**hexagun**

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# hexagun

by cloudycats

Summary

> “Vash the Stampede isn’t a real person. It’s just a name people use when they want to cause property damage.”
>
> Stampede Vash wanders into the 1998 series by accident.

It’s all a mess. The bounty hunter’s going to die, Meryl’s going to be down the money for two boxes of donuts with no results to show for the expense, and Vash the Stampede is going to get away from them after they went to so much trouble to find him.

They’re going to have to do this whole process over again until they get it right. Meryl groans and presses her face to the galloping tomas’s neck just for a second.

At least they rescued the kid, she supposes. Not all a waste.

“So!” the kid in question pipes up, still sounding cheerfully baffled despite having just escaped a probably-horrible death. He somehow climbed onto the saddle and found a seat behind her during their escape, and since then he has very carefully avoided touching Meryl, holding onto the bird with his legs alone. It’s extra weird because she remembers seeing him tied up with rope when she and Milly arrived, but she admittedly didn’t get a careful look before the bounty hunter appeared and bullets started flying. “Why’re you searching for Vash the Stampede? Didn’t look like it was for the bounty.”

With that Space Age arm and impenetrable air of clueless optimism, Meryl figures he’s some rich heir Vash kidnapped for ransom, never mind that he’s dressed for heavy travel and armed besides. He actually doesn’t look much younger than her or Milly, but she’s not sure she’d trust him to buy groceries without a chaperone if she was his family. He might get lost in the shelves or trip and fall in a cutlery section.

“We’re with the Bernardelli Insurance Society,” Milly says. The kid listens wide-eyed to her explanation while Meryl broods.

“That sounds dangerous,” he says once Milly finishes.

Meryl’s resolve hardens, and she tugs the tomas to a stop, Milly following suit. The kid yelps and nearly falls out of the saddle before Meryl steadies him. “It is dangerous, but someone has to do it,” she says. “Do you know how to ride?”

Clearly he does if he’s kept ahold for this long hands-free, but she waits for his nod before she hauls herself off of the bird and hands the reins to him. He takes them absently, staring down at her through massive orange-lensed glasses.

“You’re not going *back*,” he says.

“It’s my job,” says Meryl grimly, clutching the box of donuts close. This time for sure. Victory or death.

The kid blinks. “Ah… I’m not sure either of them’s Vash the Stampede. They both said they weren’t, didn’t they? No one would lie about that.”

“I might if I was worth sixty billion double-dollars,” Milly muses.

The kid gapes at her. “Sixty billion,” he mouths. Yes, well, that’s what happens when an outlaw blows up a city of millions, even if somehow not a single soul perished in the initial

explosion.

“It has to be him,” Meryl says. “A giant with a mohawk and a big weapon. Not many people are going to fit that description.” The kid makes to respond, but they don’t have the time to humor him. “Can you get to town and warn everyone to evacuate?”

“*Evacuate*?”

“Vash the Stampede causes massive amounts of property damage to every settlement he turns up in,” says Meryl. “That’s why the company sent us, remember? He’s outside of town, so it might already be fine, but it’s best to be safe.”

“I can warn the residents,” the kid replies, “but I really don’t think you should – ”

“Don’t worry about us,” says Meryl bleakly. Milly waves good-bye to him, beaming, and the kid waves slowly back, his smile halfway to a confused grimace.

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Vash does not appreciate donuts, it turns out, or at least not enough to refrain from tying up Meryl and Milly and threatening to kill them and worse. Meryl might have made a grave diplomatic error.

“Um,” says a small, unfortunately familiar voice from far behind Vash’s towering bulk. “Hi.”

Vash, his henchmen, and Ruth the bounty hunter (who Vash has, somehow, convinced to ally with him) all turn. As Vash moves aside, Meryl sees the kid standing gormlessly at the opposite end of the mountain shelf, head tilted, eyes closed in a smile, prosthetic arm raised in greeting.

“He’s going to die,” she whispers.

“Maybe not,” says Milly. “They haven’t killed *us*, right?”

Meryl’s not touching that sentence right now. Or ever, if they survive long enough for that to become a different measure of time.

“*Vash*,” says… Vash. They’re still doing this. Alright. But does the giant honestly expect anyone to *believe* that the kid is Vash the Stampede instead of him?

“Seriously?” says Ruth, glancing up at Vash. “Him?”

“Red coat, blond hair, big gun,” says Vash, hefting his weapon. “Fits, doesn’t he?”

The kid titters nervously. “We can talk this out, can’t we? You seem like reasonable men.”

