

898

They bled together and were forced from time to time to place their lives in each other's hands. They witnessed one another's courage and sacrifice. They watched them bury their dead, nurture their young and weep at their pain. Whenever things looked darkest, the Amazon would turn to their partisan partners and say with utmost confidence 'we have survived worse; so can you'.

The seminal event happened on the night of February 17th, 1944. For two years, the fractured, wounded women that are ever-present wherever there is war began to attach themselves to the Amazon bands. At first they were little more than annoyances. In time, the Amazons tried to turn these women into something 'useful'. Later, a few earned the right to follow the Amazons into battle. *WWw.nó(v)el#wó©m.©©m*

On that February night, two ladies were inducted into House Živa. This was hardly the first time outsider women were brought into the Host, but this circumstance was unique - induction in the middle of a war, having proven themselves in battle before their now-sisters. From that action - not the last in that conflict - was born the concept of the 'Runners'.

With the end of WWII, the Amazons emerged more powerful than ever. The three strongest groups in the United States were the Egyptians, Illuminati and the Amazons. The Amazons profited the most; having started with the lowest profile and having infiltrated both the government and business sectors during the war effort.

Using the Freemasons, the Egyptians reaped great benefit from the US war effort too. Always forward-looking, the Egyptians helped the Amazons as well. Still, not everything was rosy. For the Public World, World War II ended in September of 1945. That was barely a blip in the Secret Societies' radar. The calamity came on the 10th of December 1949.

Using their pawns in the Chinese Communist Party, the Seven Pillars had re-unified China and were back on the world stage. Earth and Sky and the 9 Clans were dealt a setback. A fourth secret society involved in the Chinese struggle was absorbed by the 7 Pillars. The problem was that all the societies were locked in a bitter struggle yet devastated and over-extended.

The 9 Clans, fearing the ratcheting up of Cold War intelligence-gathering services by multiple national governments asked for a global truce. The Amazons were dangerously exposed and over-extended. The Illuminati decided this was their time to strike and nothing could deter them. Into this backdrop, came the news to the Amazons that they had serious genetic issues. *WWW.(n)©Vef#wóRm.coM*

That led to the First Directive; the recruitment of 'Runners' as an established program as well as the explosion of what I knew as Executive Services. In a truly bizarre twist, U. S. and Soviet agents found themselves engaged in cat-and-mouse games with European NATO agents. Amazons had penetrated the proto-CIA during the war in an effort to reach their European sisters.

In Eastern Europe, many of those partisans went over to the Communists when the Soviets overran their countries and looked favorably upon their erstwhile allies from the War. They couldn't match the influence that the many of the other secret societies possessed. Instead they pulled upon existing, personal relationships.

I worked with a negative result of those days - Desiree, or more accurately, Desiree's parents. I was also walking with the final resolution of that crisis. The Secret Societies proved they could work just as fast as the UN. In three decades they had resolved nothing and were spending more and more time on damage control.

Three events converged. The Illuminati had figured out the full-blooded Amazons were dying out so they knew they could win a game of attrition. The rest of the groups were coming to the conclusion that wiping out the Amazons was the easier course of action. The Amazons had, without a doubt, located the leader of the Illuminati, Cael O'Shea*awww.nOveLWôRm.CoM*

O'Shea was in sight of his goal - the extermination of the Amazons - when a lone Amazon got to him first. O'Shea's death sent titanic shockwaves through the Illuminati. There was a scramble for the top spot, fear over how much the Amazons knew about their inner workings, and how the other secret orders would take this bit of news.

The Illuminati recoiled from the event, agreed to a truce and that led to the protocols that kept Brianna from dragging me off - gunshot wounds and all. That had been the state of affairs for the last thirty years. Again, the World had not stood still. China was an economic powerhouse, the EU grew stronger, and wars of political ideology had been replaced by religious-based terrorism.

The Amazons were at a critical juncture in their history. The 'New' Directive was their best chance at staving off extinction and the Houses were fighting it kicking and screaming. The First Directive wasn't being implemented properly. If nothing changed, the Amazons would be dragged under by the weight of their own bigotry.

