancée's parents reacted to my proposal.

Natasha: Complete with you running for the door?

Rick: Exactly like that.

> Monmouth: NOOOOO! Don't let it explode yet! I must get away!

Matt: Running from explosions is a lot less dramatic in text.

> [Observation post explodes;

Rick: Then, house explode.

> Storm, Stiletto and Mole in foreground]

> Monmouth [V/O]: GAIIIIIIII-YEEEEEE!

Matt: He died as he lived; mostly off-screen/

> [Stiletto, Storm and Mole looking at ruined outpost]

> Stiletto: The end of K-Squad... they were a superb fighting team, combat leader!

Rebecca: Were they? Were they really?

Matt: On the balance of it... no, they were not.

> Storm: Yes, Stiletto, but against us, they never had a chance... Storm Force are the best combat unit in the world!

Rick: Way to bury them there.

> [Mikron on stretcher being loaded onto helicopter;

Rebecca: Mikron killed a man for the first time ever, and frankly he enjoyed it.

> Porcupine, Griffin and Magnus on board; Storm, Stiletto and Mole in background]

Matt: Downside, she spent most of the story being held hostage. Upside is that she got out mostly unharmed.

Rebecca: Yay, I guess.

> Time lapse: One hour. Medical helicopters have arrived to evacuate the wounded

Natasha: Mole has a very generous health care package.

> Mole: Your stay in hospital will be short.

Rick: Only as long as it takes to get you all robot arms.

Natasha: But none of them are missing any limbs.

Rick: Oh, Mole will take care of that.

> General Monmouth may be gone, but there are many more like him in the world.

Matt: Many more stuffy corrupt generals with moustaches and monocles who have elite strike teams that they are willing to betray for their own corrupt goals.

Rebecca: Well when you put it like that..

> Mikron: True, Mole, but let's hope they don't think up quite so good a plan to get rid of us!

Natasha: Better than telling someone else to do it, for sure.

> Storm: I'll second that!

> THE END

Natasha: Freeze frame, roll closing credits because we're out.

> Next week: Storm Force will appear in Eagle comic!

All: Great news for all readers!

With that final comment, the big screen turned off, converting the world back to prose format. "And thus passes the glory of the world," Matt considered, "or at least as much glory as Storm Force can muster."

"Which is not much at all," Rebecca noted. "And this was a rather inglorious Storm Force to end a comic's life on."

"Yeah, I admit that I was hoping for..." Natasha shrugged. "Something more, I guess. Even the single-part Storm Force stories tend to have something going on in them that's a bit much."

"Like Spider Fortress still had the colossal spider attack," Rick offered.

"And Man on Fire had, well, Bruno Demonski, the Man on Fire," Matt added. "Whom, by the way, you cannot stop."

"And yet, Stiletto still managed to get herself captured," Rebecca sighed. "She really is a deadweight, isn't she?"

"I'm just shocked at how useful Mikron was during this one," Natasha admitted. "Like, he killed two of K-Squad. He did more in this one story than he has in everything else we've read so far combined."

"Although the fact that he always keeps a stick of dynamite on him does raise a lot of questions," Matt noted. "Ones that I'm not entirely sure that I want answered."

"Here's something to consider," Rebecca continued. "Mole was kidnapped and spent most of the story unconscious. And yet, that's still a high water mark for him actively contributing to a Storm Force story."

"Let's see..." Rick considered. "There's Operation Mole Machine where he shows up in person to machine gun spider goons. And there's the initial Storm Force story where he exposits the premise and introduces the team, so yeah, I think you're right on the mark there."

"Well I can tell that you all enjoyed the story," the Voice crashed in to the conversation.

"I don't think that you so much 'enjoy' Storm Force as you 'experience' it," Rebecca replied.

"So then I would like to get your reviews," the Voice continued unabated.

"The thing that struck me most about this story is something we bought up during it," Natasha began. "With Storm Force, we're used to the stories being a bit... colorful, I think is the best way to put it."

