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"Officer Cresky is here as an observer," Vincent clarified. "We have come to touch base with you. Our taskforce has been told you are being cooperative and we would like to keep it that way."

"We were also informed that you had a woman of Japanese extraction with your party," George cut

"She doesn't seem to be around," I shrugged.

in. I looked over my shoulder then to the left and right.

"Is she still on the plane?" George made to move past me and see for himself. Moving toward the plane was okay. Moving toward the four Fatal Squirts and Saku was not. Since Sakuniyas hadn't exhibited the slightest desire to inform people before she bifurcated them, I grabbed his elbow.

"Slow down, Tex," I cautioned him. He was looking at my hand as if he was planning out the series of martial arts moves he was going to break me down with. Very Jason Bourne of him.

"We were told she was a... ninja," FBI Vincent said with deep-seated scorn. I let go of George.

"She is. Why do you want to talk with her?" I asked Vincent.

"It is part of the ongoing investigation," he evaded. Tiger Lily had used the interruption to sheppard our youths along while Saku covered the movement with her body. George headed for the plane.

"Well, with an explanation like that, I'm sure she will show when she wants to, Vincent," I sighed.

"She is not part of Havenstone's deal with Javiera. You can be a dick like George there, or you can trust me enough to believe I'm not going to burn any bridges with Special Agent Maddox and FP Castello," I stated. "Do understand, I am not your snitch, CI (confidential informer), or some scumbag turning State's Evidence to save his own skin.

My people do not view themselves to be American citizens, or citizens of any other recognized nation. They do not consider their numerous infractions of your laws to be criminal and they aren't afraid of you. A few of us started this morning shooting people, setting them on fire and watching them burn to death.

Now, before you make your final mistake of this meeting, think about what I've told you," I advised him. He dissected my words and body posture with the skills of a professional cop.

"I would like to talk to your ninja – Ms. Miyako Yuki," he requested. Miyako had a last name and it meant – Snow. Game of Thrones?

"Yes?" Miyako responded. I gulped. Vincent nearly leapt away in surprise.

"You ARE a ninja," he croaked.

Miyako looked up at me, gave me a wickedly little grin then shared it with

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"I confess to nothing," she beamed.

"Ms. Yuki, last night at approximately 8:30 pm Tokyo time, a series of violent criminal actions happened in five of Japanese largest cities," Vincent told her.

tried to incite a reaction from Miyako and failed "I do not know," she replied in a flat voice. "I will contact some of my associates and give you what

"Ms. Love thinks you can provide some insight into how that might tie into the attack in Arizona," he

information I am allowed to share. Cáel, we need to go now." "Rachel!" I got her attention. "We need to leave now. Vincent..." I kept going.

"Agent Loire, please," he stated firmly.

creeps," I finished. "What... there she is," George was coming back down the jet's stairs. "We need to..." he clued in on

"Whatever. I'm inviting you to come along with me. Leave George the keys. He gives me the

the rapidly loading Amazons. "You can't dictate the progress of this investigation," Loire said.

"I'm not... Vincent. I go on a first name basis. I am not telling you how to do your job," I tried again.

"I'm allowing you to sit in as the intelligence arrives and not get it watered down by some third party.

My people don't trust you and yours, but I trust Javiera and Virginia – Agent Maddox. I told you that

we do not consider ourselves Americans. We are part of a tribal identity, culture and faith that

predates the United States, the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Code of Hammurabi. I understand your disbelief and that doesn't matter. We believe it and that DOES matter. Got it? Good. That's your concept to juggle. Now, my side's problem is wondering how the US government let roughly 350 heavily armed Special Forces from the People's Republic of China into

your country so they could attack us this morning, threatening 500 of our children. Your team dropped the ball and my side isn't feeling the love. Still, we are honoring our deal to accommodate Javiera's investigative team. If you want to sit in the

"Why not George here?" Vincent thumbed toward a rather smug George who somehow thought he held the key pieces in this dilemma. "He's our foreign intelligence expert."

lobby at Havenstone, be my guest. By making the offer, I've met my good faith obligation to her."

"Delilah, shit going down in Japan," Pamela tapped in the Range Rover's driver side window.

"Okay," I sighed. "First off, we need guys like you – honest, fair-minded law enforcement. I can get a

'George' whenever I want one. We don't need him." "Hey now," George protested. "You don't know me. The taskforce is working on multiple foreign

terrorist angles."

