

974

Cover? I had some. It was most likely pointless. There was a shit-ton of dead bodies and ruined equipment between me and any combat effective enemy. I saw a beam of light come up from the camp. Turned out it wasn't a beam of light; it was the fiery tail of a woman-portable surface-to-air missile. The exploding helicopter clarified the confusion for me.

Moments later, a second streaking flame sought out another helicopter - this one clearly veering away - too late. More fiery death. From the former middle of the column, three of the hybrid fighting rides pulled off the road and headed south. Escape wasn't that easy. From somewhere close to the bead workshop, a thin tip of flame (it was coming at me) reached out and punched the lead vehicle.

I was moving up in the world. I could now honestly claim to have seen what carnage a 90mm rocket could do, courtesy of an expertly aimed M79-Osa. The explosion nearly ripped it in two and tossed both halves my way. The remaining two split up and made a run for it. As I watched them speed away, Miyako came up and lay on her stomach beside me.

"Many of their warriors yet live. They will be making their way on foot to some sort of gathering point, if their masters allow it," she told me.

"Seen our 'friend'?" I asked. She shook her head. "I think I've put Rachel through enough for one night," I added with a sigh. Miyako pulled down her mask long enough for me to see her smile.

I had done right by my people and my friends. Calamity had called me to battle, yet in the end, I was Rachel's burden to bear. Her first job was to safeguard me and I wasn't letting her do that job by running around out in the dark, hunting down trained killers. Maybe Miyako was warming up to the idea that our child and I would meet face to face one day.

Since most of the enemy soldiers were slipping away to the south, we circled around to the north. Of my temporary ally, there was no sign. As the eastern sky began to lighten, I shattered the last two reliquaries. I hadn't done it earlier out of fear that freeing the ghosts would alert our enemies to the extent of our knowledge. Now a desire for them to be free meant more.

(Aftermath and Alliances)

Sunrise bore a dual bane for the Seven Pillars troopers. Their armor, while impressive, was both very stifling and black. Many dumped it and went around in their underwear and t-shirts. Having left the stables alone, they were now being hunted down by Amazons on horseback and guided by four small UAV's (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles).

It wasn't vengeance. That would come later. The more men they killed now, the less intelligence their enemies could wring from the survivors. The priority was evacuation and the conundrum was: 'if the Seven Pillars knew about the camp, what did they know about possible Amazon exit strategy?' Enter Special Agent of the FBI Virginia Maddox. It was a long shot. And that Caprica allowed it, showed the depths of her concern.

Javiera Castello ran a multi-agency task force centered on the criminal presence of heavily armed mercenaries gunning it out with civilians and police in Chicago. That opened some doors for her, though her precise authority was limited. It was a 'friend of a friend of a friend' deal ... what she needed was elements of the US Air Force and the US Air National Guard.

I don't know whose cocks she sucked, pussies she licked, asses she kissed, or who she promised her 'first born' to, but she arranged for air transport of 300 Amazons - destination: anywhere between Panama and Alaska, Canada included. We could all see the decision eating at Caprica's heart. Both St. Marie and Katrina left the final call with her. She was the leader on the spot.

200 of the youngest and 80 Amazon warriors would take the offer of aid. In four hours, local, state and federal authorities would be crawling all over this place, so the majority of us had to be gone. Sophia and a handful of others, including the worst wounded, along with Virginia would stay behind to face the music.

The rest of them would break for the northeast and the Kaibab Indian Reservation. There was no agreement between the Amazon and Kaibab people. They had been quiet neighbors for a hundred years. Before then, the Southern Paiutes suffered considerably from the slave raids of the Navaho and Ute.

One winter, shortly after the establishment of an Amazon freehold in the region, slavers grabbed an Amazon girl by mistake. The freehold tracked the Navaho through Kaibab lands. Seeing that the Amazons were going to get back their 'tribe' member and missing several of their own people recently, the Kaibab offered to help.

Neither side talks about the vengeance the Amazons subjected the Navaho to. It took the Navaho eight years to return to the Kaibab lands. This time, the tribal leaders asked the Amazons for help and help they got. The Navaho didn't get their raiding party back. When they went looking, they found the corpses hung from trees by their own intestines and their testicles and phalluses stuffed into their mouths. Some really sick bitches.

The Navaho never came to the Kaibab lands after that. From that day forward, the two groups had developed an understanding. If some outsider group threatened the Kaibab, the Amazons, acting in their own self-interest, would help out. Beyond that, it was live and let live... until this day. The Amazons were in desperate need and only the hundred or so Kaibab could help.