"The phrase 'batcrap insane' also comes to mind," Rebecca offered.

"I'll take that," Natasha nodded. "You know, Mutant Spider Goons stealing mole machines, zombies with nuclear weapons, armies of killer robots, a man who is on fire who you cannot stop and so on. Conversely, this one is surprisingly mundane in both story and opponent."

"Storm Force are fighting for survival against a group of soldiers," She continued. "K-Squad are just normal people. They don't have superhuman abilities, amazing weapons or anything else. Likewise, the story doesn't have any stakes beyond the survival of Storm Force; there's no doomsday scenario, no world to save or the like. It's not that it's a bad story per se, it's just that by Storm Force standards it's surprisingly underwhelming."

"Related to that, it need to be said that K-Squad themselves were never really presented as an effective threat," Matt continued. "Despite the fact that they were armed, prepared and it has to be said had the advantage of surprise, they were completely ineffectual against Storm Force. For example, Keela, despite being a supposed expert sniper, only gets off a single shot which she misses anyway. Shelly does nothing at all before being taken out by friendly fire. Hurlson is apparently killed

right at the start of the battle, but his death is effectively offscreen; we only know that he's dead because Kilcline says he is."

"Ironically, the only one of them that poses any threat is Maximillian, the old-timey strongman," he noted. "And he's unarmed, pit of mines aside. It took more effort by Storm Force to put him down than the rest of K-Squad combined before he was killed by his own trap. None of this makes Storm Force look good, however; instead, it simply makes them seem less inept than their enemies."

"Putting aside the problems with the way that K-Squad themselves were handled, the story itself is mostly functional," Rebecca noted. "I said mostly, given that while the idea was solid, the execution was lacking. An evil general sets his elite kill squad on an unaware Storm Force who have to fight for survival is a good idea, and one that actually works. The problem comes in how it is executed, which is also a recurring problem with Storm Force as a whole."

"Monmouth's betrayal and motivation is thrown out there right at the start of the story," she noted. "There's no build-up, no mystery, no suspense. He basically tells the audience what he's doing and why, and then sits out the rest of the story until the end. The thing is, though, this is a recurring trend in Storm Force. More often than not the entire story is dumped at the start so the rest of it is just cartoony violence. Ultimately, while the story is unusual for Storm Force, the way it's handled is entirely on par."

"Speaking of the plot, I found it strangely circular," Rick admitted. "A corrupt general gets a team of good fighting men killed for the sake of his own wealth and standing is very much sock in trade of Battle's older, more serious fare. It's a recurring thread in Charley's War where the British officer class are presented as the villains of the story. It's also seen a lot in Jonny Red, where the Soviet commissars will subject Falcon Squad to horrific orders for their own sake. And so on."

"And that's the plot of K-Squad as well," he continued. "Monmouth uses K-Squad to kill Storm Force so he can get rich. It's clear that he doesn't care what happens to his own men, and goes so far to have Keela killed to cover his tracks. And while I can't tell if it's deliberate on the part of the writer, it becomes a strangely apt way for Battle to conclude."

"huh," Natasha paused. "That's surprisingly deep for Storm Force."

"What can I say?" Rick shrugged. "It was something I noticed that I felt was worth mentioning."

"So there you have it, Voice," Matt finished. "Storm Force, really. It's a thing, and stuff happened in it."

"And thank you all very much for that," the Voice replied. "And as always, I will see you next time"

"More Storm Force," Rebecca sighed. "Always more Storm Force."

"So Rick," Matt spoke up, "You said that this was a rather significant story beyond just being the last time that Storm Force ran in Battle before its merger with Eagle. I'm curious then as to the greater significance of that merger."

"Wait, you are?" Natasha asked, genuinely surprised.

"Oh yes," Matt nodded. "It's one thing to examine a work, but it's also good to get some context as to the environment it existed in."

"Just so you know, you're also responsible for whatever comes next," Rebecca added.

"Noted," Matt nodded. "So Rick, explain why this was a big news issue."