“He’s going to *die*,” says Meryl.

“If you’re only going by that description and those traits,” says Ruth dubiously, “yes, he does fit. But *that* is not the Stampede.”

“Um,” the kid says again, “if nobody here is the person you’re after, then maybe you can let those two go…?” He’s making puppy dog eyes, God help them. “*I* might be Vash, but they’re not involved at all.”

“He’s not Vash,” says Ruth, side-eyeing the real Vash.

“He *is*,” Vash snaps. “And if he’s not it doesn’t matter. If nobody knows what Vash the Stampede looks like, the bounty office won’t either.”

If the real Vash turns in a fake Vash, he’ll both earn a reward and escape future hunters. That’s horribly devious. Meryl’s not sure how she’s going to stop it, but she can’t let it happen.

Ruth stares up at Vash for a long moment. The kid droops, splaying his hands and gazing down at his palms with a far-off look. Nobody’s watching Meryl or Milly. Meryl strains against the rope until her fingers brush one of her guns.

Then Ruth shrugs. “Okay.”

The kid’s head jerks up. “*Ah*? No no, this really isn’t – ”

Ruth and Vash’s henchmen raise their weapons, Vash lifts his blade, and Meryl hooks her index finger around the trigger guard and tugs the gun into her hand.

This is an absolutely horrific angle to shoot from, but her targets are stationary: her first shot tears apart the rope suspending Milly from the stone arch above them, her second strikes the barrel of Ruth’s gun and knocks it off course just enough that the kid doesn’t get immediately swiss cheesed as Ruth and the henchmen open fire. The kid flails away screaming – which is good, screaming means alive – and dives behind a boulder for cover while Milly wriggles out of what remains of the rope and hurries to untie Meryl.

“Senpai, let’s fetch him and run,” says Milly, not bothering to keep her voice low amidst the obnoxious amount of gunfire. “We can figure out the job later.”

“Yeah,” says Meryl. The question now becomes how they’re going to do that, with Vash the Stampede bearing down on the kid and three gunmen actively trying to fill him with lead.

Vash hurls his massive steel boomerang, and it passes through the boulder the kid’s hiding behind like the solid stone is so much cotton fluff. The kid screams again, which is still a good sign – he must have been cowering so the boomerang went over his head.

Then he panics and bursts *back out* into the open.

Meryl yells, but nobody pays her any mind. The kid books it onto the slope that circles down the mountain and disappears around the first bend as bullets pepper the stone around him and

throw up dust in his wake. The whole group charges after him, so that a few seconds later only Meryl and Milly remain.

“I got him killed,” says Meryl faintly. The gunfire is less deafening now but still more than audible, a steady clamor broken up only intermittently by brief silent intervals.

“He might be fine,” says Milly, though even she doesn’t sound certain. “They’re still firing, so they can’t have hit him.”

“I’m not sure we can help him. They must be halfway down the mountain by now, he was running pretty fast.” By the time they reach him, it’ll definitely be too late. Vash’s crew aren’t going to keep missing their shots forever.

“Yeah,” says Milly quietly.

Meryl takes a deep breath to steel herself. Focus on what she can do. “Let’s go to the bounty office in town. We need to tell them that Vash the Stampede is going to try turning in someone else’s body and passing them off as himself.”

“Right,” says Milly.

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This job might be impossible. Meryl traces a fingernail across the water glass, peering forlornly into her reflection. They can’t follow Vash the Stampede if he tries to kill them every time they make overtures. With his reputation, why did they expect a different outcome?

Not to mention that they’ve outright lost track of him. He didn’t show up at the bounty office after chasing the kid down, but the kid never turned up again either, so presumably Vash killed him and then finally realized that the ruse was never going to work. Meryl and Milly headed to the next town over, hoping he might have shown up there if he’d decided to travel onwards, but the residents haven’t seen any giants with mohawks around.

Which means there’s going to be more property destruction to fix and more insurance claims to fill. They’ve failed entirely. They might as well not have come at all.

“We did the best we could,” says Milly, “and that’s all anyone can ask of another person. I don’t think anyone else could have managed more than we did.”

“Yeah,” Meryl sighs. “Probably not.”

Then someone comes up to tell them that they heard Meryl and Milly were searching for Vash the Stampede, and Meryl's prospects begin to pretend to look up. He’s been sighted around, they say. He’s attacked the local water baron multiple times, they say. He’s blond with a red coat and a big gun, they say.

“That’s not the right description,” says Meryl afterwards.

