

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 10

The brush slushed as she went on her way through the forest. The meeting of Vong and Stark behind her, her attention turned back to her former students, not presently in sight. The slightest breeze that filled the forest, swishing and swaying plant life. What was once so-so was now somewhat alive.

Her head hung relatively low as she strolled. Dull shimmerless eyes. Her sword swaying at her side.

“...”

Her sights drifted right. Large white wolves across on the rocky shores, electric yellow highlights in their mane. Deer, regular deer, drinking at the river unbothered by the large wolves. Her attention shifted back ahead.

Birds perched above chirped.

“*AYE- EYYYY!!!*”

Clang

“*AHHH!!!!*”

Shouts came from further down the river. Her head perked up at the sound, metal clanging. All at once Elise tensed up. Battle sounds, a few clangs of metal on metal. Only a few moments passed her by before realization struck of what the source might be-

“Thomas and Destiny- Thomas! Destiny!” she called tearing off through the woods.

SLAM- clang clatter clatter clang

A metal sword clattered across the ground and a figure went flying.

“GWOHF!” he shouted as he hit back against a tree and slumped down.

“Tom!” Destiny shouted out rushing over to his side.

He groaned and struggled laying there, a gash straight across his chest as she reached him. Clenching up, he looked as did she. Two massive Scorupi Mamba crept in, flanked by several black cloaked assassins. A skull mask man stepped forward with flourishing dark robes, eyes visible behind the mask glaring down at them.

“Bastard-” Thomas growled.

The eyes of the skull mask man narrowed. He stepped forward a few paces more, standing over the duo.

“You were both there during the attack. I will know who it was who defeated Ozaro,” he spoke in an almost distorted deep tone.

“Bite me,” Thomas grumbled.

“That can be arranged, human,” the man muttered, two of the assassins stepping forward.

Thomas staggered up, stumbling about with Destiny at his side. Neither of their weapons remained at hand, only their fists now. What surrounded them were several enemies, the Mamba, and this man. He shot forward with a howl, throwing his fist. The man in turn flung his left hand out.

CLAP

The first was caught in the palm and the fingers folded round. One swift jerk pulled Thomas in. The release... AND BAM!!

The man's fist slammed into Thomas's gut. Salvia flung out of him as he crashed back into Destiny, both hitting the ground with the young man slumping over. Destiny pushed off and flung an arm up.

“You bastard!” she howled with a dagger in hand.

Her arm flung out and the knife flew.

Sling

It slimmed between the masked man's pointer and middle fingers, caught. His arm lowered and the dagger clattered to the ground. Both of his feet moved, approaching the two.

“Where is the one who defeated my Mamba? Where is the one who defeated Ozaro?”

Destiny glared, “I won't tell you diddly!”

“No matter. Your deaths will suffice-”

“W-wait you- you can't! Vulfax will-”

“Vulfax will blame it on the neighboring clans and instigate a war for it. As planned.”

“Planned?” Destiny murmured.

“Yes. The Inquisition may not march on the mountains yet; but this will be a start.”

An obsidian dagger slipped from his robes, a ceremonial one at that. He crept towards the battered duo, raising it up.

“The blood I will spill shall move us closer to the brink. I will begin with you, girl.”

SCHWING

Drip... drip... drip...

The masked man stared down at the petrified Destiny. Stillness crept through the air.

The silence...

Slump

Slowly... slowly... she fell to the left with blood trickling from her throat. Her body slumped, not with a thud, rather a noiseless slump. He stared down at the two, eyeing her and then Thomas. Once more the dagger raised up.

“Hey!” the loud shout of Elise rang out.

The assassins spun round at once, an archer and a few swordsmen. The masked man himself did not though he did halt. The two Scorupi both turned a pace. Elise stood there, her sword already ripping out as she stormed into the clearing.

Her steps carried... though came to a dramatic halt. Her eyes pulsed. The masked man turned aside, looking to her, and as he did the sight of her underling became fully visible. Destiny lying there in a growing pool of her own blood with the throat cut, Thomas completely out.

Her sword trembled, briefly; though quickly was brought into a firm grip. She glanced to the masked man.



(Art by Sonmie)

“Ah... you’re the other one,” the masked man grumbled aloud, turning further to fully face Elise.

Her sword further rattled in her hand, a step taken forward at the question. Her shoulders swayed. The question, not answered. Two archers raised their weapons with aim, several of the assassins standing round with the Mamba at standby.

The masked man called again, “Your silence speaks volumes. Kill her.”

The two Scorupi Mamba howled out and began to move forward. Her sword shot up as both beasts began to snap away. Jaws and claws, snap and bite. Slowly Elise moved backwards keeping her weapon out ahead of her as the duo of archers kept aim.

“Tch-” she grumbled, free hand reaching into her pocket.

In her hand she pulled a small collection of dark bluish berries with red stems. The masked man’s focus remained on her though his eyes could not be seen.

