

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 1

Date: 19th of the 4th Month, 3242 A.U.

Realm: Untari

Location: The Flax Mountains of Western Glastol

The explosive boom of thunder and the dramatic flash of lightning. The howling call of the winds and the craggle of the trees. A relentless storm overhead plowing through the mountains above and eclipsing the rocky tops. Not the flap of a bird, the scurry of a squirrel, the charge of a bear, or the flight of a deer.

The whirl of the green so short it barely came up to the ankles and for prairie skirts up and beyond the knees. The standing bodies many centuries old and firm, bending and weaving ever so with the rustle rustle of their appendages. Air slammed to the sides of the mountains with such explosive splintering force. The rain pelting down like an avalanche of snow pounding into whatever lay below.

Muds running and splashing, paths washing out going all the way down the mountainsides. Despite such forces it was the rocks that still did not buckle. Firm in opposition, their paths yet to be drowned. Paths that stretched up and up, illuminated only by the flashes of the clouded night sky... and the illumination of fire.

Shadows cast and glows apparent though dim dotting the mountainside of one mountain. Flickers of fire that went deep. Entrances carved out that went within, the lights penetrating deep within.

CLANG

Tunnels rolling in, winds and waters crashing about yet barely touching the inside. Down and down, into the core of the monument. The pathway of light alit by the mounted torches continued down further and further. Around some corners bits of English and urks rang, becoming more and more prevalent the further down.

TING BING CLANG

The echo of metal on metal. The clack and bang deep within. Strong force against strong force.

Swish

The source: a large cavern with torches all around, paint and chalk drawn upon the floor forming a very large rectangle with other shapes drawn within. And it was in the midst of this rectangle drawn that two blurs shot around. Steps echoing, the flurry of blades clashing together. Rock itself and the dust were left tossed across the way, the clang clang of metals continuing.

The two figures bouncing around one another, spinning and bashing. One flew back, arms a slurry; the other skid away with their sword dug into the dirt, their own arms quivering greatly. Fiery eyes locked, weapons raised. A female, long dark hair and bright eyes in a long coat; the other a male of short lighter hair and darker eyes.

Grunts escaped the two and both again flew for one another. No movement wasted, the woman spinning around a slash and her own sword sent flying, deflected then by the cross block of the man. The clang, both hopping back. Both again flew out with their weapons and crashed.



[Art by Aureolin Flax]

CLANG-DING-DING, SWOOSH

“D-dammit!” the male spat, the tip of the sword across from him at his own throat.

Clap-clap-clap, a spell of clapping from across the room. There, sat atop a high rock, a lone female who had just begun to slide down and place both feet upon the ground. The heads of the two turned, seeing the approaching figure who wore the slightest of grins as she spoke the words-

“Alright alright, that’s the match and the game!”

Hair, a long dark blond going down her back and curling over her face. The glimmer of a light green shining behind the stands, reflecting the light of the torches. A purple short sleeved shirt, black sleeves extending out down to her wrists, a dark blue coat over top with the sleeves sliced off. A black skirt with a golden trim, atop long gray sweatpants leading into boots. A book in hand, red cover with patches of black; though no writing on it however.

“You guys did great that time, much better than before,” she spoke.

“Bleh, if you say so. Feels like I got the crap beaten out of me,” the male said.

“Hee hee, you got that right,” the girl giggled.

“Destiny don’t start with me. I still feel the tip of your damn sword, too close a shave.”

“Thomas, Thomas, Thomas, that’s what happens when you get overconfident.”

“Yeah? Well how about a rematch. None of your silly ballerina stuff just straight up striking and power!”

“I’m not Tom, a battle is more than just being strong. A battle is being smart too. Should do you some good to think for once.”

“Heh heh- just listen to the two of you. Quarreling over nothing. Kind of adora-”

“Shut up Elise!” both barked at once.

The girl, Elise, broke into a bit of a laugh. Her hand held up to her mouth as her snicker escaped, eyes closed as she did so.

“Yeah? How about you and I throw down and see how funny it is. I’ll take you on!” Thomas howled.

