

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 3

Later that evening...

Dusk had long since befallen the valley with a cascading glow of orange. The sparkling night sky of purple and pink dots, some red and some blue. A very dark navy backdrop rolling across. Below within the rock faces the gravel turned solid leading up to a small opening.

The cloaked figure of Elise Bakuuva moved through, gravel rustling beneath as she closed in upon the cave. And though unseen from the outside there were two guards standing tall within by that entrance. Neither would of course move as Elise strolled right inside passing by. Both stood there with arms folded and cutlasses at their sides leaned against the wall, and both would watch and she walked on by.

The tunnels echoed with each step taken, eventually spilling out into the main chamber just inside. It was a relatively large chamber, rocks all around mostly smooth and dripping with water. Despite being volcanically forged, the system here was primarily moist now. Several stood around on ledges and on the main floor, most not batting an eye as she moved through towards the left-most hall.

Just as her form moved through the archway, there came a series of clacks from behind.

“Hold it, Bakuuva,” a gruff male voice called out.

Her right foot ceased prior to stepping down with a slim twitch. She held place momentarily, soon stepping back and turning about. Three stood there behind as she turned to meet their gaze. All three in wrapped garb, cloaks with hoods back over an assortment of different outfits.

To the left a woman, slightly older than Elise, and to the right a man definitely a decade over her... and to the middle leading the group, a fellow not far off from her but

by a year or two. His burning amber gaze met her dimmed emerald. A slight scowl across his face as he stared back at her. With this Elise turned in full, her expression unchanged even as she moved her own lips to speak.

“Uh... hi, Rusty?” she said slightly questioningly in a low voice.

“Bakuuva you scrub. What the hell is this I hear from the dipstick twins about? Scorupi Mamba up here?” he grumbled.

“I- I’m, er yeah. I’m not sure why yet but the Scorupi being up here is kinda... weird so-”

“Those things wouldn’t just wander up here ya friggen dumbass! Wouldn’t be a new hive either. If one of the other clans has a tamer now- where the hell is Vulper?!”

“I- I don’t know. I just got back and-”

“GAH!! Wasting my time on this I swear, guys lets go!”

Rusty stormed passed Elise, his side slamming into her. She stumbled a tad as his two wings accompanied him.

“Rusty wait! You can’t go out there without Vulp-”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what Vulper says. This is a problem and I’m solving it NOW!” he barked in interruption.

“But Rusty-”

“Elise shut up! God you’re such a pathetic pile of vomit!” he barked again, stopping in place.

“I-”

“Just shut up shut up SHUT UP!” he stormed whipping around, “Worthless broad. GOD you piss me off. You think you’re all high and mighty like you know it all. Learn your place already woman, daddy isn’t here to shield you right now so stop-”

“Stop barking? Yes, you should brother,” spoke a more reserved voice from behind Elise.

The approach of more caught the focus of Rusty’s team. A slightly widened Elise shifted herself around to look at a young lad. Long black hair, red eyes, tan skin, fairly tall, dressed in a black coat and jeans and boots. Beside him walked a taller man with a rugged set of attire, dirty blond hair all frazzled and green eyes.

“I can hear you screaming from halfway inside the mountain,” the reserved lad continued as others filed in with the duo.

“Shut the hell up Britt,” Rusty growled, “This useless hack is trying to tell ME what to do. ME!!”

“Yeah? Your point?” Britt questioned with a cold gaze still on approach.

“Point is that she shouldn’t be. She’s not a commander!”

“Neither are you so stop acting like a jerkoff Rusty,” the man beside Britt retorted.

“Shut it Sacho! I will NOT be insulted by the weakest elite in this bloody clan. I will NOT listen to this weak ass freeloading woman and I will not obey anyone who isn’t worth two shits in combat.”

“You sure are keen on putting down people who you deem beneath you. What? Makes you feel good about yourself?”

“Ya know as a matter of fact yes, yes it does,” Rusty chuckled.

“Well cut the shit you punk,” Sacho growled stopping just in front of Elise, “I am an Elite of Vulfax. Therefore I outrank you.”

“You outrank jack squat! Screw with me and I’ll make you regret being born.”

“Big talk from an overconfident runt who can’t even defeat a Zaherian,” called a girl from behind the duo.

“You stay out of this Nora!” Rusty barked.

“You’re a bloody disgrace to the word Selenian. Vulgar, arrogant, dumb as hell.”

“Nora I swear I will-”

“Enough!” Sacho roared, “You WILL learn respect Rusty. You’re acting like a hotheaded idiot right now. Flying off the handle doesn’t help Vulfax in the slightest.”

“Idiot? Oh- oh really Sacho? Ya know what, how about we go at it right now just the two of us? I’ll show you who the idiot is I swear it. I will-”

“Rusty that’s enough!” Britt spat.

The crowd in the chamber had only continued to grow by this stage. Several around Britt and Sacho. Several standing around on the sides watching. Rusty’s bones crackled with a few taken steps towards Sacho.

“Maybe it’s finally time we do this then eh?” Rusty questioned as he took a knife in hand.

“You would challenge me Rusty? Foolish- I am an Elite Warrior of Vulfax. I will not be beaten by some mongrel.”

“Try me-”

“Rusty that’s enough!” Britt barked.

The glare from Sacho shifted over to his brother’s presence. Britt stood there now with moreso fierce eyes than the cool calm ones of before. A moment would pass,

before Rusty's edge dropped ever so. A sigh escaped him, from which Sacho began to relax just the same.