Why? Another aspect, rarely discussed, went much more to the creeping fear among all the camp guardians. If the Seven Pillars' ghosts found the children once, they could do so again. In the Kaibab lands were a series of old, old religious sites, sacred to the spirits of the land and the Kaibab ancestors. Caprica was going to the aboriginal inhabitants for mystic protection.

Two ATVs head sped ahead to open negotiations. For the rest, it was rounding up what we could carry and destroying what we couldn't. The fifteen, sixteen and seventeen year olds took over security. The thirteen and fourteen year olds prepared to be pack mules for the camp's goods. The ten, eleven and twelve year olds corralled the youngest for their transport to the assigned airfields.

Me? I was being sent back to the remote airfield and heading home. A quick meeting of minds allowed me to take Aya and her Squirts with me. Asking any of my Security Detail to remain behind? They all wanted to, but their duty was to stick by my side. Europa and Loraine hugged Aya and me before returning to their duties.

Virginia stayed because the camp had become a crime scene. She would catch up with me when Javiera could replace her as lead investigator. Delilah and Miyako were leaving with me. I had one last thing to take care of before leaving. I went back to the site of the convoy slaughter. A few dozen meters to the south I found what I was looking for and more.

I found two dead men with a black shafted arrow in each. This time I had my entourage (minus Virginia) with me.

"Target," Tiger Lily spoke softly. She'd brought her FN-P90 up and aimed at the stranger. In the morning light, she cast a far more frightening figure.

"Rachel, I would like to talk to her," I 'suggested' to my chief bodyguard.

"Sure," Pamela joked. "She's all pom-poms, pastels and Puppy-love."

"Information, please," Rachel inquired of me while watching the tall woman draw close. She had taken off her archaic, white hair crested helm. Her braid undone; her loose black mane was already plastered with sweat.

"She is the Friendless - Queen Shammuramat of Assyria, traitor to the Host, murderer of her twin sister and under a sentences of death."

"Oh... and here I thought we had survived this battle," Charlotte mused dryly.

"Come on, Charlotte," Pamela snorted. "She's an old chick. How tough can she be?"

Had anyone a hostile look to spare, they would have tossed it Pamela's way.

"We have unfinished business, you and I," Shammy glared.

Her arms and armor were equally archaic seeming yet... I felt the design had incorporated techniques and materials not available when the original was crafted.

The attentiveness of the ladies around me cruelly amused her.

"Let's return to my camp. We can drink water and eat some breakfast," I evaded.

"No," she snapped. "I want to know who you are and I want to know now."

"Neither my hostess nor I are bound to your timetable," I grinned.

"For that matter, I know you don't have a timetable." I balanced that thought with, "Meet with the Amazon whose prestige you helped save. This was a gathering place for the young of the Host and you are not here by accident, I'd wager."

"I am not of the Host," she growled.

"You are telling this to a guy, you know?" I countered. "Take an extra hour out of your life. Eat and drink with me and I will answer what I can."*w(w)w.nOvELwOrM.coM*

"Fine," she grumbled. "It is already hot and the Sun hasn't even begun to cook me." As we headed across the bloody, stinking burned out ruin of a landscape, I caught Shammy looking around in a haunted fashion.*w@w.nO℃éℓ@o(ι)M.cOm*

Tiger Lily went ahead to give the bare basics to Caprica. This was more than a matter between the Friendless and me. After the water and a dry breakfast, the introductions went around, me last of all. The stage was set, the players were in their spots, and it was up to me to screw this up.

"I am Cael, Head of House Ishara, and I come with a pledge of peace," I said as I approached with empty hands.

"I do not want your peace ..." she punctuated with disdainful laughter, "Ishara? Groveling is your specialty, not mine. Bow before me and I will press my sandal upon your neck," Shammuramat scoffed. That meant make me her slave. Nope. I'd been dodging that fate for way too long (was it two months already?)

"Stick your foot in my direction, it better be because you want a foot massage, Princess. Falling down has never been my problem. Staying down when I should give up on the other hand... it simply isn't me."

"If it makes you feel better, I will kill you standing up," her inner wolfishness came forth.*wWw.N@o℃ℓ(w)O(ι)im.c.m*

"I would rather you kill me on my death bed... say in 70 more years," I grinned.

My bravado made Shammy smirk.*wWw.N℃VℓTwO(ι)M.c.m*

"You aren't the gloomy Isharans I have dealt with before. Your tongue is rather glib," she casually noted.

"Why, thank you," I kept things positive.

"It wasn't a compliment. I find your pedantic nature annoying," her non-violent mood was dissipating.