“Oh, oh- no thank you. I don’t really care for combat. I’m fine sitting on the sidelines,” Elise chuckled, opening her eyes once more.

“Thomas you’re dumb. I know that you know what I know that we both know that Elise is a glass cannon. She’d beat you like a sack of potatoes on bath day.”

“Gah dammit, screw you. I quit!” Thomas barked aloud.

With his bark he turned right round and stormed away, barging right out of the hall and turning around the corner to disappear, the shout of Destiny to follow, “Oh come on Thomas. If you want you could come with me to collect water and haul it back. Maybe get laughed at by Rusty for... well, being you. I can talk to Vulper about assigning you to my teeeeeeam if you want~”

“Never again!” his voice yowled back with an echoing curl.

“Hee hee hee, oh Thomas,” Destiny giggled looking after him, soon directing her focus back to Elise, “He’s rather simple, isn’t he?”

“Heh heh, just a little; but that is our way, isn’t it? Vulfax is built on the backs of warriors, and he will make for a fine warrior one day.”

Elise’s own steps carried her forward, staring out at the entrance. Beside her stepped Destiny, crossing just behind, her sword sheathed as she moved. Their motions now carrying them from the rectangular outline and towards that very same opening in the rock. Through the halls walked several, cloaked in the outfits of the old world: of leather, of cloth, of rags and stitches.

“If he lives that long,” Destiny murmured.

“The both of you will do fine,” Elise spoke as both rounded the corner, “You should both pass the trials without any trouble. After that you can join the ranks and take to the battlefields, and once ready-”

“-Once ready we can be turned!” Destiny interrupted with a giddy smile.

“Ah, of course. The sacred rite. You get to become a she-devil, heh heh.”

“Pa-hah, oh yes of course. Then they can call me devilish. Devilish. Such silly words by those feeble humans. Ahhhh to live in such pure blissful ignorance,” Destiny giggled.

“Lest you forget friend, you are one of those *feeble* humans as of right now,” Elise spoke.

Both continued down another corridor alit by the torches anchored within. People did pass as they curved left and then up some stone-carved stairs leading up. It was here where around another change of halls at the top that a good few stood a distance down. A lone man with a lantern in hand, cloaked in a brown wrap, and several in black leather-like garbs.

The man in brown lifted his head and glanced outward towards the two as they entered, their steps carrying the sound of their presence. The man, his face drenched in

swirling long black hair over a single eye, the other eye standing out with its dark greenish blue glow. Elise's head perked ever so, taking in the sight of the man. Both Destiny and Elise stopped, the latter's gaze turned to the former who in turn gave a simple not.

It was following the exchange that Destiny turned herself around and progressed the other way, whilst the man before Elise resumed his chatter with the others. They too broke way and continued on, leaving just the cloaked man and the young girl who was now moving forward herself.

"Miss Bakuuva, a pleasure as always," the man spoke, soon turning to walk with her as she caught up.

"Likewise my friend," Elise stated as she did in fact catch up, walking in tandem now with the man.

"I trust that our newest additions are nearly ready for their ascension?" he questioned.

"Yes, for the most part. Destiny has showcased remarkable progress. On the other hand, Thomas is... well he's determined anyway."

"*Huff* Take what we can get I suppose given the circumstances," he mumbled, "Harsh times are upon us."

"I... heard that there was another attack. Alavan this time," she murmured while glancing over to him.

"Yes. The rogue forces laid siege to Alavan; though it seems the humans were able to repel the enemy this time without aid from the Inquisition. Their resilience is becoming rather... concerning," he spoke calmly, almost monotone.

"Is it really that surprising though? The humans have endured a lot in recent times."

"Oh, I fully expected it to happen eventually. It's still troubling. The stronger they get, the closer they get to becoming a credible threat to us. And the more damage the rogue forces do, well- you get the idea. And that... that is why I intend to raise this concern at the next summit. To protect our own interests and such."

She'd glance to him for a moment as they continued to walk and then look away, "Seems as though conflict is inevitable."

"Such is life Miss Bakuuva. We can not live without conflict, lest we become stagnate and rot."

"I... am aware, but- conflict should only go so far... is another war likely?"

