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"We need to get out of here," the stranger stated. "Follow me." The white horse hair plum on her helmet whipped around and she began running to an easier path to the exit the ditch - to the west. The 'tons of enemies coming at us in a big way' west. She climbed up to the lip and peeked over.

"What are we doing?" I grumbled at her as I admired her kilted posterior from below.

"If I have this correct, the ditch is about to become an impassible barrier after a few vehicles go crashing in. We will need to circle around and kill the people in the last one so the rest can't escape." The two of us? Miyako had vanished again.

"I love this plan," I groused. "Me, you and a Miyako Monkey holding off how many hundreds of guys."*www.noVelNorm.com*

"If you are scared, feel free to run away," the stranger sneered. "I wasn't planning on you being useful anyway." I made a quick assessment of my resources.

Glock-22 - check; I'd dropped it. USAS-12 - check; I'd dropped that too. My .380 versus their body armor - check; useless. A nifty Chinese Personal Defense Weapon/SMG I had no experience with, three grenades ... it took me a second to access my Mandarin library - 308-1 (that was of no help), one big knife, one small knife and four tomahawks.

"Try to keep up, Gimli," I scoffed. "I bet I'll kill more than you. Loser buys the winner a night's worth of koumiss." Chicks dig Legolas - nuff said.

"What is that? It sounds vile," she snorted. The vehicles were getting close. Jumping up and trying to run past them at this point was a great way to feed the vultures.

We had to wait until the pile-up began and confusion reigned.

"Chilled fermented mare's milk. You'll love it," I joked.

"It doesn't sound vile. It sounds wretched," she corrected herself. Two of the small helicopters flew over us, racing to aid their comrades already inside our perimeter.

In their wake, came some hybridized Hummer/Jeeps, including the guy at the swivel mount of what could have been an automatic grenade launcher. He was traveling so fast he almost made it... ALMOST. The bridge had a built-in dip and as the force and weight of his vehicle hit that dip, the entire eastern end of the bridge gave way.

Even then, the bottom of his front bumper hit the lip of the far abutments. So close. That momentum kept on trying. The vehicle's rear end rose up and for a second, I thought they were going to flip all the way over. It didn't. The problem was that like Special Forces world-wide, they had clearly trained for this mission.

Seven Pillars commandoes had worked out every detail of their plan, which included racing through the night, bumper to bumper, so they could reach their destination and deploy before the enemy could pin them to their transports. Only the Unit Commander could execute the plan, or call it off. It was an 'either/or' decision. Once he unleashed his hounds, all bets were off.

Thus everything hinged on the lead scout spotting danger in time to communicate the threat for the whole unit to react. Such a formation ensured rapid deployment, yet it really impeded your ability to slam on the brakes if needed. Like right at that moment when they needed to avoid the disaster overtaking the ride directly in front of them. It was the downside of this assault's calculated risk.

The second hybrid-weapons platform nearly knocked the first one over. The driver, with lightning reflexes, had instinctively hit the brakes instead of the gas. Faster would have slammed him into the undercarriage of the first ride. Braking... not much better. The third driver apparently had a different driving philosophy.

He yanked his wheel to the right and gunned it. Had he not clipped the bumper of the second roadster... but he did ... resulting in him flying over our heads and into the rock wall across the gulch. The fourth landed on top of the second, only to have the first finally come down and land on him. Momentarily, that was a good spot for vehicle one as it now was level with the lip of the ditch.

But wait, there was more. First off, Friendless and I took off, running past the doomed convoy as fast as we could. A few of the armed guards in the follow-up 2 1/2 ton truck glanced our way, but they had more pressing concerns - like bracing for impact. Had they possessed a spare moment, they might have been concerned about what we were running from.

The driver of the first truck could see the unfolding fate of the fighting vehicles ahead. He swerved to the left, aiming to skirt the edge of the gully, but he had too much forward momentum. The truck flipped the lip, landing upside down. The pain of this uncoiling serpent wasn't over. The first truck had a clear view of the fate of the members before it.

The trucks behind the first didn't. Even as communication warnings flared, physics was playing hell with the Seven Pillars' column. The trucks were bigger, so they needed a longer distance to stop, and the craftily designed Amazon roadway didn't aid that. The final approach to the camp was an 'L' that went from southwest-north to due east at the half-kilometer mark.

