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"Oh my God," Delilah laughed. "You wove Harry Potter into a life and death conversation and it made sense. I am probably going to die, but I'll die knowing I have lived."

"Not you too?" Maddox glared at Delilah. Rachel just shook her head. We exited the car, settled ourselves out. Rachel took point, Dellah took one flank while Pamela took the other.

By happenstance, I ended up in the middle... yeah right, with Virginia covering my back.

"You stay here," Pamela put a hand on Rachel's shoulder. "You'll need to lead the team in if someone 'pumps up the volume'." Interesting euphemism for 'when people start killing people'.

"What are we doing today?" Miyako 'appeared'. She'd been walking down the sidewalk toward us – the Kazak Consulate was a townhouse – but her presence hadn't registered.

"I require your pledge of silence on what is to transpire. No death is intended," I stated calmly to Miyako.

"I didn't know you were versed in ninja contracts, much less spoke Japanese?" Miyako responded. Blink.

"I didn't know I spoke it either..." I mumbled.

"No sweat," Pamela tried to hustle us along. "He's a quick study." Yeah. I didn't feel it apropos to point out I hadn't heard myself speaking Japanese, or understood that my words had some secret meaning.

"How important is this to my people?" Miyako asked. Now that I was paying attention to it, I could make out that she was speaking in her native tongue.

"If they don't think we can be trusted to not speak of what is to transpire for a week, they are going to kill us," I related my suspicions. "My mind and heart are joined in this decision."

"I give you my pledge," Miyako nodded. She looped her arm in mine.

"Does anyone care to enlighten me?" Maddox prodded. Whoa. It seemed that, beside me and Miyako, only Pamela spoke Japanese.

"Special Agent Maddox, no matter what, don't give up your gun, when we say run – run, and shoot to kill because they will be trying to kill us," I informed her.

"Does the term 'extraterritoriality' mean anything to anyone here?" Maddox snapped. Her nervousness was totally understandable.

I stopped at the top of the steps, looking over my shoulder. I nodded. Pamela, Delilah and Miyako nodded as well.

"Hold on... I can't believe I'm saying this. Does anyone have a back-up I can use?" Maddox groaned.

Rachel quick-stepped forward and handed over a .22 automatic pistol then a spare clip with a smooth, practiced motion that suggested that SD swapped weapons all the time. Maddox didn't miss the casualness of the gesture. The firearm and magazine disappeared.

"Fine... we will never discuss the laws we just butchered – ever... and if I die and any of you make it out alive, I will seek revenge at whatever cost FROM WHEREVER I AM," FBI girl growled.*www.NoGrEfWOr.coM*

"One of us," Pamela smirked at me as I touched the doorbell. It opened promptly. We weren't on a crowded street, we were on their stoop and a security camera was pointed right at us. We were invited in and two rather Caucasian-looking gentlemen (Kazaks are a mixed bag of Turks and Cumans) were waiting with the doorman. They looked tough in that they took personality lessons from saddle leather*www.(n)oVéLWÖrm.CoM*

"You will place your weapons there," the more charismatic of the two spoke up. He was pointing to a side table that looked large enough for the task.

"No," was the most courteous response I could muster. He didn't look surprised. He didn't look much like he was breathing, or blinking either.

"Go," he pointed to the door. I looked to Pamela.

"Well, that didn't take long," I grinned. I felt out the necklace under my shirt and pulled it over my head. "Please return this to its owner in the spirit it was given." He took it. The doorman opened the door and out we went. Rachel was back in our GL550, using the door as possible cover. She said we could take our seats and away we rolled. Maddox looked apoplectic.

She had prepared herself for the Wild, Wild West, not a doe-see-doe at the door. In her mind, I had wound her up for nothing. My phone rang*W@w.NoVeLWÖrm.coM*

"Câel Ishara, there seems to have been a diplomatic miscommunication," a male native Turkish-speaker said in heavily accented English. "The person you are meeting must be approached in the spirit of peace."

"No, I understood you perfectly," I assured him. "We aren't the Brownies, or the Girl Scouts, Buddy. I don't know, or trust you and you don't know, or trust me – yet. I will compromise though. I will respect your traditions. I will enter your home unarmed. In turn, everyone in the building will line up outside on the street except for the person I'm supposed to meet. Is that acceptable?"