But wait! There was this idiot with no conception of history getting in the way of Amazon extinction; the decline toward oblivion that six murderous factions were waiting for. In this epic there were no 'friends', only 'allies of convenience'. The Egyptians weren't buddies. They simply preferred others to fight their battles for them.

The Amazons fit that bill nicely, but if they were dying out, the Egyptians would be more concerned in filling the Amazon void than mourning over the Host's grave. The Illuminati and Seven Pillars were enemies. Though there was little animosity between the Earth & Sky and the Amazons, the E&S were based on perpetuating the legacy of the World's greatest rapist.

The 9 Clans were the 9 Clans and their business was all about the precise application of death. They had no friends and if they pretended to be your friend, it was only so they could position themselves to kill you. It was only business. They rarely played with debts, obligations and vendettas. Still, if a member of the 9 Clans said they owed you, it was worth the assassin's weight in Iridium.

As a bonus, the 9 Clans were gender-neutral. Outside of the Amazons, they had been using females in their numbers the longest. Because of this, the 9 Clans tried to interact with the Amazon using women from their own ranks, minimizing the sexual tension between the groups. The Condottieri had also began recruiting women into their ranks over the past twenty years.*www.(n)©vê©w(ó)R©.©om*

Their leadership was still all-male with the added complications of the unresolved Naples killings and the brutal destruction of La Solidaridad. Also, while the Amazons were not business competitors, they didn't employ the Condottieri either. All these micro-wars had been very good for the Condottieri, allowing them to build up quite a stable of talent and a huge war chest.

If the Amazons recovered, the global map would change. How so? Madi and Rhada weren't from Cleveland, but from India where unresolved crimes against women were too common. Palli Chandra, the VP of International Finance and Ngozi from my sparring match were from Central Africa and I'd gathered from some of the chatter that decades of male strife had let the Amazons inherit hundreds of thousands of square-kilometers of territory in that region.

Along with securing that land came a tragic collection of rape victims and war orphans to swell their ranks. Latin and South America offered up their drug wars, political and ethnic strife. St. Marie herself had a strong current of Amerindian blood in her. From the moment of their first arrival, Amazons had always identified more with the Aboriginal Americans than the Christian Europeans.

It wasn't about Amerindian society. That could be as male-dominated as any other. It was that Amazons were deadly upfront while the European colonists screwed you later. Fuck with the Amazons and they killed you. No aboriginal tribe wanted a war with some women who were just passing through.

Invariably, Amerindian women joined up with the Host for a variety of reasons. They stole (and later murdered) Amerindian males. No one could ever say the Amazons were prejudiced against skin color. I was sure neon-pink skin would annoy them solely because it made that warrior difficult to hide.

This racial mish-mash meant the Amazons had their roots on every continent (why Antarctica? I was afraid to ask). Yes, this left them extended and vulnerable. It also meant that if you were their enemy, there were a few hundred dedicated killers less than one week away from you no matter where you ran.

Remember, every Amazon was a combatant for the cause. There wasn't a schoolyard bully yet that thirteen year old Europa was afraid of. At age twelve, young Amazon women had to prove they belonged to the oldest continuous martial tradition on the planet. At some point, older Amazons decided when they could no longer pull their weight in their society and 'took themselves to the cliffs' - suicide.

I'd let people with lesser problems decide which was more hardcore: letting your twelve year old fight for her life, or deciding that not being able to do 100 push-ups equated to your obsolescence, thus your deciding that you'd had a good run and it was time to join the Ancestors. I had never been in the military, or even prone to following orders and behaving in a disciplined manner.

If the British SAS, Russian Spetsnaz and US Navy SEALs taught that level of dedication, I would have been stunned. The fact that each one of those groups have alumni associations without having a middle schoolers' summer camp that included a list of the dead spoke to that. I was sure all those men were Bad-Ass Mothers, trained in a thousand ways to kill.