“Blasting Berries? How quaint; though they will hardly work on my beasts,” the masked man uttered.

“You think too small!” Elise shouted, flinging her hand out and with it went the berries.

The small round objects flew to the legs of one of the beast and upon striking the ground, detonated. Multiple explosions, small in comparison to some sort of triggering device; but numerous concussive blasts nonetheless. The targeted Scorupi howled out and crashed off to the side straight into a tree. A tremendous crash, bark crackling.

Forward Elise flew, steps echoing as she bolted in. The upright Mamba ground to a halt and arched, swinging its claws. She slid down, right beneath the thrust of the beast’s claws. Another toss of the little berries, right at its face.

KABOOM-

The Mamba shrieked out and stumbled back, unphased but still with a bunch of small explosions right to the face. Elise stormed passed, aiming for the assassins now with sword swinging. Both archers released.

Ding

As she sidestepped, one arrow struck the blade. Quickly Elise was upon one archer. Swing- while stopped by the bow, did in fact plunge through the shoulder. A howl left the man who stumbled back, and as he did so the second archer rose again with aim.

She spun, the shot lined up-

Zip...

“HYARGH-” the first bowman cried.

The arrow stuck from his chest. Elise’s hand reached to the cut shoulder, having yanked the man to be a human shield. And as that man dropped she pulled from his lining a dagger. The other archer whirled, moving for another arrow as she whipped the dagger up and hurled it.

It flew and slapped against the man. He howled as the knife bounced off of him, a bit of blood clung to it as he went down. She spun, throwing the archer in hand off and to the ground. Quickly Elise shot forward while the other assassins drew their weapons.

One with a saber shot ahead, sword swinging. Her own blade slapped against and thrust forward, straight beneath the collar bone. A sudden jerk and she tore through, blood welling out as the man fumbled. Next came another and again, her sword swung.

This time up, the flat slapping against the angle of the sword. One quick diagonal slash from up-right to down-left. Blood welled out and the man dropped. Her right hand swept, taking up another dagger, whirling it out. This time at closer distance the blade slammed square into a man’s gut.

He grunted and flopped back. Her attention turned as the last two making their way for her made their way for her. One with a dagger, the other with a sword. Position taken, right arm behind her back and rapier poised forward with a slight down angle, hang right near her chest.

One assassin went low, aimed at her feet. A slight turn of her twist left her sword at position to block, as the other assassin came in with the knife. Upon the clang of sword to sword she ripped up. The knife clashed against the side of the rapier.

Pulling the handle over head she turned, her arm rolling back and the angle changing. The point aimed to the assassin who stumbled back, and with one quick thrust forward her sword stabbed into the man’s chest. Her rapier ripped out the man’s back, coated in blood.

She pulled back, letting the man with a pierced lung huff back. This left only the final swordsman who swung at her again. A side step to the right, her sword tossed from hand to hand, and she swung- blade ripping clean into the assassin between the neck and collar bone. And down they dropped.

Elise moved forward, blood dripping from her sword. All of the grunts were down, all of them bleeding, several of them badly. The masked man was the last remaining while the Scorupi Mamba rebounded behind her; though with a wave of his hand, the creatures stopped.

His hand lowered, "I can see why Ozaro lost despite the power he possessed. You are very much a spider lily young one."

Her piercing gaze centered on the man.

"And you will burn out exactly the same."

She growled stepping forward, exploding into a run seconds after the taunt. Her sword retained itself in her right hand as she dove in with a swing and wrist flick. The man swung the dagger. The clang echoed out.

The crackle of struggle, metal against this dagger of obsidian. She blinked, her wrathful glare temporarily drawn back.

"{It didn't break?!}" she thought to herself.

"Problem?" he murmured, maintaining the block with his knife, reaching out with his free left hand open.

Elise zeroed in, pulling back. A twirl of her blade and a flick of the wrist, sword straight into the side of the man. The clang... not blade to blade. She froze.

In his left hand he held the blade, as is. It had stopped and been caught in totality. A light tug followed, a quiver. Quickly Elise released the weapon however as the obsidian dagger closed in.

The whoosh as it missed. The masked man stood there, holding her rapier by blade in his palm. He looked to it and then to her.

"You appear to have lost something my dear," his voice echoed.

"That's fine- Tillanis Metradeuya!"

As she spoke an arch of electricity surged from her palm through the air to the rapier and struck, the pulse of visible discharge coursing around the masked man. He arched back with a howl. He stumbled back, the surge continuing as he hold on the weapon only continued. The surge though lasted only a short while before falling off.

The rapier clanged to the ground and his arm lowered, robes flopping. Literal smoke drifted from his hooded head and shoulders... he looked to the ground only for a short bit as he staggered. Soon the man looked up. A pair of yellow eyes, bright yellow orbs with no pupils whatsoever, only the pale bright yellow dots- that is what stared back at her from behind that mask.