“Hopefully not Miss Bakuuva. If anything I hope for this to be resolved quickly and quietly. Now then- speaking of the humans, I have an assignment for you my dear.”

“Oh boy,” she scoffed with a slight grin and eyes shut with a prolonged blink, “What am I to do this time?”

She looked to him once again.

“Word has it that some of the Local Lords are going to be moving through the mountain pass. One by the name of Matias is going to be with them. I won’t go into much detail about him but- we need to make sure he gets through here. Any of them dying would be a particular problem for all of the neighboring clans. Understood?”

“I understand loud and clear Vulper.”

“Good. Once the storm passes by you’ll leave with Mark’s team. Expect their convoy to be through here no more than an hour passed the storm.”

“I’ll ready myself to head out then. Thank you Vulper,” she spoke turning about with a couple paces.

“Try not to get into too much trouble young one,” he spoke as she left his side.

“Oh come on you know me!” she called back while rounding a corner, leaving Vulper with but the slightest of smirks crossing his face.

As she walked down the corner her hands drew to the sides of her head. Taking hold of the hood she flipped it forward over top. Her face, slightly obscured with the darkness and only illuminated as the torches passed her by. A few paces more and her eyes closed, a breath drawn in.

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Emerald eyes open, breath exhaled.

Drip drip drip

Drool hit the rock before her feet. Her emotionless gaze staring forward at jagged teeth in a double jaw situation. Ripping jaws in fact, outer almost like can opening supers on a living tank. A hulking form stood before her cloaked body shrouded.

The snap. A several meter tall scorpion-like creature, two massive claw arms and four smaller sets beneath. A huge stinger and eight legs. A smaller right claw missing, part of the big left torn off. An eye blown out and bleeding.

A couple of these creatures stood round though each of them a meter or two smaller and less damaged. Behind Elise a horde of horses with gunners in ranger attire

and a cowboy in all black with revolvers drawn. A carriage lay behind, a couple other cloaked people surrounding it. And all the while behind that carriage a few more of the creatures stood.

“It would be a problem if a couple of local Lords went missing this way up,” spoke one of the cloaked figures who wielded an ax, “Can’t be havin’ that. So that leaves us with no choice but to interfere.”

The voice was deep, male, and very gruff. Beside him the cowboy stepped ahead, the black of his coat turning into an ash-gray blue with a wine red vest and ascot. His amber gaze sunk forward as the others in cloaks gathered round.

“Hey if you’re going to interfere you might want to back me up!” Elise called out, the creature before her snapping with its jaws as she did so.

“Dunno what you people are going to do against these things, so allow me to partake for a moment,” the cowboy spoke.

“Heh- be my guest,” the ax man agreed as he stepped forward, “Just don’t expect this to be easy now merc.”

“Hell. Since when is anything in life easy?” came the retort as he stepped forward with revolvers poised.

“True ‘nuff... your lil pistols there gonna be able to punch these things through Captain?” the ax man questioned, “Scorupi Mamba are literal living tanks you know.”

“Son- a well placed shot can take anything down. I’m more concerned about her little twig of a sword there.”

“Oh don’t you worry none about what her sword can do. She’s got it all sorts of figured out,” he chuckled, “specially thanks to your putt shot there in the Alpha.”

Blood dripped from the blown eye of the creature before her. She held the rapier in her left, the tome in her right snapping shut and lowered to her side. A final guttural growl deep and brisk, followed by the howl. The Alpha chomped, large right claw lunging forward.

Elise dipped down with the boot sliding to a small bag behind her held to a strap that circled her. A light toss of her rapier from left to right. **Grab. Thrust!!**

RRRRREEEEAAAAAAAAAARRRUAAAAAAAAAUUUUU!!!

A howl escaped the creature unlike any other. Her rapier pierced into the bleeding flesh of the creature’s left eye. One single stab as blood trickled along her blade. A quick rip and she shot herself back as another claw slammed down like a hammer.

The ground cracked. The captain behind aimed and fired, explosive rounds blowing sparks off of the two smaller Scorupi Mamba while the Alpha itself stammered back. She glanced ahead once and then doubled back with a leap. The stinger of the alpha waved and slapped about as the other two near it clacked forward.