Pause.

"Do you hate these people, or like them?" Maddox grumbled. "With you, I can't quite tell."

"That would not be acceptable," the man finally responded. "Perhaps an alternative. You come in, alone yet armed."*W@W.NoVèLWÖrm.coM*

"Nope. Due to the efforts of people far smarter than me, I know pretty much who I am meeting, so I am either very rude, insane, or bear a message that is worth my life," I countered.

"Your personal safety is guaranteed," was the counter-offer.

"That is a false promise – not because you lack honor, or respect for me, but because you are from a wise and noble lineage with a historical propensity of cutting to the heart of any problem."

By that, I meant they'd cut my heart out. "What I expect is for every one of you to hold the future of the Earth & Sky above any such concepts as personal promises, hospitality, and honor. I am even putting my faith in your willingness to put the survival of the Earth & Sky over your own well-being," I riposted.

"If the message is so crucial, you should be willing to come alone," back at me.

"It isn't important to me," I stated. "Listen, a war is about to break out. Unless we both want to be found all alone in the outhouse masturbating when the headsman comes, one of us has to blink. Today, it is you. Tomorrow you may be able to return the favor and mess with my head."

Pause.

"Your koumiss is getting warm."

"We'll be right there. We apologize for the delay. Traffic is murder these days, or a close facsimile thereof," I gave a little back in the humility department.

"Tiger Lily..."

"On it, Ishara... Wakko Ishara. I've been circling the block," Tiger Lily had anticipated my antics. Sure, I acted like I had no game plan, but I never wasted people's time. Maybe if I developed an actual game plan I could do even better.

"Wakko Ishara?" it was Delilah's and Maddox's turn to share a 'what the?' moment.

"May I explain the sacred names?" Rachel requested of me. "I have a feeling these two might become a fixture."

"By all means, Rachel. Our trust runs deep," I trusted Rachel with more than my life; I trusted her with my future.

"Wakko, as in you're the nutty one?" Delilah made a stab at our arcane nomenclature. If you use small words does that make it gnomenculture? Pamela winked at me... psychic twin grandmother powers activate!

"We need complementary rings," Pamela remarked. Sweet!

"Câel Ishara is differentiated as Wakko Ishara, Ishara, first of House Ishara, is Yakko Ishara, and..." Rachel began.

"The Animaniacs? Your code names are the Warner Brothers and their sister Dot?" Maddox gasped. "You are beyond nuts."

"And the Goddess Ishara is named, by House Ishara and House Ishara alone," Rachel made some warding appeal against divine punishment, "as Dot Ishara." Maddox's face shown with disbelief.

"Following Câel Ishara into battle has been one of my greatest pleasures," Rachel stared at Maddox. "I never knew insanity could be so liberating, or that laughing at death could be such an aphrodisiac."

"When did you two go into battle?" Delilah wondered.

"In a morgue, fighting to retrieve the body of his fallen father so that our enemies could not desecrate it," Rachel explained. Ah... the walls of Troy... fighting over the spoils of the dead.

"You mean when I face-planted?" I grinned at Rachel.

"Even without a weapon, your instincts were good, forcing our enemy to commit to multiple angles of coverage even though your efforts were foiled by a footing failure. Your rushing their leader was even more heroic in that you were unarmed and using your body as a decoy, knowing your enemy's superior skill would stop him from shooting you," Rachel smiled my way – sex.

"Let me get this straight," Miyako finally spoke up. "You charged an enemy unarmed then stumbled and failed. They were armed?"

"Yes, with a .357 Magnum revolver and a 10 gauge sawed-off automatic shotgun – in tight confines and close range... oh, and no cover." Maddox replied – then to me, "I read the report."

"Then you repeated the action a few minutes..." Miyako.

"Less than a minute later," Maddox clarified.

"A minute later... wow! You are as fearless as we've heard. Please don't die before we have a baby," Miyako gave me a quick hug. If you cover a zeppelin with uranium paint, can it still fly, or does it sink to the center of the Earth? Ninja babies...

We had returned to the stairs at the Consulate. This time the door swung open upon our approach.

"Is there some drug you are all taking to bask in this shared fantasy life?" Maddox mumbled.