

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 2

A single button outside of the cell was pushed, a button on the wall with a wire running through to a box inside the cell.

“Good morning Cortez,” the Warden of the prison spoke, “I have a special guest for you.”

“Open Cell Z-56,” a voice spoke from just beyond the duo.

In mere moments a loud buzz was heard, and with the buzz a rolling. Before the group the very glass divider had begun to sink into the ground, or at least a part of it. A small section, big enough only for a large man to step through dropped out to give entry inside. The warden himself took a step back with a slight side glance and a nod- to which the Dragon General stepped forward.

His steps carried him, clunk clunk clunk.

And then clang clang clang. Across the metal grates and into the cell where there hung the man. His face draped, a wash of anguish as he strolled slowly forth to the suspended elderly man... and then his stop.

Stop.

A pause, a pause to the extent that there were no other sounds within aside from the electronics beeping and pulsing. No breathing from any within, at least not audible. Outside of course the facility was continuing on as normal- albeit with an eerie quietness to it. The only sounds heard outside were that of the guards moving about and little else.

The stare, his gaze bordering on a cast of rage upon the bound man. The ‘blank’ returned expression with a mouth slightly draped and the eyes still cloth-covered. Though as both ‘looked’ upon one another, it was the old man who had begun to stir first. A husky hoarse grunt and his mouth opening, the slightest of twitches of the head allowed.

“... Well... certainly an unexpected honor,” grumbled the elderly man, “The Great Earth Dragon... Gideon Ezdorth.”

“Cortez. It’s certainly... been awhile, hasn’t it? How do you do?” the General replied with a slight head tilt.

“Sorry to no-doubt disappoint but... I am doing rather well, all things considered,” the bound man replied, still a little slow and hoarse.

“Yes, considered. Being bound and drained must be uncomfortable. If you would only allow yourself to die of age, this might be over for you.”

“Right- and how about you General? How fair you this day?”

“Enjoying my freedom, thanks,” he spoke spreading his arms out, “A few ups and downs, politics and the sort. Certainly better than what fate has dealt to most of your kind.”

“Riveting,” Cortez muttered as at that moment General Ezdorth began to pace around behind the platform, “You are no doubt here for more than simple..... small talk. Might I inquire, as to why a man of your stature has brought himself to this... exquisite winter home?”

“Ah, right, about that,” he began still pacing around, stepping around the cords and panels behind the bound man, “You see- I’ve come to personally give my condolences, first of all.”

“Condolences?”

“Yes,” he continued, passing around on the right and walking right before Cortez once again, “You see, after a lot of consideration and nudging, your execution has finally been authorized. Personally I think it took them perhaps a little too long to decide this but no matter.”

“Capital punishment? And here I thought you Lightonians were better than that. To serve the Light and whatever other rubbish. Seems like a stain on goodness if you ask me.”

“You would object but lest we forget, dear friend, that you of all people most certainly are a flight risk that we can’t keep contained.”

“Flight risk? You have me bound in a cell that drains my energy constantly, all the way out here in the middle of a frozen hell. I am but a frail old man with nowhere to go.”

“Rather comical, hearing you refer to yourself as such. Though I suppose the years of solitary have not been kind to you.”

Stomp!

A slight turn round with the wave of his hair as he spun.

“Regardless, your fate is set. You understand why the lot of us feel such right? Your kind did damage, yes; but you in particular... Cortez Macabre, the Phantom Commander of the Dharkanians. One of the greatest threats we had ever had to deal with.”

“Hmph, I once was certainly what you say. Now though I am far from... and I must say- I’m disappointed that it took you fools this long to determine my fate.”

“Fools eh? And yet, we are the ones who stand atop now,” the General stated, turning back, “And speaking of fools and foolishness, are you not the fool? One careless mistake led to your capture by Lady Bell. You’ve been locked up for so long that you’ve begun to age. You should be grateful to us for granting you this mercy, Dharkanian.”

