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"Hey," Miyako wiggled up between Delliah and Mona. "Why are we all standing in the sparring area? I had to go to the latrine. What did I miss?" Rachel handed the match back to Pamela. Pamela pulled out the matchbox and put the point of contention back inside.

"You bluffed?" Caprica gasped at Rachel.

"Yes, though I prefer to think of it as creating an illusion based on my foe's ignorance of the forces in play and an active imagination," Rachel turned the screw.

"Miyako, did you give Pamela that box of matches?" Caprica glared at the ninja.

"Matches? Matches are 'Old School'. Ninja's use encapsulated chemical reagents to generate flames," Miyako enlightened us all. "They even work underwater," Caprica looked down and coughed. When she looked back up, she was shaking her head and grinning.

"I concede," she sighed. "Students," she called out.

"Let this be a lesson to you: don't assume you know all your opponents capabilities and if you are ever in my position do NOT issue orders, as it voids any outcome of a match." That had been Rachel's victory. I had rendered myself hors de combat, ending our match. Rachel's fight was a fresh encounter. Once we were all back in the sparring ring, we were equals. Superiors couldn't pull rank to avoid an outcome.

The moment Rachel tricked Caprica into reasserting her authority, the second martial bout was over - concluded, and concluded by Caprica herself. The question of my sanity was balanced by my 'side' winning. This was not 'might makes right'. This was 'Rachel is a clever bitch and in her opinion, I wasn't a threat'. This was 'listen to the smart Amazon'. Caprica chose to listen.

"He should always be under constant observation," Caprica compromised. My heart soared. No one on my side said a damn thing. They were administering another lesson.

"Cáel, you must constantly be in contact with a 'watcher'," Caprica corrected her command. I was an Amazon, not a child, or helpless burden.

"I guess this means I'm not going to get my own 'Boys Restroom'," I joked. There were more yawns than chuckles this time around. Time for all the campers, counselors and guests to get some shut-eye.

That meant forgoing the comfy-looking barracks and crawling through my rebirthing ceremony again so I could lie down in our real, no-frills dormitory. I was crashed down in a disturbed state of mind. Even with my 'Aya togetherness', I was still ramped up - uncomfortable inside my skin.

When it came to comfort levels, Miyako was my polar opposite. She was enamored with the place. By the time we went to bed, my little stealth-acrobat had already hinted to me, to Pamela and to Priya 'how wonderful it would be to be invited back... with a few baby ninjas in tow'. She was deadly serious too.*Ww.w.n.c/wc.m.cm*

As she snuggled in with me, she sighed and gave happy murmurs as she recounted the shrubs, boulders and pines she had hidden behind just traipsing around 'town' unseen. Sex was not in the offing, since I was already on my back with my bear cub snoozing on my chest. As with the past five days, real sleep didn't come.

Getting both audio and video to shut down at the same time had proven impossible. I would 'think' things. A few of the 'playbacks' - I wouldn't call them memories - showed me numerous activities I had once partaken of. Others... well, I could play piano, eight-string guitar, pan flute (Go, Zamfir!) and the bagpipes.

I didn't actually have any of those and had only touched a piano while taking two lessons that both ended up with us having sex on the floor. I'd also killed a man with said flute by ramming it into his throat. I had no idea where, or why he'd met that fate. The guy's blood kept pumping out one of the shafts for almost a minute...

Would the nightmares of a drug-induced sleep be that much worse than this waking tug of war with - Pamela called it an edimmu; an ancient spirit of the vengeful dead*W@w.florê()Wor.M.c@m*

"Cáel... Daddy ... Fehér mén (Magyar for White Stallion), what is wrong?" Aya propped herself up with her elbows on my pectorals, sleepy and sincere.

"What do you think is wrong?" I asked. I put faith in her instincts where I was concerned.

"Your heartbeat is strong and powerful when it should be slow and steady. Your breath is deep when it should be shallow." She paused as she correlated the facts, washed them in her limited experience and found the answer. "You're constantly ready for battle at a second's notice."

Amazons are exceptionally trained fighters. Outside of being trained to kill, they were also taught to take care of themselves. The Host's stratagem for marching would have made the Zulu Nation proud - run with a full kit over rough terrain for twelve hours and deploy for a fight at the end of that jaunt. 'Run' didn't mean run like a marathon*ww.W.novelwD(r)M.cdM*

It meant jogging and walking with short rest breaks to hydrate. That still equated with the average Amazon being expected to cover at least 80 kilometers a day, continuously for three, or four, days.