That slowed down would be attackers enough so the watching Amazons could figure out what to do with you, yet left you enough space to accelerate to an unsafe speed. This left the trucks piling up around the collapsed bridge. The instant the first truck stopped short of disaster, the sadistic sister observing the fiasco hit the first switch and out came the sticky accelerant.

Their respirators must have given the troopers a few more seconds of not knowing what else was going wrong. With their enlightenment came the running. No one screamed because they couldn't (their facemasks). Half the Amazon naphtha remained a clingy liquid while the other half turned to vapor. Instant Incendiary Inferno! The initial earthshaking explosive force was followed by multiple secondary and tertiary detonations.

My erstwhile ally and I picked ourselves off the ground and resumed our footrace to the last in the line-up. She stopped, drew back her bow and took aim. I didn't. I had a PLAN that required me to get just a bit closer. The second to last vehicle, like the last, had a man standing up at a swing mount. He pointed his vehicle-mounted grenade-launcher my way just in time to take a black-fletched through the sinuses.

The gunner in the last car barely had time to register he was under attack when she killed him as well. When the trucks began slamming on their brakes, the fighting vehicles did too. Braking distance - a slight gap opened up between the last truck and the last two guardians. The rides were four-doors with a rigid top and a fold-down trunk.

The Seven Pillars commandoes flowed into action even as the last of the dust was being kicked up. Ranged death was coming from their right, so the left rear passengers in each vehicle dismounted. The right side rear guy, pulled down their dead gunner and prepared to take his place. Me? My plan required me to get a tiny bit closer! I bolted for the nearer of the two targets.

I swung the gun aside, pulled out one of my brand new grenades and pulled the pin. Was that four seconds, or six? Come on Hollywood, get your fiction straight! My right foot was on the bumper, the left went on the hood, right on the roof and down went the grenade. If this bitch was a smoke grenade, I was so boned.

At the moment, the dead gunner had just been dragged down into the cabin. Before he could be replaced, the grenade bounced down among them. One toy down, two to go. I kept running on top of the vehicle. By the way, the trucks 'behind me' had Special Forces fighters in them. Woot! The shear insanity of my action bought me precious steps*www.noVelNorm.com*

Off the back of the first hybrid killer and onto the hood of the second. The rear-left passenger would have been shooting me dead except he'd sprouted a throwing dart in his visor and was pitching forward off the slightly elevated road and rolling down the slope. I pulled the grenade's pin too soon - whoops!

The poor bastard wasn't even dead. He had a steel wedge shoved into his ocular groove though. The pain had to be intense. My Miyako was out there, somewhere, still watching over me. I went from the hood to the roof of the last hummer. As I ran across the top, down went grenade number two and... the 308-1 grenade is NOT made in China. The Seven Pillars stole the design from the US Navy SEALs.

In fact, the 308-1 is referred to as the 308-1 NAPALM grenade (my emphasis is on the 'N+' part) in the US inventory. 'Arinniti's burning heart, what a horrible way to die' was replace by 'they were going to use these on my Amazons, the fuck-wads'. As I dove headlong off the end of the second vehicle, another 'little' problem arose. If you recall, the first victim's weapon mount was an auto-grenade launcher. The after-battle evaluation indicated the Seven Pillar's team brought way too much spare ammo to be remotely safe.*www.noVelNorm.com*

The resulting explosion gave me a heck of a tail wind mid-flight. The fireball chasing after me made any calculations of distance irrelevant to my immediate survival. Suffice it to say, I did land, rolled with the impact and wasn't crippled. The second ride/the rearmost one? The blast shoved it down the road after me and twisted it sideways - then it blew up.

They had a 'Hua Qing' Mini-gun onboard (why does Delilah knows so much about Chinese weaponry? I'm not sure) plus a great deal of machinegun ammo. Until that point, Gimli had a chance of humiliating me in the body count race. The explosions rained shrapnel everywhere and propelled a flaming engine block into the truck in front of it.*www.NoVelNorm.com*

Twelve more guys plus the driver and the guy riding shotgun. Four plus three and a half for two fighting vehicles - I was sharing the blinded guy with Miyako. I was looking even better if she let me include the ones I killed pre-wager. I was also cultivating a full-body bruise. I was morbidly curious if the soles of my boots had melted, because I was feeling a bit singed.