“All she did was piss it off-” the captain growled.

“Oh ye of so little faith Captain Halkot? Give it a minute,” the ax man chuckled.

The beast snarled with snapping jaws once more. Saliva flickered and spattered the ground. A brief stagger and the creature was at once moving again. Elise’s sights narrowed ahead as it swung its mighty claws.

SWOOOOOOOSH-

Her hood flapped and her hair blew in the winds. The creature missed. A couple of paces back were taken. The creak came next- then the crash.

Down it dropped on its left. Legs twitching and claws sprawling out. The shriek of the creature loud and almost ear piercing. Its jaws snapping as it flopped along the ground.

Foam formed at the mouth, its head rising and crashing against the ground. Behind her the captain stared in awe, as did the soldiers still stood. The other Scorupi did not move an inch though all were most clearly watching the Alpha flail.

“?!”

The ax man grinned. Elise stood over the creature now as it thrashed violently with spasming legs and tail. The arms all flopped and bounced.

“No way did she pierce the brain. So what did, wait- poison on the blade?!” Halkot exclaimed questioningly.

“GGs as you humans say, you got it right. Your explosive rounds blew the protective lens to hell and let her get in there with the blade. She applied it to her weapon before engaging with the creature.”

“Hmph... smart,” Halkot murmured as the Alpha’s spasming ceased, “Break the lenses then and you guys can finish the job?”

“You’ve got it,” the ax man concluded.

“Well then,” Halkot spoke as the Alpha’s body grew lifeless, “Lets wrap this up then!!”

The remaining four Scorupi crept forward, jaws and claws snapping. Around all of the riflemen readied up whilst the five cloaked figures readied their own melee weaponry. Elise herself swung her sword flicking the blood right off- ready to go.

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*Realm: *Redacted**

Location: Lightonian Arctic Supermax Penitentiary Facility "Nospheross"

The winter's weep, flurries blown across the fields of white, descending from the cottony-velvet in the sky high above. A sharp chill cutting across the landscape of rising and diving earth topped white. Jagged shards of crystal sticking forth from mounds and flats, the high rise of stone and ice. If one were to describe the surrounding area it would be: a wintery mountainous region.

And so it was...

Yet within these mountains, deep deep in the valleys where the snow tsunamied on down, things were not quite as natural. Bursting from the mountainside like a deformity- a massive iron box surrounded by large walls and towers. Lights pointed out into the white out of sharp knives. A facility easily the size of a castle if not more.

Guards stationed on the walls making the rounds, guards stationed at the towers, guards stationed on the grounds, guards stationed with snowmobiles on the outskirts even. Guards all armed with their rifle looking non-rifle rifles, sufficiently techy with various electronic readouts and gauges. Energy rifles- a creation some might consider sorcery, something some might call futuristic; though for those familiar with the concept, a rather low tech cross of engineering and cosmic energy.

Long rifles, white in color primarily with some patches of black stretched across different parts of the rifle. A scope, various gauges displaying statistics such as the capacity, firing rate, power. Those atop the walkways of the walls were armed with such weapons, with some in the towers and some on the ground before the facility carrying just the same. Many though were armed with relatively old fashion gear ranging from swords to crossbows.

Of course each and every guard had on a super thick layer of bulky coat, hat, pants, gloves, boots, and face mask. They moved slow, feet disappearing beneath the sea of frozen confetti where it wasn't pact. And while each were certainly armed with their various weapons and equipment, it would prove itself quite clear that none of them were on guard. Rifles hung at their sides, not a single soul marching, some not even bothering to look out away from the facility itself into the dense cloud on the ground.

The facility itself, built into the mountain and stretching down countless levels. What lied within... well-

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BANG!

“SON OF A WHORE!” cried out a voice deep in bellow, a man’s voice at that.

Soon came the sound of glass shattering across a hard surface. A white liquid fled across the tiled floor, bubbling up a little with air spewing through. Glass stormed out and away, the milk waving outward to create a mess. Through the tile gaps and with the patterns. A man stood there behind a desk, his fist slammed straight down upon its surface.