SD? That same arch-crushing pace each and every day until they got where they needed to go. They wouldn't move any faster. It was kind of useless for a tiny fraction of the Host to cover a significant distance ahead of the rest. What the Security Detail needed was the ability to swarm around the Host, on the march and at rest, scouting, counter-scouting, raiding and distracting their foe. And they did this while taking into account a horse-culture that reached back three thousand years, but also included modern three-dimensional warfare.

When it came to the arts of killing and seizing victory, the Host was always thoroughly up with the times. The tactics that led Alexander of Macedon to victory at Gaugamela had been exhibited by the Host during the battles before the Second Betrayal, four hundred years earlier. They had learned it from the Scythians of the Pontic steppe generations before.

Fix the center with part of your force (Amazons used their infantry) and roll over a chosen flank with your cavalry. Hannibal did it double-envelopment style a hundred years after Alexander, earning him martial immortality at Cannae. The hit and run the Mongols perfected was old hat for the Amazons way before Genghis Khan and his decedents created the largest land empire of all time.

The Amazons didn't invent any of those techniques. They were not master innovators. Their gift was to see something new and go 'we can do that and do it better', then making it so. The Host had no tanks, jet fighters or warships larger than multi-role frigates. If a serious modern army attacked the Host, they would disperse. They didn't possess a war industry. Slugging it out was anathema.

'You can rebuild a home. You cannot bring back the dead' was an Amazon axiom. Another was acknowledged to be of foreign origin: 'living enemies raise armies; dead ones fill graves'. The Host has light AFV's, helicopters of all stripes and transport aircraft as well as sea-craft capable of moving forces all over the globe.

Operating a multi-threat attack system and shooting a bow were all the same to them. Having trained and equipped themselves to a razor's edge didn't absolve them from trying to do it better next time. Amazons would die in battle; that was a given. Their task was to make every drop of Amazon blood spilt worth the cost.

I didn't use those words while I poured out my turbulent mental meanderings to Aya.

"Cáel, destiny cuts both ways." my little imp bathed me in her insightful purity. "If we listen, it prepares us for what we must do. Destiny also places us in situations where we know what should be done. We do not hide behind such concepts as Fate, Dadda.

We Amazons bow with respect to Destiny because she gives us the freedom of choice. We know what we must do but the voice, step and blow are ours to make. I would gladly be with you counting penguins in Terra del Fuego, no matter what Destiny wished for us. You are not a coward. Cáel, you save your fear for the lives of others. You get angry. You also forgive.

Best of all, you boldly show others your heart and dare them to do the same. I recall the first time I witnessed other Amazons dealing with Aunt Katrina. She shown with radiance of purpose and the confidence of the Firsts. The others held her in reverence, as if she wasn't one of them, but something more.

Before that, I had only seen her with my Mother. Those two would talk late into the night at my home. I heard Katrina worry and second-guess herself and I saw my Mother help her work through the hardest things that troubled my aunt. I asked Loraine about it. She told me Katrina had to act so self-assured and doubt-free so that the Amazons around her would grow braver and have the strength necessary to do the difficult tasks Katrina set before them.

You are the same way, but in a different direction," Aya teased me. "You show compassion and forgiveness to a people who need that lesson badly, Cáel." I gave her a big ole bear hug while she gave back muffled giggles. "On the road back home after the archery range that day, it came to me. No Amazon would have given themselves up to be butchered like you did."

"Mommy said it was because you were a crazy, outsider male. As the last of those words fell upon my ears, it occurred to me: 'why wouldn't we do what you did?' Why did that make you less of an Amazon to care more about us than we cared for ourselves? Wouldn't that make you better than us? I took my questions to Europa.

She told me to keep such thoughts to myself because you were already in so much trouble. Making the elders think you were infecting me with your 'weakness' wouldn't help either of us."

"What do you think now?" I sighed happily.

"I think if I'm going to grow up to be a member of the Host, I'm going to be an Amazon just like you."

"I don't know how I'm going to take the facial hair," I mumbled after a few seconds. "The chest hair... let's not go there." My guffaws and Aya's snickers echoed.

"That was a nice bonding moment for you two," Charlotte rumbled softly. She stood watch near the front exit to our cave.

"Now go to sleep, before I shoot the ceiling and drop some big rocks on your heads."

Aya figured out how to sleep with my altered biorhythms. Perhaps my 'fourth' cerebral pattern connected my peace of mind, warm memories and sense of safety to be an indicator to let me submerge into my closest facsimile to sleep since I passed out at the end of the Tadéfi/Sikia three-way.

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