The hate in her eyes faded, replaced with stunned shock, "{He's still standing? Even if he were a vampire that should've dropped him!}"

"Are you finished already dear?" the masked man called out catching her focus, "I must say- I hoped for more from the one who defeated my stand-in; but no matter."

He extended his right arm out fully. Ring finger, pinkie, and thumb pulled back- middle and pointer extended out and together. A faint lavender glow radiated from the tips of his gloved fingers. She locked in on the sight of it as his hand began to move.

It waved around, slowly, curving like a pencil drawing a circle- only as his fingers drove through the air they would leave a trail of this lavender light behind. It hung in the air much like ink to paper. The energy gleamed as he drew a full circle, about half the size of him.

As the circle finished he stepped back. His hand drew back to his chest, fingers now pointing upwards with the glow retained at the tips. The bend of his other fingers continued as the hand raised to his masked face. The masked man's glowing eyes faded as he spoke out...

"Come forth."

The faint lavender circle before him erupted into a bright amethyst. Lines skimmed across from the ring inward, forging a seal that would appear only momentarily before the entire circle burst to life with an explosion. A whoosh of wind and a lavender cloud that began to turn silver. The outline of the ring became faint again though the silhouette that came out of it was more than captivating in its place.

A sound of large wings, hovering intensely fast. The clouds dispersed to unveil a near-human sized wasp-like creature. Six long hanging legs, a huge stinger attached to its extended barbed bottom, multiple compound eyes, horns, and mandibles well visible.

Her eyes fluctuated, "{He summoned a creature?} You're an energy user!"

"Precisely. If you know that much then you know how it works, and exactly why you cannot defeat me."

"Tch-... !"

Plunge

A sword ripped through the masked man's chest, just the tip. A grunt escaped him in that moment.

"Nrgh- what?" he grunted.

Elise stared back. There, standing with a huff, was Thomas. The sword in his hand with it plunged through the man's back. Thomas staggered off as the masked man whirled round, and all the former could do was kick the rapier.

Right against the butt and off it flew, skidding across the ground and beneath the giant flying insect back to Elise. She looked down at it and then to Thomas, her eyes widening. The obsidian dagger stuck in Thomas's gut, blood trickled from his mouth. A

wet slushing crunch left as the dagger pulled free and with it dropped Thomas to his knees.

The masked man backed away with a slight stagger, “Miserable little insect- this changes nothing.”

Elise stood now, rapier back in hand. Her glare shown through as she eyed the masked man who turned now to her. The glow of his eyes visible.

“Enough of this. Kill her-” he ordered the flying insect.

A crackle of noise escape the creature which then began to hover forward. Elise whipped her sword around. Her right foot out and her right arm extended, her left arm pulled back with sword in hand. In some capacity it was as if holding a bow with her right and a large arrow with her left.

Her left foot jumped and forward she shot, thrusting with her rapier. The insect stung; though she shifted to the side as her thrust slammed into the creature’s abdomen. The jab did nothing but as she swung up she clipped through the wing nearest her, dropping the wasp creature. It crashed while she charged ahead.

The masked man readied his dagger again and dove in. A brief exchange, their weapons smacking against each other. His obsidian blade held while her rapier weaved. The flick of her wrist, the swing of his arms wide.

She thrust at him. His right hand swung out for the blade.

Clap

His hand wrapped round, not the cold metal of her blade, but instead the soft flesh of her wrist. He blinked, vaguely visible behind the mask. Her right hand had swung out, arm extended. Her left had pulled back.

He blinked again, staring... **thrust.**

The splash of blood, his grip on her wrist releasing. The obsidian dagger swung down right into Elise’s shoulder, her own blood spilling out; though she back pedaled at once. The rapier ripped from the masked man’s gut and his dagger carved through her shoulder without going deep. He stumbled, free hand moving to his abdomen.

“I see- I see child,” he growled, “Excellent work indeed!”

His attention shifted slightly, out beyond Elise in that moment. His eyes with a bit of a faint glow to them. The unseen smirk likely present, given the gleam of those eyes. The amusement behind his saunter.

The obsidian dagger dropped to the ground, his right hand reaching up as his left continued to hold his wound. The loud buzzing of an insect filled the space, the wasp

flashing passed Elise. His hand grabbed hold of one of its long legs, whisking him away. He flew, carried really, looking back at her as the bug cleared off over the tree line.

She stared up with a hint of shock. Behind her the Scorupi Mamba cleared way, while she herself stared as he vanished beyond sight. Blood dripped from her shoulder as it did her rapier. From there her eyes drifted down.

The unmoving bodies of both of her pupils, blood still trickling from the gut wound delivered to Thomas... and a very faint leakage from Destiny's throat. She staggered forward a few paces, dropping to her knees not a moment later and slumped. The winds around them warped with ferocity for only a few moments. And from the forest around them the crackle of branches, breaking and passing aside as something moved through.