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I save my indignation for those who scorn Dot Ishara, Yakko Ishara and all members of House Ishara, past and present. Quite frankly, being disrespectful to me is actually rather difficult because I only care about the sensibilities of a handful of people."

"How can any warriors follow a leader into battle if that person has no pride and never shies away from shame?

And besides, what is this Wakko/Dot/Yakko nonsense," Saku persisted. "Fatal Squirts, start assembling my armor." Her attention was split between me and her panoply.

"Hello," I snickered. "I'm a male Amazon. The fact that I haven't run for my life way before now is all the heroic background check anyone should require.

Doubting my common sense actually makes sense. Doubting my courage, or loyalty is idiotic in too many ways to count. As for revealing the hallowed and revered enigmatic occult appellations of my House..." I started.

"Get him!" Tiger Lily showed some faux-outrage.

"Shit!" I cried out as Delilah, Tiger Lily and the rest of the SD swarmed me. Pamela and Miyako were of no help whatsoever. I could not express my joy more at the resulting physical abuse and humiliation aimed my way. I was tickled. Yes, my Kick-Ass, full-blood, natural born killers pinned me down and tickled me until I nearly peed on myself.

In a very short period of time, we'd shared some really nerve-racking moments. Dad dying, my showdown with Hayden, being mugged by Carrig and the rest of the crap that rained down blow after blow once I came out of my coma. They had taken me numerous times to the hospital and had to sit back helplessly while I suffered. Yet, I refused to be repressed by circumstance.

I fought for our people – OUR people now – both with the Earth & Sky in shared counsel and the Seven Pillars on the battlefield. Rachel hadn't given me word-one of a reprimand for leaving Charlotte to raise the alarm while I rushed into danger. I was an Amazon in her eyes. Charlotte could fix the phone. Miyako and I could not. The bridge had to be secured immediately.ŵŴŴ.π@v@/w.r.m.©om

We couldn't wait on Charlotte. I didn't even act as if what I did was all that brave. Rachel knew me far better now; she wouldn't make that mistake. Had I been able to fix the phone, I would have stayed and sent Charlotte. Had the whole team been there and Rachel told me to stay, I would have stayed while they ran into the fight.

No. The situation hadn't allowed that, so I had killed a number of men and been wounded. The backside of my right thigh had merely been grazed (which my normally mangled left side found to be grossly unfair.) That was another scar to add to my 'sexy'. I had fought in my own insane manner and was alive solely because Saku had decided to shoot another man instead of me.

Even after I knew who she was, I had allied with her and charged the rear of the enemy troop convoy. In the after-battle analysis, they weren't sure how many Seven Pillar Special Forces I had killed, both in the gulch and when I annihilated the back section of the attack column... and took my impromptu flying lesson.

Credit for destroying the bridge jacks, thus making the BBQ a carnal cookout featuring Chinese 'Long-Pig', was still hanging out there as well. Rachel and company were still pissed with me despite all that. Why? On a purely personal level, they realized they would miss me if I got myself killed. They were not supposed to feel that way about their protectee.

I certainly wasn't their first protective detail ... though they were starting to believe I'd be their last. No, I had done everything right – by going into harm's way – and they were furious with the universe for placing us in that situation. Since the universe wasn't offering itself up to be punished, it fell on me to soak up their pique.

Delilah was simply picking on me because she could get away with it this time.

"You are all embarrassments," Saku remarked bitterly once my screams began breathless pleas for mercy. "The Host has fallen a great way since my day." What a killjoy. I finally got my breath back.

[Akkadian] "And the Queen on the floor of the Royal chambers, pushing around toy chariots with her two eldest sons and a child-playmate, was the height of decorum."

Well, if looks could kill... I would have never made my nineteenth birthday, so Saku's glare was just another walk in the park.

[Akkadian] "That was a personal moment with my family. It was a VERY private moment," she sizzled.

[Akkadian] "My Mother's line is... it is what it is. My Father was murdered. My Father's sister and I were never close. These people are my family and my choice of kin."Ŵw.Nð(˘)eL(w)óŔm.©om

"English," Pamela chided us.

"Having no family to call your own, you welcome so many that 'family' has no meaning," Saku angrily mocked my words.

