

Chapter 38

Denton looked around as he got off the jet. "Is this an airfield or a dirt road?"

"Both?" Colby said, behind him.

This wasn't what he'd expected when he thought about going to Mexico. Mexico brought to mind heat, small towns, densely packed people, music and singing. Well, it was hot.

He walked around the jet and saw a small hangar with a building next to it, also small. Maximilian was the last one to debark, then the pilot opened a hatch at the back. The cougar pulled out a trunk and placed it on the ground. Denton was next to him when he opened it.

"Everyone take one," Maximilian said.

"No." Denton looked at the cougar, then back at the trunk. In it were gun belts, with guns in their holsters. It was full of them. there had to be at least twenty of them.

He took one of the guns out, and just by the weight, he could tell it wasn't a stunner. He pulled out the clip, it was a long one, probably eighteen bullets. He slid it back in and dropped the gun in the trunk. "What the hell are you doing with a trunk full of illegal weapons!"

"I'm making sure everyone is armed."

"You want to give guns to people who don't even know how to use them?"

"You prefer they go up against who knows what unarmed?"

Denton didn't have anything to say to that. He snarled.

"How did you even get that through custom?"

"The nice thing about having a private jet, and lots of money, is that custom officers tend not to want to know what you're doing."

"How about here? You have them out in public. what are they going to say?"

Maximilian looked at him for a moment, then smiled. "Well, if they do ever show up, I'm sure they're going to have something to say about it. Are you planning on waiting for them?"

Denton glared at the cougar, then saw a cloud of dust in the distance. "It might not be that long of a wait." he pointed to it.

Maximilian checked it out, then handed guns to everyone. "That's just our jeeps."

Denton took the belt he was handed, and put it on. He wasn't happy about it, but Maximilian was right, he'd be stupid to go unarmed. The belt had five loaded clips attached to it.

Fred took out his gun and pointed it in the distance. With a curse Denton was next to him and forcing it down. This was why you didn't give guns to people without the right training.

Someone was going to shoot it carelessly.

He turned to everyone. "Okay. You guys now have guns. Don't not point them at anyone or anything unless you are going to shoot. In fact, after this, I don't want to see one out of its holster." He glared at Fred who nodded sheepishly. "Okay, take it out, keep it pointed at the ground. If you feel the inside of the grip, two third of the way down, you'll feel a small switch. If it's down, the gun isn't powered. If it's up, flick it down." At least no one had the bright idea to turn the gun to look at the switch.

"You're going to have trouble flicking the switch up. They're made that way. No one wants his gun to accidentally switch on. When you turn it on, there'll be a green light on the back of the grip, toward the top. If that doesn't come on, don't bother trying to shoot, the battery's dead."

"What do we do then?" Frank asked.

"You take cover. I'm not going over battery replacement, even if we have spares. Let me put it this way. I don't want you to use this thing. Colby, Bruce and me are the only ones who've been trained, and I don't want *us* using them. Max's right, we don't know what's waiting for us, but I'll be a hell of a lot happier if they're waiting for us with spears and rocks, cause it means we won't need these."

He holstered it, and so did everyone else. Moments later the jeeps were here. Maximilian spoke with one of the driver in Spanish.

"Alright. These two jeeps are ours. I'll drive this one, You guys figure out who you want driving the other?"

Colby jumped behind the wheel before anyone could say anything.

"What about them?" Denton nodded to the three jaguars in the last jeep.

"They're going home," Maximilian answered. "This has nothing to do with them." He got in the jeep. "Colby, follow me."

Denton sat next to Maximilian. "How do you know where it is? have you been there before?"

"No." He hooked his phone to the dashboard. "But I'm the only one who thought to enter the Coordinates in his GPS."

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They came upon the trail leading to the cave fairly quickly, with indications someone had driven along it recently.

By the time they reached the cave's entrance, everyone was shirtless due to the heat. Frank and Fred had cut their pants into shorts, and Denton was considering doing the same. The only ones who seemed comfortable were Colby and Bruce.

Two other jeeps were already there.

"We're going to have company," Martin said.

"That's why we're armed," his father said.

"Bruce, You're in front with me," Denton told him. "Colby, you take the rear. "Everyone else, keep your guns holstered."

"Doesn't that defeat the purpose of arming ourselves?" Maximilian asked.

"It also ensures we won't shoot ourselves accidentally in there." Denton pointed to the entrance. "From the looks of it, it's going to be on the narrow side." He and Bruce led the way.

"What's that stuff?" Bruce pointed to the pale gray substance in the wall's crack.

Fred ran a finger over it. "Feels like concrete."

Further the tunnel widened so three of them could stand side by side, but Denton kept them paired, so they could move if they were ambushed. They also came across the first light, then it was dark enough for them to see that lights had been fixed to the wall every few feet.

"I think I hear something," Bruce said. They'd been moving slowly for a minute.

Denton had everyone stop and be silent as he strained to listen. He thought he could make out a rapid clicking, increasing in volume. Before he could figure out what it was, someone ran by him really fast, and knocked him back against the wall. Everyone else sounded like they'd been hit by the same person.

Denton turned in the direction he'd run off. "Anyone saw who that was?"

Shakes of heads.

"Stay against the wall," Maximilian warned. "He's coming back." He stood in the center of the tunnel. Then he quickly stepped aside, leaving his left leg extended. He cursed as the runner tripped on it and face planted, skidding for few feet before coming to rest motionless.

Denton tilted his head at Maximilian.

"He didn't think as fast as he ran."

Denton nodded and crouched. He turned him on his back, a chimpanzee.

"That's the other pilot," Frank said.

Denton looked up to see most had gathered around him and the chimp. He just had the time to yell "Fred!" before a lean bear slashed at him.

Fred turned and only got his arm cut, instead of his back. He punched the bear in the face, forcing him back. Then Frank was on him, hitting and slashing. When he moved away, the bear was a bloody mess.

"You okay?" He asked Fred.

The lion looked at his arm, which had a fine red line in

its fur. "I'm fine. it's just a scratch."

"Bruce," Denton indicated the tunnel. "Keep an eye out for more of them." He lifted the chimp's shirt. His body was crisscrossed with symbols carved in his flesh. They too looked fresh, the blood bright red, but when Denton ran a finger over them the blood didn't smear, although it didn't feel clotted either. "Okay, this really can't be normal."

Maximilian knelt next to him and studied the symbols. "This one looks a little like the one for running, but I might be assuming that because he could run fast." He ran a finger over them, then pressed the flesh. "I have no idea why the blood looks fresh. When you were in San Francisco, did any of the tigers have symbols like those on them?"

Denton shook his head. "Except for one scar on his arm, and that looked a few years old, Arnold didn't have any visible marks."

"They could be hidden."

"I don't think so. If these symbols can give normal people powers, it can do the same for the Orrs, They wouldn't have let me get the best of them if they had any way to stop me. No, I think this is something Damian figured out on his own. I think it has something to do with why he killed my family."

"Then he's found something new to tap into."

"Or old." Fred told his brother to stop fussing over him. "Blood shows up in legends older than when we made the deal with Him. It's possible he used them as a basis for research."

Denton chuckled. "Somehow I have trouble imagining one of the Orrs bent over books. They don't seem quite that bright."

"We only dealt with them for a few hours," Stefan commented. "I doubt it's enough to make an informed judgment."

Denton nodded in agreement. "Okay, let's keep going. Again, two by two. Bruce, you okay to stay in front with me? or you want to switch with Colby."

"I'm good."

They kept going.