“My my. Even after all of this time your commentary still bores me to death Gideon. If you keep this up you’ll be able to cut the execution expense. Though I suppose such ignorance comes naturally to mindless lapdogs such as yourself.”

With his conclusion, Gideon’s gaze narrowed greatly, his hands tightening up, teeth grit ever so slight as he spun back around yet again, “You’re one to talk you bastard. Feel around you Cortez, you’re locked up airtight with dozens of your own pets and mindless followers. Blood suckers, flea bags, lizards- even your own brothers and sisters, and I’m the idiot here?! Recall your place Cortez-”

“Have I struck a nerve? Well regardless, the situation has not been lost to me.”

“Exactly, so zip it Cortez and face the facts. Your era has ended, our victory all those years ago sealed it. And look at what we have built since that accursed conflict. We’ve built a legacy, unlike anything your kind has ever managed!”

“You continue to allow yourself such frivolous bragging whenever you are within my presence. It truly shows what a wounded cur you remain to this day. You talk of legacy- might you mean a legacy of speciesist propaganda and arrogant ideals, courtesy of the prideful and corrupt body of government that your kind put in place. You are spot on, something we would not ever attempt to-”

“Don’t you dare Macabre,” Gideon hissed, walking forward and resting right in Cortez’s face, “You people are... bah! There is NO victory left for the Dharkanians!”

“Nothing is ever truly decided until the absolute end. I taught you that years ago, didn’t I?” Cortez questioned with a growing grin.

“BAH!” Gideon spat, turning his back with a twirl and beginning to walk towards the cell door.

“Had your people learned that lesson, they might have not lost Sillith. As I recall, we still own it.”

The General’s steps stopped before the doorway, his head turned back only slightly, his fierce eyes glaring back, “I’ll be sure to tell the executioner to drag things on for as long as possible. Say hello to your daughter for me, see if she’s still as air headed as the last time I saw her.”

“Ah, I will certainly ask. Shall I also say hello to your wife when I get to Hell? If my child has her bullet hole, then I assure you that your wife should still be in pieces. As I recall it, the blast left so little that it was hard for you to mourn the loss, was it not?”

“PISS... OFF!” the General spat, storming out of the cell, his steps echoing as he rounded the corner and went on his way.

The rattle of the door could be heard, the glass rising back up into place with a clank. This left Cortez once more alone in the cell with not but a smile crossing his face.

“Are you truly so bored that you would come this far and pick such a small skirmish with me here, Gideon? Well no need to worry, I can assure you. Your life will be lived up soon enough. Nothing stays the same forever.”

...

Realm: Untari

Location: The Flax Mountains of Western Glastol

The dust of the trail which wasn't much of a trail, adrift on the subtle breeze. The last twitch of the last Scorupi Mamba. A little leg spasm and then the curl. Absolute nothingness.

One Mamba lay a good few dozen meters away from another, the last to fall twitching on its back and the other on its front. The alpha was nowhere to be seen, nor were the other two, nor the carriage, or the horse people. In fact the only ones visible now surrounded by trees mostly and a cliff side were those of cloak. The five stood around the last mamba, Elise's rapier stuck in its eye socket.

A couple paces forward and her hand extended. *Grip*. A slight shift and the sword pulled right out. A small trickle of blood ran out and down its face.

"Bloody disgusting creatures," a girl with green lips murmured.

"Ain't good for squat," the ax man grumbled while poised with one foot on the head of a mamba, ax on his shoulder.

"... the human travelers," Elise murmured, glancing around with subtle shifts of the head, "Did they make it along alright?"

"Yeah," the ax man retorted with his gruff voice, "Kept on right after knockin' these two down the slopes."

"That's what we wanted right?" the girl with the green lipstick questioned, "For the local lords to move on through without incident."

"Don't like though that someone tipped off that guard captain that we aren't human," one of the two similar-sized guys spoke aloud while looking at the ax man.

"Don't worry about Captain Halkot," Elise spoke up with her sword being sheathed after a slight flick, "He's one of Vulper's contacts. He won't mention what we are."