“Oooooooooooooo- tough luck there bud, looks like you lost. Again,” spoke another from well across the room.

“I am so sick of this crap! I put five hundred down on this one. Oh when I get my hands on Big Barry I’m going to-” the angry man howled.

“Going to what? Send him to the infirmary for talking you into a bad bet? Lest you forget my guy that he tried to talk you out of it but noooo- your dumb ass went hard on it.”

“Shut the hell up Derrick.”

The man slouched back into his seat, a brown cushiony seat. A fan buzzed above, connected to a very white panel ceiling, dotted with yellow lights. Walls, about the same as there had been all white and pristine. The wood desk, filing cabinets and book shelves to the back; chairs hovered across on the other side, along with the usual fake tropical trees in pots and a few more shelves.

Upon the desk a dual monitor setup and a small PC box with various wires strewn about, the keyboard and mouse. Plenty of documents spanned across the wood surface, files turned open and others closed.

“Dude. You broke my drink,” the one called Derrick spoke from his chair, looking down at the milk.

“So sue me,” the other man growled, rolling a hand up to his face.

“Marty my guy, you’ve gotta chill. We aren’t even supposed to be gambling on the clock ya know- what if the chief finds out?”

“Screw you man, we practically live here,” Marty muttered, allowing a sigh to escape not long after as he leaned back in the chair, “Bill is busy anyway.”

“Bill busy? What gives?”

“... someone from high command showed up today. Supposed to be here for one of the Level-5 inmates.”

“Well heck that sounds fun. One of the admins, great we’re so gonna get written up then.”

“It’s not an admin.”

“No?” Derrick replied with a head tilt, “Who is it?”

Marty glanced up from his lap, sights set over on Derrick, half closed and tired. Derrick on the other hand was fully alert with his head tilted as it was.

“Bro this book sucks harder than your mother.”

“What the hell Scanlon why would you say that?”

“Another stupid romance novel with some stupid dialogue,” the first man, Scanlon, grumbled.

Scanlon, a rather average looking thirty year old man, looked up from a book & quickly tossed it back behind him. The pages flapping as it went over, crashing to the ground with a thud. There he sat in a wood chair all tilted back. Across the room from him- another man, complete with slicked back hair and glasses.

“Maybe you just don’t like romance?” the second man asked.

“Nah I like romance when it’s all saucy. Last few just suck.”

“Probably has the same tropes then. You need to look into it more before you buy.”

“Or maybe people need to learn to write cuz this slop is garbage. I don’t know how it got greenlit.”

“Why do you have to be like that? If you want something different, I know of a couple fairy tales. My sister is reading something called Ponies On A Boat.”

“I swear I will-”

“Would you two shut up?!”

At the other end of the room, upon the wall were several dozen monitors of which most were broadcasting imagery in black and white. In a rolling chair, a desk chair to be exact, sat a man behind all those monitors looking up. At his hands were a keyboard and a mouse.

His head turned back to give the two a look, "If you two can't be quiet then I'll send you back to Archiving."

"Sorry boss, won't happen again."

The man turned his head, sights set back up on the monitors, "I get it, this job is boring as sin; but it's important. We're supposed to be making sure the prisoners stay put without incident."

"Gee well check your monitors, pretty sure they're all there!"

"Whatever," the boss grumbled, focusing on one monitor, "No funny business while the General is here alright? Last thing I need is to get demoted back down to Inventory Management."

"Heck. General Ezdorth right? That man is scary- don't know who he's here for but man, I wish them the best."

"You don't know? Well, let me tell you... he's here for *that* prisoner probably."

Upon one monitor in black and white, a large metal door taking up the broadside of a barn lay visible with several armed guards standing around- all of whom wore riot gear. All of them perked up to attention stance at once, all looking deadest across the room.

"Show time..." the boss murmured, watching several shadows crawl across the ground.

Into the chamber with the guards moved several of them. Two in white robes, hooded, masked with masks of different designs, the backs of their robes marked with a sky blue star. Then the third, a white long coat over a visible vest of some sort, a blue band on the right arm with a white star marked on it- along with the same sky blue star on the back. A couple of the armed guards, same as those before the large door. And then the final man, in a jacket with a vest and tie.