"Thanks for lying to us, George," I glared. "I'm not lying," he protested.

"Then you are a delusional idiot, neck deep in shit and wondering if someone is ever going to cut

the lights on," I countered. Mushroom, or lying professional espionage prick... "I don't think you are an idiot. I think you employ mercenaries and some of your former

subcontractors showed up on my Dad's doorstep a few weeks back," I seared him with my banked rage. How did I know this? I didn't. I was testing him to see what his reaction would be. "Hold that protest one second. Vincent, you come downstairs one night and find me fucking your

oldest daughter on your favorite lounger. What do you do?" His look said it all.

"George, I fuck your wife, make a video and it gets posted to the cloud. What do you do?" I redirected the blow.

His outrage was a second too slow and Vincent caught that. Vincent? Vincent raised his daughter right. I was screwing her on his favorite chair, he'd politely, but firmly, invite me to another room and

explain the facts of life if I planned to keep seeing his 'little girl'. Summary; the man trusted his

offspring. A good father was what Havenstone needed. George – his wife cheating would never be his fault and he'd immediately go into cost analysis mode... over his wife's infidelity. Fuck-nut. He was also playing the same game with me, my father's death and how those dead men tracked back to the CIA. I didn't believe they were with 'The

Agency'. I believed they were hired killers the CIA used for 'unpleasant' tasks and it was those crimes they were interested in keeping secret. "How do you know I have daughters?" Vincent turned his investigator's mind back to me.

quality of their parenting in the first thirty seconds. I'm rarely wrong."

grinned. "As a man who regularly preys on the feminine gender, I can get a good sense on the

"A calculated karmic guess, Vincent. You would seriously rock as a father of young ladies," I

"Special Agent Loire," George snapped back. "Let's go." Vincent tossed him the keys.**wW**w. π o \boldsymbol{v} el(w)orm.c \mathbb{O} m

"Eh... I don't have a clue. I wanted to piss you off and I did," I sneered.

"Officer Cresky," I'll be keeping a close eye on our targets and keep in regular contact." George was smart enough to not argue. We had all taken our seats in the GL-550s when Delilah

some clearly coded message drops. Rachel touched base with Elsa while Delilah had a 'chat' with someone on the other side of the Atlantic. I missed Aya, but she, as war leader, had to stick with the rest of the Fatal Squirts and that put her in car #2, headed for Caitlyn's townhouse. Aya's mom had sent away three kids of varying heights and

got four tiny mites back. I continued to get more than I deserved. I called Hana Sulkanen to set up

came sprinting over. The drive into Manhattan was done with a bevy of phone calls. Miyako made

another meeting with the Earth & Sky. I got a lot more. "Hana, this is Cáel Nyilas," I started. "I know I haven't even begun to pay you back for your earlier

favor... and I need another one. I need a back-channel meeting with that person at the Kazakhstan

consulate." "Cáel, I need to know why," she answered. I sensed something behind that

request.www. $\mathfrak{n} \odot (v) e \odot woRm.\mathbb{C}o\mathfrak{m}$ "This morning, a few hundred men of most likely Han ethnicity tried to kill me," I confessed. "I'm

"Cáel, our family business is heavily invested in oil and natural gas exploration throughout Central

Asia," she worried over every word. "Twenty hours ago we lost contact with our petrochemical operations in Karamay, Xinjiang Uyghur

worried that the conflict will spill over to my Kazak friends' way." Long pause.

any of the sites. I just got off the phone with our director of operations in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan. He reported air raid sirens, rolling blackouts and police activity all over the city. Cáel, that's the largest refinery in Central Asia, bar none. This is bad – B-A-D and not only for our corporate interests, but the entire regional economy. Also, do you know where Aksai Chin is? Well, according

Autonomous Region, PRC (People's Republic of China)," she made the leap into critical trust. "That

is \$10. 75 billion worth of energy to the PRC and we can't raise anybody at our regional offices or

to their new website they've declared the creation of an independent provisional government, free of Chinese control, and are asking Pakistan for recognition. Does any of that make sense to you?"

"Where is Aksai Chin?" I mumbled.

(Historical sidebar)

"I had to look it up to," Hana sighed. "It is PRC territory and its southwest of Tibet, but that area is somewhat in disputed by Pakistan and India. It is a desolate land in the ass-end of nowhere."