“We don’t have any other leads, though,” says Milly.

Of course, then it turns out that this Vash the Stampede is an imposter borrowing a criminal’s name to intimidate the local water baron. Through a sequence of events Meryl does not intend to file a thorough report on, the entire town ends up flooded, the water baron gets ousted, and the fake Vash hangs up her red coat for good.

Back to zero. In a different saloon and in a different town, Meryl traces a fingernail across a different water glass and sighs.

The bartender clears their throat. “I hear,” they say, “that you’re looking for Vash the Stampede?”

He’s been sighted around, they say. He’s been drinking at another saloon, they say. He’s blond with a red coat and a big gun, they say.

“We keep hearing that description,” Milly muses. “Senpai, you don’t think…?”

“Don’t think what?” says Meryl, too tired to muster any tonal inflection.

“Maybe that person really was Vash,” says Milly, “the one the big Vash chased down the mountain.”

Meryl, cheek on the table, peers blearily up at her. “What?”

“He fit the description.”

“He couldn’t defend himself at all. He just ran,” says Meryl. “Also, he’s dead. Also, the real Vash knows how to *use* a gun on top of having one. And we haven’t heard anything about Vash the Stampede missing an arm or being short.”

“Sometimes people change,” says Milly, “and, also, no one ever knows everything about another person.”

“They know if someone’s short and missing an arm, though.”

They go to the other saloon, whose bartender tells them that Vash the Stampede frequents the saloon they came from. The two businesses are feuding, and both are trying to get the other one leveled by pointing bounty hunters looking for the sixty billion double-dollar reward at each other.

Back to zero. In a different saloon and in a different town, Meryl traces a fingernail across a different water glass and tries not to regret every life choice that led her here.

“Vash the Stampede isn’t a real person. It’s just a name people use when they want to cause property damage.”

“The descriptions are too alike for him to be fake,” says Milly.

Meryl squints up at her. "*Are* they? A giant with a mohawk."

Milly's brow scrunches. "Okay, that's true." Her gaze flits to something behind Meryl, and her brow scrunches even further.

"What is it?" asks Meryl.

"It might be better if you look," Milly whispers.

After a second, Meryl lifts her head and turns. It takes her another second to parse what she's seeing, but once she does she jolts the rest of the way upright in her seat.

The motion must catch the kid's attention, because he glances over from the bar. His expression lights up, and he takes his drink, bounds over to their table, and pulls up a seat.

"Hi," says Milly.

"Hi!" says the kid. "It's been a while. I'm glad you've stayed safe."

"You…" Meryl begins, and then doesn't quite manage to bring herself to finish with *aren't dead?*

"Me!" says the kid, and takes a chug of his beer. Blond hair, red coat, big gun. Also: one arm, significantly shorter than Milly, spiritually closer to a person-shaped puppy than a highly destructive wanton murderer. "Did you find the man you're looking for yet?"

Milly says, "Senpai thinks he doesn't exist, but people just use his name when they break things."

The kid hums. "Well. That's possible. How long have you been searching for?"

"A few months now," says Milly.

"What happened to the big Vash?" Meryl asks.

The kid blinks. An odd note flickers across his expression, but it disappears so quickly that it was probably a trick of the light. "The big Vash…?"

"The one that chased you down the mountain."

"I'm not sure," the kid says, kicking back in his chair. "I got really lucky and managed to lose him somehow. I heard afterwards that he might have gotten picked up by law enforcement, but I'm not sure if that rumor was really referring to him – I never caught his name."

"Oh!" says Meryl. "Speaking of, we also never asked you your – "

The kid suddenly makes a startled noise and jumps to his feet, eyes flicking to the door before focusing back on Meryl. "I'm really sorry, I wasn't keeping track of time. There's somewhere I needed to be at ten minutes ago…."

Milly says good-bye for them both, and the kid returns it and then rushes out at speed.

“Maybe he’s Vash,” says Milly after a bit. “He could be. We don’t actually know his name.”

Meryl groans. Back to zero. “He’s not Vash the Stampede.”

“Isn’t it a little strange that he’s so far from where we met him?”

“A little bit,” Meryl admits. “But a runaway or a vacationer isn’t the same as the Humanoid Typhoon. Can you imagine *him* causing Lost July?”

Milly visibly tries to picture the scene and visibly fails utterly. “So, we’ll keep looking, then?”

“What else is there to do?” Meryl mutters. “I’m going to put a leash on him if we find him. What *is* this?”

“There, there, senpai. Drink your water, the ice is melting.”

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