"Well it is all contextual," Rick agreed. "By this point, the process of mergers that had made up the IPC/Fleetway boy's line had reached a terminal point. The pace of cancellation had drastically

outstripped the pace at which new books were being created. And the new ones that did emerge usually were short lived and existed only to die.”

“The boy’s line essentially had four books at this point; Eagle, Battle, 2000 AD and Roy of the Rovers,” he continued. “The latter two largely existed on their own and were left untouched by the lives of the other comics. Conversely, both Eagle and Battle had become net absorbers of other comics.”

“How so?”

“Back in 1976, Battle had absorbed Valliant,” Rick noted, “which had by that point absorbed about ten other comics. Likewise, in 1985, Eagle absorbed Tiger which had in turn absorbed a similar number of books.”

“So then the merger of Eagle and Battle represented about two dozen books,” Matt agreed. “I can see the significance.”

“More than just a merger, it was an extinction event,” Rick offered. “After that point, there really wouldn’t be any new original books with their own lives and lines. Everything was either a short-lived title that existed only to be merged down or some sort of merchandise-based book.”

“I didn’t realise that,” Matt considered. “It really puts a lot of things in perspective.”

“Eagle would limp along for the better part of six years,” Rick added. “It absorbed two more books after Battle, but neither had any sort of legacy attached to them. And then at the start of 1994, Eagle was cancelled. It wasn’t merged into 2000 AD or anything else, and I can think of several good reasons why.”

“And so that legacy of two-dozen books-“ Matt began.

“And older ones before that going back to the 1890s,” Rick added.

“Just... stopped.” He finished.

“Basically,” Rick nodded. “The Eagle-Battle merger would be the second last of its kind, and the terminal end of the IPC/Fleetway boy’s line. Ironically, Storm Force survived it and would last for another two years in Eagle, thus becoming Battle’s final legacy.”

“Which is a pretty crappy legacy to leave behind,” Rebecca noted.

“It is,” Rick agreed. “And that is the story of Storm Force.”

Author’s notes:

Well, Mikron finally managed to be useful. Better treasure it, because it will only happen again once more, and that’s a long way off. Of course, given that he was supposedly recruited as a computer hacker, its not like he’s exactly been earning his keep so far. I think it’s not spoiler to say that he never will hack a computer either.

By the time of its demise, Battle really was a shell of its former self. Storm Force was the only new material in the book, accounting for a mere six pages. The rest of it was reprints of various trips, both the iconic (Charley’s War, Jonny Red) and some right duds (Lofty’s One-Man Luftwaffe, a story that was over a decade old by that point). Then again, given that there had been consideration given to merging Battle into Eagle as early as 1983, I suppose the book should consider itself lucky that it lived that long.

As always, I recommend A Resource on Jinty (jintycomic.wordpress.com), Blood for the Baron (www.bloodforthebaron.com) and Great News for all Readers (www.greatnewsforallreaders.com) for those who want to know about the fascinating world that spawned Storm Force. I'm really only touching on the very small tip of a very large iceberg here.

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Rebecca Bartley, Natasha Isavia, Matt Simmons and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Laser-spewing shark-shaped battle cars? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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> Mikron: Will a stick of dynamite do? I always carry some for use in emergency situations...

Porcupine has to share a locker room with Magnus. After that, there's nothing you can do or say to frighten him

They've fought mutant spider goons, a man wearing a suit that was permanently on fire, a Zombie with a nuclear arsenal and a robot wizard. After all that, half a dozen guys with guns seems somewhat irrelevant as opponents and a somewhat anticlimactic conclusion. But here we are at the end of *Battle* as Storm Force fight for survival against declining sales and editorial mandates. And with nothing to lose, our brave band of designated heroes prepare for the fight of their lives to see if they will make the jump to *Eagle* or end up forgotten in the bottom of a filing cabinet somewhere. So grab your machine gun, your pit full of landmines and the stick of dynamite you always keep on you for emergencies for *Storm Force*. This is a big news issue!