

STRYKE

"Loose Ends", Part 2

by

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Promo blurb: *Loose Ends*, Part 2. Stryke's quest to find Greco leads her to the floating headquarters of arms merchant Abdul Al-Kassi, and into contact with the deadly femme, Savate. Will Savate's hatred of Greco cost Stryke her mission - and more?

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Stryke is underwater, riding along on what appears to a Jetski converted for underwater travel. We will see that Stryke herself is wearing a thong-backed bikini bottom and a tight wetsuit-style top that's a size or two too small, unzipped strategically to show some cleavage. She wears an oxygen tank, mouthpiece, and visor. A knife is strapped to her side. Make this an "comin' atcha" kind of view, to give the reader a sense of action/activity.

She surfaces about a kilometer away from the *Allah's Jewel*, the ship riding the smooth midday waters. From this angle, we can see that the dashboard of her Jetski has some nifty buttons and gadgets, and an inset sonar display.

Stryke flicks a switch on the dash that reads "STEALTH MODE"; a light under the switch activates.

She zooms back into the water.

From behind her, we get an overhead view of a shark, a twelve-footer, in pursuit.

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Frontally on Stryke, as she continues toward her target. The shark is closing the gap.

Close on Stryke's face. Her eyes cock to the side as her instincts alert her to danger.

She narrowly shifts aside to avoid the shark's gaping maw.

The shark has veered away, and she's watching it.

Close on her face again; her brow is furrowed, and it's easy to ascertain that she is *not* happy.

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The shark has circled around, and is jockeying for another pass. She's continuing on her merry way, but is wary of it this time.

She straightens her right into a knife hand, her fingers held tightly together.

The shark makes its move. It's only a few feet from her.

At the last second, she maneuvers the waterbike sideways and up, swinging above it, upside-down.

She drives the knife-hand into the top of its head, between its eyes.

Stryke resumes her trek; in the background, the big fish floats at a strange angle, obviously dead, blood flowing from the wound.

She scoots up under the boat, zooming past the propellers.

Now beside the hull, still underwater, she affixes a magnetic pad to the ship, from which a cable runs to the front of the waterbike.

She stuffs the scuba gear and visor into a compartment behind the seat; she now has a small waterproof bag slung over a shoulder, presumably withdrawn from the same compartment. In her free hand, she holds a grappling hook gun.

Stryke now surfaces beside the ship as it sails by.

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She fires the grappling gun, and the hook rockets toward the railing above.

It loops around the topmost rail a few times.

She begins climbing the cord up toward the deck.

A view from deck-level, as her eyes become visible, looking to the left to see if anyone's coming.

As she pulls herself over the rail, with one leg planted and the other coming over, she sees a couple of guards coming out of a nearby door. (A view from behind her might prove appealing.)

Stryke ducks down a nearby alcove as they approach.

"That's not what I meant," says guard #1, holding out his hand for emphasis. "It's certainly possible that other species of animal might have comparable intellect to humans. But a spirit? A soul? I doubt this very much."

"You are too ground in traditional thinking," answers guard #2, gesturing for emphasis. "It seems to me that the capacity for reason -- and therefore, spirituality -- cannot be unique to man! Tool use and cable television are not the ultimate determinants of racial evolution, after all."

Guard #2 looks to the spot where Stryke was standing. The door beside where she was positioned is cracked open.

"This goes beyond issues of technological achievement, Anthony," offers guard #1. "Humanity is clearly different in many ways from -- eh?"

Guard #2 asks, "What? What is it?"

They both now notice the grappling hook.

"I suppose it was nothing. I thought I saw someone in the shadows, but I --"

Guard #2 says, "Look! Look there!"

From below the hook, on the guards.

"We'd better tell Greco," says Guard #1.

From behind and below Al-Kassi, who is visible only from mid-back down, dressed in a short silk robe, a whip dangling from his left hand; in the foreground is a nude girl, with light blonde hair and a long ponytail, braided similarly to the one Stryke used to wear. She's crawling away from him, a look of fear on her face, tears streaming from her eyes.

"Blonde *bitch!*" says Al-Kassi. "You think because of the luxury and money I provide that I am not your master, not the god of your world? You are *mistaken!* How *dare* you deny me *any* demand?!?"

"N-no, please...." she moans.

Al-Kassi is in her face, jerking her head roughly back by the ponytail.

"That's right, fear me. *Fear me!!!* Fear the whip I hold, for I will be using it to teach you proper obedience!"

"I-I beg you...." she says.

He's released her ponytail, and clenches his fist, still crouching over her.

"Begging will gain you *nothing,*" he says. "My sister pleaded for mercy as well, but it did not stop me from killing her. She was my own flesh and blood, but she had embarrassed our family, so I burned her *alive.*"

Al-Kassi has pulled the whip back to strike, but a hand has reached in from off-panel to grab it.

He says, "Your torment will be of a different sort. The lash in my hand will teach you the obedience *all* women should—*eh?!?*"

He spins, to see Greco, holding the grappling hook in one hand and the end of the whip in the other.

"Greco? What is the meaning of this?!?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Al-Kassi, but I'm afraid I've got some urgent news.