There was a hushed moment then everyone but the three other Squirts and Saku started laughing. The three kids didn't know me either.

"By what metric do you measure family by?" I snickered.

"On his third day on the job, Fehér mén (Aya's pet name for me – White Stallion in the Magyar tongue – it is complicated) threw his body over my sisters and me to protect us," Aya said.

"He spared my foster-sister when she gravely insulted him," Mona volunteered. "He didn't know me. The Amazon, Constanza, would have died by anyone else's hand – except his. You may look down your nose at his mercy. As you do so, consider that it is his mercy that allows you to feel that way about him – and us right now." Whoa...

"I have never seen him fight out of pride, or take joy in any combat," Rachel stared down Saku. "My only fear is that Cael will get himself killed saving my life, or the life of any member of my team. He knows it is wrong. He knows I will be absolutely furious with him... and he accepts that. He is like no other Amazon I have ever known.

We have limits. We follow orders. At our best, we put the welfare of the Host over our own survival. Not Ishara – Wakko Ishara. He follows the dictates of his house and those are to seek mercy and peace where appropriate. He is like no Amazon I have ever known, and I have zero doubt that he is one of the best Amazons I will ever know," she finished with a chuckle.

"I'm speaking my mind, aren't I?" she asked me.

"Afraid so... sorry about that," I apologized for corrupting her social skills.

"Saku, your mistake is that you confuse his caring about you and caring about your opinion of him," Pamela finished things up.

"Sakuniyas, I will work to honor my pledge to you. I will try to keep you alive because you can be a powerful ally of the Host, but also because it is the right thing to do," I enlightened her. "That doesn't make you all that special though. Personally I think you are a horrible, bitter bitch and lousy company for any non-masochist.

I'm going to help you in the same way I'm going to help everyone else here. This is despite me feeling confident that not a single Amazon on this planet has a living father. They've never had brothers because their mothers murdered them. Your crappy attitude doesn't influence me one way, or the other. You are a horrible fucking person born to a horrible fucking race – my race, the Amazon Host."

"You kill your fathers and sons," Delilah mumbled as she looked from face to face, finding not a single bit of denial, or shame. "I thought that was so much Greek bull's buttocks."

"Nope," Aya shrugged. "Before I left for camp, Momma told me they put Daddy – my other Daddy – down when I was two." Kind of like Old Yeller, or Benji. "His name was Paul Twelve."

Delilah looked at me with downright worrisome eyes.

"Yeah, I figured that out on day two on-the- job," I relayed to her. "For the past 2500 years, every male child of the Host has been tossed off a cliff to his death, or left out in the wilds for predators to devour. Every male they have kidnapped has been under a death sentence from the moment of capture.

They tried to genetically breed their captive male population with Amazon females, but something went wrong. The males began passing on genetic defects that poisoned the race. In response, they have begun recruiting men, such as myself, and exterminating their old male breeding populace.ŴwŴ.NðVe©W.r.MI.COm

Initially, I didn't run because I was sure they would hunt me down and kill me. Later... later I came to like enough of the Host to decide that knowing what was going on meant I couldn't let it slide. I couldn't leave this issue for someone else to tackle. I know I'm facing long odds, yet I'll never succeed if I don't try," I wrapped up my little my 'Cael's Amazon Primer' lecture.

"Okay... okay, Cael you are blood nuts... and hellishly brave. The rest of you are just hellish... killing your own kin as infants or if they get too old," Delilah sputtered. "That's plain wrong."

"I had sons," Saku stated. "They grew into fine, strong warriors. My daughters married into the nobility."ŴwŴ.©oVelŴ@r.m.©o©

"Delilah, we don't expect you to understand our culture. Twice in our people's history, men have tried to eliminate our society, stealing our homes and property, and enslaving our children and sisters. We let down our guard once, and that nearly destroyed us... except we now have Cael and a better understanding of what happened that second time," Tiger Lily educated Delilah.

"It turned out that not all males betrayed us. No... when we needed them the most, they sacrificed themselves for the welfare of our people and we repaid that loyalty with anger and barbarism. That is a burden we have carried the these centuries without understanding it. Only within the past month has the real truth about the Second Betrayal become known.