"Not that it matters too much," one of the two spoke, "Some Lords aren't bothered by us so long as we don't stir up trouble."

"Yeah might even like that we helped 'em."

"Enough guys," the green lipped girl spoke, "Mark what's next?"

The ax man, Mark, gave a rough shrug, "Dunno Sam. Mmmm... Elise what do you think?"

“Hey don’t look at me Mark- I’m not the boss,” she murmured quickly.

“Ah haaa hahaha but thang is that you are.”

“Well take the lead-”

“Fine fine. ‘rrright, well them guys aren’t outta the woods yet so to speak. Scott and Drake, you two head back and report to Vulper. Reckon that he’ll be mighty interested in why a couple o’ rogue Mamba were this far up the mountains. Sam and I’ll take after the convoy and make sure it moves smooth. Elise, I think you can do your lil magic and survey the battle site right?”

“... do you mean literally or metaphorically?” Elise questioned.

“Whichever you can do- alright move out!”

“But wait that’s-”

With the words leaving her mouth, the four had already begun to move. Scott and Drake the twins were off towards the trees with haste. As for Mark and Samantha well, they were also heading their own way though for them it was a charge along the curvature of the slope. This left Elise alone with but two bodies of the Scorupi Mamba.

“***Sigh*** Alright, guess we’re doing this now,” she murmured turning towards the slope.

Hands to the ground and feet to the rock, a slow angled ascension back up to the top of the side which stretched an eternity above her. Rocks tumbled from her hands and feet. While not a total rock wall it was certainly a trek. Despite it all she moved with ease.

One simple slip of some loose gravel and she did not tumble or slide back down, simply climbing back up the slope. A short few moments and her hand reached atop. *Shift*. Pulling herself over and a simple toss up, she now stood at the edge and before three massive bodies.

The echo of her steps sounded as she approached the first to fall- the alpha. Her green eyes scanned it over, stopping right at the edge of its form. Sprawled out with fluid still leaking from the blown out eye. A soft sigh escaped her closing expression as she knelt down beside the beast, hand placed over the head.

“The Alpha went down... and the others kept at it. Scorupi are beasts but they don’t attack so fully, let alone so far from their nest...”

Her hand pulled back and with a swift shift she stood. Looking over the alpha, then a glance left at the others.

“What’s your take Captain?” she questioned aloud.

From behind came a series of steps with echo. Boots on rock. A lone figure protrude itself from behind and came into view, despite her back to the figure that was Captain Halkot. The cowboy approached relatively slow with his eyes cascading over her.

“Reckon there ain’t much to tell. Bunch of Scorupi Mamba that came too far up the mountain hunting. Probably stirred up by the trouble down below,” Halkot replied.

“Seems a little odd doesn’t it?” came a near instant response as she turned right around to look at Halkot.

“You think the creatures were... coerced?”

“Or controlled,” she murmured looking down at the creature on the ground beside her.

A pause filled him for the moments that followed. Silence drifted between the two as the Vampiric Captain looked from Elise to the alpha beside her. A low sigh left him.

“Not really a thought I would like to imagine being reality,” he spoke, words carried just as his feet then were.

“Can’t say I fancy it either. But it is a distinct possibility with everything going on.”

“Nrrrgh... these are dark times,” he grumbled, “I have no doubt that Vulper would agree with your perspective. Keep it to yerself for now and him.”

“What’ll you do?”

“Investigate, as I tend to do. Fer now though I need to make sure that carriage makes it to its destination. Tell Vulper that I’ll be in touch,” Halkot said in turning.

“I will,” Elise replied with a nod, watching as Halkot departed the scene.

From there she turned her own body and began to walk, drifting back towards the woods. Halkot soon ducked out of sight and she would do the same. Sheathed sword swaying at her side, book in her pouch, hood still draped over shadowing out her face. Her eyes gleamed even in the dark as the shadows of the forest swallowed her whole.