"A pair of guards were on patrol above decks, and they found this."

Al-Kassi holds the hook in one hand, and extends the cord attached to it.

"A grappling hook? This means—"

"An intruder's aboard. I've ordered a bow-to-stern search of the yacht. I think you might be safer back in your own quarters."

Al-Kassi is tugging the knot on his robe a bit tighter as he walks out. He's released the whip, which Greco holds.

"Yes. Yes, you're right. I'll retire to my cabin at once, and await word of the search. Keep me fully informed."

"Yes, sir."

Greco looks down at the girl as she speaks to him.

"Th-thank you, Mr. Greco. I was so afraid...."

Focus on her face, and hair.

In his mind's eye, he now sees her as Jacklyn/Stryke, complete with the sword over her eye.

We get a view of his face, which bears a somber, almost saddened expression.

He stalks out, leaving her behind him.

"Don't mention it," he says.

Elsewhere on the yacht, three guards are walking down a corridor, part of a search patrol. One is holding open a door to a room. The lead guard is talking into a walkie-talkie.

"This is unit two-five. We've cleared sector four, now we're checking the dining hall and kitchen."

"Copy that," answers the voice.

The men push open a pair of double doors, which leads to a nicely-furnished dining facility. Six round tables occupy the room, each with four chairs; all are properly set with placemats, silverware, and a centrally-positioned vase holding two or three flowers.

"Okay, keep it tight," says the lead guard. "Remember what those Triad bastards did last year."

"How can I forget?" answers the guard to his left. "I got a punctured lung from that, remember?"

Frontally on them, as Stryke drops down behind them; she was holding herself aloft on a pipe running horizontally above the door, near the wall.

"Yeah, I remember," he says. "Just don't walk into a crescent kick next time and I think you'll--"

She rushes against the back of one of the guards, feigning fear.

"Oh please oh please can you help me? Oh please --" she jabbars.

"*What the hell?!?"* yells the lead guard, as he swivels.

She's plastered to the front of the guard she rushed up on; the lead guard has his hands on his hips, visibly annoyed.

"Oh, *shit*, it's just one of the bimbos. You idiot, we've got a general quarters alarm! Why aren't you in your cabin?"

"I-I'm new! I got lost, and I don't remember how to get back there! You've got to help me!"

"Waitaminnit," says the other guard, standing behind her and close. "What are you doin' with that knife?"

Stryke's right heel flies up and connects with his crotch, still facing away from him (**CHOCK!**).

"You'll find out in a second."

"Aaaack—"

She sends the guard she was plastered against flying head over heels.

"Yaaaaaaah!!!"

He smashes into one of the tables, scattering the items atop it (**KRASH!!!**)

Stryke side-kicks the radio out of the lead guard's hand.

"Jesus! Central, this is -"

"Ah ah ah," she says. "No fair giving us away! This is a private dance!"

Still balanced on one leg, she brings her heel across his jaw in a pendulum motion, snapping his head/helmet to one side (**WHAK!**)

"Unhhh!" he groans.

A palm strike sends the guard she crotched flying (**BRAK!!!**)

"Haaaaai!!!" she screams.

He collides with the wall (**THUD!**)

Stryke pulls a silenced handgun out from a pouch at her waist.

"Sorry, fellas, but I can't stick around and play."

"I've got places to go..."

She shoots one guard through his visor (*VIP!!!*)

"...people to see..."

She puts a slug in each of the remaining guards, one through the throat, the other in the heart (*VIP! VIP!*).

"...blah, blah, blah."

She swivels as someone speaks to her from behind.

"It's been fun-huh?!?"

"*FREEZE, LADY!!!*"

A pair of guards have her at gunpoint in the doorway.

"Just drop the piece, bitch, or we spray you all over the wall!"

"Yeah, yeah, hold your water. I'm droppin' it."

Suddenly, a leg lashes out between the two of them, striking one on the forestroke and the other on the backstroke (**BRAK! BRAK!**)

"Ooof!!!" yells one guard.

"Uuunh!!!" exclaims the other.

Standing tall between the unconscious men is Savate, hands on her hips. She looks down at them with a smile.

"That ees no way to treat our visitors," says Jeanette. "Then again, guards are not trained for politeness, I suppose."

"Oh my God...." murmurs Stryke.

On Stryke's face.

"Savate?!?"

Savate smiles back at her.

"Zee one and only."

"Come with me. I weel hide you."

They're in Savate's plush quarters; a bed fitted with silk sheets is positioned against one wall, with an antique nightstand beside it. The remaining furnishings (chairs, chests, tables) will be identical in theme. Stryke is toweling off after a shower, not bothering to hide her body from Jeanette. The latter is sitting on a padded stool beside her bed.

"Later...." reads a caption.

"Thanks for the shower, Jeanette," she says. "It feels good to get the salt off."

"My pleasure, *mon amie*," she says. "As I recall, we have been in similar positions before."

Stryke is drying one of her legs, as Savate watches.

"Yeah, I remember a certain little French maid havin' to duck into my hotel room, with a buncha Yakuza thugs breathin' down her neck."

"*Oui*," she answers. "I have not forgotten that day."