The group stopped before the door- the guards brought in surrounding the three in white and the man with the tie. The guards before the door already there at attention ever still. Across the way, one guard adorned by a white duelist cape and a saber, stepped forward.

"Director Issacs," the guard spoke.

"Captain. I require access to The Vault," the director spoke.

"Very good sir. Your code sir?"

"H-W-E-E-W-I-T-E. Hweewite. Alpha Blue Seventeen."

“Very good sir. And the... outsiders, sir?”

“General Ezdorth,” the man in the white coat spoke in a gruff voice, stepping up as he did so.

A scruffy fellow with a load of brown hair tossed over his head to watch his brownish amber eyes. A chiseled face, chiseled from what who could say though certainly decorated with facial hair and a scar over the right eye like a thin line. There was significant bulk to his form, particularly the shoulders and and torso- as if he were wearing some form of armor beneath his long coat.

“One of the Dragons,” the captain murmured, looking the man over with only eye movements, “It’s an honor sir.”

“Indeed. Captain we have some time sensitive business to tend to with one of the special inmates,” the director threw out.

“Of course. One moment,” the captain replied, moving a hand up to a shoulder walkie, “Waxferd to Ops. Warden Director William Issacs’s code clears. If ID badges at Point Origin clear, proceed with with GuardLox Procedures. Code 0-0-0-1-0-0-3-Gamma-0-9. Over.”

“..... you are green lit for entry Director.”

The guards in front of the large door stepped forward, the sound of steam roaring behind in an echo. The clanking of cogs slowly turning, chains rattling, and then the shaking of the door itself. The large metal door rose slowly, the spikes becoming visible as the door propelled up. And as the door rose up the captain again looked to the warden with a nod.

“Best of luck sir,” he spoke, the guards all shifting aside now.

As the door was still lifting up into the air the posy had continued forward. The warden at the lead, the guards surrounding the figures in white. On the other side of the door, multiple levels and floors. Different prison cells, some with bars and others with what resembled glass. Guards stood stationed on each level, some in front of cells on the walkways, others on platforms high above overlooking the entirety of the prison block.

Heads did end up turning as the crew entered; though soon returned to normal.

“Welcome to Level-5 General,” the warden spoke, “We have several types of containment cells here for different species and power users. The cell you want is four from the end of the back, up at the top on the left.”

“Good. Lets get this over with then,” the General grumbled, walking ahead with the warden and the rest of the squad.

Step, step, step, step, step.

Up the stairs and around the metal. Cells empty, cells occupied. Some prisoners chained to the back, some left free. Some old and frail, others young and bulky. Some dangerous and monstrous, others appearing timid and young even. General Ezdorth glanced into a few as he walked ahead behind the warden, only the two in white robes trailing now as the guards awaited at the bottom.

One cell, then another, and another, finally three more and the very next: Cell Z-56.

Turning left, looking straight in, “Hmph...”

A glass wall divided the cell’s space from the outside. Within, not even a bed or a sink, only a man practically crucified to a board short of the nails. Bound with chains and cloth straps stained in runes. His arms held out, his legs held tight. Wires moved towards the braces latched to this man via his wrists, ankles, hands, and boots.

Three thick metal clamps wrapped around his torso with great girth, holding him in place. One more clamped around his throat. The restraints held up much of his frail body to the device behind him, where the wires and other attachments connected back to some sort of generator- large tubes jetting back into the wall behind.

Different IVs poked into his arms and chest, different medical equipment stationed around reading his heart and breathing rate. His face bound, eyes covered in a black cloth. Strands of silvery gray hair, a little black in there. A long thick beard and stache so obviously overgrown from the imprisonment. Old flesh wrinkled and pale. Only this old man’s mouth and nose were free, free of the various restraints binding the overall rest of his body.

The palpable silence that drifted by as both Warden and General laid eyes upon this old fellow who seemed none the wiser to their presence- until his head craned up ever so. The scrunch of the fabric binding him as his face directed itself at them. Were his eyes visible, they no doubt would be right upon them- fierce.

“Well well,” the old man murmured slow and gruff, “It would appear that I have... company.”