"Nehhh... fine. But this- this is not over," Rusty stated with a scowl.

The onlookers continued to onlook as the squad led by Rusty fell back and moved out towards the entry tunnel. Elise herself remained back with a hand crossed over to her wrist.

"*Sigh*"

A silent expression left her as she moved on. Sacho stepped forward as Elise exited. Britt turned as she moved whilst Sacho took center stage.

"Well? What are you all just standing around for?! Piss off already!" he barked at the onlookers.

The growl of her rapier sounded as it slid from the scabbard. The glimmer of the reflecting torch light. Deep beneath the grounds as the scabbard dropped to her side. A box-standard rapier from the storage unit and a busted up scabbard, blade held out before her. Her eyes scanned it as she held point with a coldness rushing over her.

Held straight out in her right hand as opposed to her left. Her left swayed beside her. A glance forward.



Art by A. Stormsong

A momentary silence filled the chamber aside from the hiss of the crackling flames. From staring out she looked down upon the blade, turning it in hand. Hollow eyes. Hollow vision.

A jab forward. A jolt with her feet that sent her ahead, then taken aback as she swung up with a back step. A wide swing followed. Then the blade held to her side with tip pointed at an angle to the ground with a straight arm.

She paced with her left arm behind her back crossed over. One swift motion and she brought the sword blade up in front of her face. A slight twirl and the blade then moved back to her side. A sigh escaped her as she readied herself.

“Rusty...” she grumbled to herself.

Body tingling and shoulders revving. A couple quick jerks and from there she sprang. Two steps forward and throwing her blade out. Both hands upon the hilt- she swung down with full force. Pulling back and releasing her right hand, twisting her wrist round and twirling the blade.

She began a regiment of swinging left and right keeping her palm level with her head. Two three four then an uphold and downward swing. Twisting once more and thrusting with a jab, then another. She pulled back with a sweeping motion. She spun on her feet throwing the blade back behind her to cover her literal back, ducking with both knees.

Turning around she swung left and then right. A back flip quickly followed with the blade being tossed from her left hand into her right. She swung out at her lower right, then a quick turn and held it before her main body. A flurry of movement followed where she thrust, swung, and held her center while tossing the rapier back to her main hand.

A jab forward. A sprint forward and a corkscrew flip through the air. Again the rapier flew up in front of her face. A strike off to the left and another sweep.

Pulling back. Positioning the weapon to her left with the blade parallel to her ear as she held it up. Her right positioned in front of her left. A thrust forward and a spin.

The entire time she moved around her feet whipped around. Each swing of the sword was a turn of her feet. Like a sort of dance or ballet, she moved with some degree of control and power where needed. One more duck and a flip back would send her hood flying up before her face and once skidding back she pulled from her side a tome.

Flipping the book wide open she stood at the ready. Her center appeared open but her demeanor was anything but.



Art by WonkyBeans

Two huffs left her, not from exertion. A shimmer stained visibly in her eyes. One swift turn and with a howl the rapier went flying. A solid clang rang out.

It stuck and rippled within the wood of the torch mount of the cave wall,
“Tillanis- Metradeuya!”

Her left hand swung out. A burst of raging white electrical current forging around her hand. A single stream sprung to life and whipped out right into the rapier with an audible BANG. The raw crackle and hum as if passing through wire, quickly dissipating with the slam of her book.

Another huff, and a puff, and a huff, and a puff.

The book lowered to her side as she straightened back up. A slow approach towards the wall followed her assault, her boots echoing with every step. Stopping beside the holder she quickly freed her weapon with a simple pull. It lowered back to her side as the tome was placed away within her coat.

Her wrist once more twisted, a jab forward. She twirled through the air with a jump. Another jab forward before throwing the blade in hand back behind her. One more swift swing back up and over.

Ducking down once more she swept at the floor before kicking off of the ground with another twirl following. Another sweep came with her flipping like a regular acrobat onto her feet proper, weapon poised forward. Her breath hung there but did soon pause. Guard lax, she stared to her right.

Step. Step. Step.

Her focus shifted left to the sole entrance to the chamber.

“You’re certainly worked up,” called the calm voice of Britt.

“...”

The young man walked into the chamber looking her over, “Don’t let him get to you Elise. My brother is an idiot.”

“It’s not that- I mean ok, that is part of it but that isn’t all of it,” she said with an uncomfortable shift in gaze.

“Whatever the cause, you are a capable warrior Elise. Don’t let your judgment be clouded because of the ramblings of the weak. That aside, I have new orders for you. From Vulper.”

“Yeah?”

“He’s going to convene a meeting to discuss recent happenings. Calagras wants the clan in attendance. However before that meeting transpires he wants more intel. You are to take the youngsters to Emerton and see what you can find out from the locals. Mark’s group will cover for you just in case you need it.”

“Emerton... alright. It’s been awhile but I can work with that. Will it be alright with Thomas and Destiny though?”

“Under your wing they should be good. Mark and Sam are still out there. We sent Scott and Drake to go get them. An elite might be dispatched, potentially. On top of that we need some supplies,” he concluded handing over a small pouch and a paper list.

“Alright- I can gear up and head out at once.”

“Very good,” he replied heading back out.

On her own way back out her foot would tap the scabbard and flip it right back up into hand. Her sword would quickly be sheathed as she exited right after Britt. Her gaze set ahead as she strolled on through.