Stryke caresses Jeanette's cheek, smiling slyly. Jeanette grins in response.

"Or that night," she says, smirking. "I found out just how open-minded you Euro-babes are."

"*C'est vrai*," answers Jeanette. "We are not so ground in the past as Americans are."

Stryke is shrugging back into her thong; she has her top back on, although it's not yet zipped shut. One gets the impression that it was designed for someone with a considerably smaller bust.

"I guess I shouldn't be surprised to see you here," says Stryke. "Is Al-Kassi on Interpol's shit list?"

"We have had him under surveillance for some time now."

"Why haven't you taken him down yet?"

She pulls the zipper up about halfway.

"We have been trying to accumulate a list of his most noteworthy customers and transactions," she explains. "His dealings involve many powerful men. We can use such information for...leverage."

"I see. So you're looking to nail Al-Kassi *and* get some dirt on the big boys. I see you guys play as rough as ever."

"It is part of the game, no?"

Stryke has seated herself on a chair across from Savate.

"Yeah, that it is."

"So, while we are discussing our reasons for being here...you were not merely swimming by and decided to come aboard, *ne c'est pas*? I assume you have taken a contract on Al-Kassi?"

"No. I...don't do that stuff anymore."

Savate is giving Jacklyn a sly grin.

"You weel excuse me if I am a bit skeptical."

"Yeah, I know. The "world's deadliest assassin" saying she doesn't kill for money is like the world's greatest chef saying he doesn't cook for profit.

"But it's true. I'm in a different business now."

They continue the discussion.

"I'm sure you've gotten the full lowdown on what happened in Queen City, the episode with Anvil and Roman Von Drake. I won't bore you with more details, except to say that...it changed me. It's...almost like I've got my soul back or something.

"But even though I've turned over a new leaf, my past isn't just going to go away. There are always loose ends to tie up, and one of them is aboard this ship."

Savate leans toward her.

"I understand now. You are here to find Greco."

"Yeah. I...need to reach out to him. I need to see if he can change, like I did.

"I know how funny that sounds, but...he and I had something, a friendship. More than that, too."

Savate is standing, her arms crossed, not looking at Stryke.

"I crawled out of the pit. I want to help him do the same."

"All very noble. But it may not matter in his case."

"What makes you say that?"

Flashback panel, to the last issue; Greco's katana is cleaving cleanly through Vachon's skull.

"I was not operating alone in zees mission. I had a partner, Pierre Vachon. I...did not much like him, but I was in charge of zee operation, and thus he was my responsibility.

"Against my orders, he tried to access Al-Kassi's data. He was caught, and Greco...killed him."

Savate is looking down at Stryke.

"Suffice it to say that I am not enamored of your Mr. Greco. Not at all."

"Hey, I understand, but...your partner knew the risks, right? I mean, you said it yourself. He blew it. He died."

They're both standing; the mood is intense.

"Oui. But that does not change things. He struck against my service, and I am obligated to retaliate.

"So do what you must. I weel not stop you. But understand something. If I am instructed to take Al-Kassi down, and the chance to pull zee trigger on Greco comes...I weel do so. Without hesitation."

On Savate's face.

"Do I make myself clear?"

On Stryke's face, smiling slightly.

"Yeah. Crystal."

We shift to an overhead view of the lush villa of Generalissimo Francisco Miguel Enrico Lopez, situated in a lush expanse of jungle. A red-tiled roof sits atop the white stucco walls of the mansion; visible nearby is a helicopter pad. A broad veranda extends from the topmost story of the mansion, leading to the office we're about to visit.

A caption reads, "Elsewhere...."

Another caption says, "General Lopez, I bring bad news."

Within, the General stands before a mahogany desk, atop which sits a computer, phone, and related accoutrement, all situated with obsessive precision. Lopez himself is in a drab tan uniform, a cluster of medals pinned to the left breast of his shirt. His black mustache and short sideburns are peppered with white. Before him stands a younger man, clad similarly, minus the mustache and graying hair.

The General asks, "Is this regarding Senor Delgado's negotiations, Major Mendoza?"

"Si," replies Mendoza. "I regret to inform you that Delgado is...dead."

Lopez' face remains expressionless.

"How did this happen?"

"According to Senor Al-Kassi, his helicopter crashed shortly after takeoff from his yacht. There were no survivors. He expresses his condolences."

"I am certain he does."

The general opens a manila folder on his desk.

"How coincidental that my moles in the Tigadoran ministry report a deal between them and Al-Kassi for the very weapons I sought, eh? And I speculate that Delgado's death may have been part and parcel of that deal."

"That...would not surprise me, General."

The general turns away from him, his hands clasped behind his back.

"It should not. We have been wronged, *amigo*, and I have lost a trusted associate in the process. I...cannot allow this to go unanswered.

"Instruct our intelligence to maintain track of Al-Kassi's current location. He will be delivering his shipment to Tigador soon, and when he nears our waters..."

Closer on the general's face.

"We will send him - and his precious cargo - *to the bottom of the sea.*"

NEXT ISSUE: DEATH FROM ABOVE!!! BE THERE!!!