

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 6

The guttural low growl and then the shriek of the Scorupi Mamba. The massive walking tank crept towards the retreating Elise. It moved slow, legs on the edges of the roof, pincers snapping. She backed away as the beast let forth its growl.

One howl left the creature and forth with it lunged. Elise tensed as the hulking mass descended upon her. A darting turn and a full on self-throw sent her crashing across as the beast slammed down. Beneath them both the roof caved, like a rock through wet toilet paper, it buckled and the whole works dropped.

Elise grabbed hold of the ledge as the beast was swallowed up and departed. Her feet dangled only momentarily before her own arms would hoist her. A slow crawl back atop and swung over the edge, she looked down into the rubble. The beast thrashed and howled as it tore its way out of the ruins, while Elise herself turned away and launched again.

Buildings erupted in the streets below. The stunned Mamba ripped from the building and the one that caved now tore out. Across the way William and his guards had already left, and to another way a few of the Inquisition Knights were already struck down and dead. A slim few remained with weapons poised as their foe approached with snapping pincers and snarls.

Three of the creatures split off and left the one with the knights. Elise fumbled her steps as she moved to hop down. Landing atop a crate with a clank and then the ground with a soft thud, she stared as the knights did battle with the sole Mamba who remained near. Their swords clamored against the exoskeleton.

“Magic or explosive force are the only way. These things are way too strong to beat with swords, even the joints are durable..... but their insides aren’t!”

Glancing next to her position she found a crowbar for the crates. A slight smirk formed as she moved to take it in hand. Across the way the now-four white knights held

ground as another of their own was stabbed through. The swords of two clattered against the swinging pincers.

The beast howled out as it moved forward. The knights backed away keeping their swords bore before them. The clatter of their shaking armor. One trembled with their weapon looking to the creature... and then just passed.

Elise's blue and purple figure shot up beside the beast, her feet clacking against its back. It whipped round with a shriek, two pincers swinging. She jumped to the left and grabbed hold of the shoulder of the main left pincer. Bringing the crowbar up and jabbed it down.

The Scorupi Mamba wailed out and flailed. The crowbar extended from its mouth as it revved and frenzied, hurling Elise straight off. She tumbled through the air and rolled round into the legs of the knights, quick to pick herself up though. Her head flew up as the Mamba tore forward with all six pincers raised.

"Tillanis Metradeuya!" she called out thrusting her right hand forward this time.

The surge of white electricity flew out and straight to the crowbar. The whirling shriek of the monster, high in pitch and deafening. Its body flailed violently, pincers and tail whipping around viciously. The beast stumbled back thrashing at the air.

The back left sets of legs gave sending it crashing aside and rolling. It continued to spasm as it lay there. One knight shot forward as Elise cut off the stun spell.

THRUST!!

The blade slammed through the wide open mouth and straight through the top of the mouth. The insectoid monster thrashed about ever so though quickly began to curl right up. One knight helped Elise back to her feet as the others approached the now dead mutated creature. Said knight who impaled it pulled the sword right back out with a bit of orange blood dripping from the weapon.

"That's that down," one knight murmured.

"There are three more, and I think that they're after the Lords," Elise began.

"After the- what are you talking about?"

"I saw the assassin, and I saw more guys dressed kind of like him behind the Scorupi Mamba- who might I add only showed up AFTER the assassin was stopped. One of the creatures tore straight after William Providence. It's just like the attack on the convoy the other day!"

"Attack on- how do you know of that?"

“Because I was there- now quit asking questions! You need to go protect the lords and find Captain Halkot!”

“And what will you do?”

“I’m going to go make sure they aren’t still after William,” she replied tearing off towards her grounded rapier, grabbing it up and heading away.

“Come on lets go!” one of the knights ordered shuffling off.

Elise ran off with the sword in hand. The few slim people still out, huddled in the shadows of the streets as she ran after the jab tracks. Determination flared, grip on the weapon tightening. Round another corner she came upon it.

Several people running way as another of the Scorupi Mamba slammed itself around. A man rushing out of a nearby building to grab hold of his very young daughter. The Mamba turned itself towards and began a slow approach. The man pulled his daughter tight to him and began to back.

Drool dripped from the beast, its pincers clamping.

“HEY!” Elise called out.

The beast stopped, its front whirling round. Across from it the father whipped his child up and bolted while it rounded in full to face Elise. And so she stood with her arms out and the drooling monster slowly creeping forward.

“Alright that was smart- now what?” she grumbled to herself.

Crates shattered behind her. Some tumbled to the ground and others simply exploded into splinters. She tilted her gaze to look back. Another of the grueling beasts crept out behind, one now before her and one aft of her. Their thudding soft steps as they each closed.

“Well that’s definitely not good,” she murmured.

The snapping pincers, again. Their wriggling tails and stingers. A couple civilians ran way from the first of the two. She glanced to and from.

“{They’re ignoring the civilians. I’m not that big a threat. Could it be the caster’s ordering them like before? Wait a second- if these are under control of a caster, then the caster has to be nearby. That guy with the mask, of course!}”

Her attention shot up and left. The building to her left. She turned and bolted, resulting in the creatures charging. She braced as she leapt straight through the glass with her force.

Tucking and rolling. She bolted upright once inside through the room. Outside the duo of beasts stopped, one looking through. A few brief snarls and the two turned and tore off.

Both monsters returned to the streets, one shrieking as they tore through. Behind them though the emerald gaze of one. She watched as both went off in one direction. Her hand placed upon the sill of the broken frame, though just as she readied to go her eyes did drift- drift right to the downed assassin from before far off.

Far across the town the situation continued to unfold. One Scorupi Mamba slammed through several knights in white. Pincer heaving up one and a tail stabbing through another knight's throat. It wailed out in front of the main plaza. The formation of knights, Captain Halkot with his revolvers in hand taking aim, yet from the opposite direction his attention was drawn.

Two more of the creatures entered with a third just behind them. Halkot aimed and fired, shots deflecting save for one which shattered the protective lens of one of the beasts.

"Dammit-" Halkot growled.

Beside him the leader of the knights, a young lieutenant named Yato, stepped up. His scar bled slightly. The two watched as a knight swung at a Mamba's arm joint just to clang it against another claw that got raised. Then swung the tail that pierced right through.

Another knight jumped at the tail of another creature but the swing missed. A swing at a leg joint only for the swing to be blocked by another leg.

"Aye yo Halkot what is this nonsense?" Yato called.

"Mamba are good at protecting their weaker joints. The eyes you see to the front of their heads are only some of what makes them a nightmare. They have hairs that can sense their surroundings so they can always block with their armored exoskeletons!"

"So I've noticed; but you know what I don't get? Is why are these things gathering here?"

BANG BANG BANG

"I don't know- we have to try and beat them though until the Lords are evacuated!"

"And what about the young Lord Providence?"

“Hope that he can hold out till we’re done here!”

Further off to the west a trio moved through the streets. One Scorupi Mamba pursued the young Lord Providence and his two guards. The creature moved at full speed, zipping like a charging centipede. Pincers snapping.

The young lord rest atop the back of one knight while the other ran beside them. Said Scorupi back behind howled. Providence’s escort turned left down a road, then a right, then right through an alleyway which brought them to another dirt road which they shot along. The road though soon wound to an end in a cul-de-sac.

Both stopped, “Dead end!” one barked.

“Did you have to say-”

They turned around just as the creature pulled out of the alley. It turned and slow approached with snapping claws. Both guards readied up, William Providence hopping off of his guard’s back as they drew their swords and took defensive stances. Both hands gripping and wide spread legs, swords out in front of them.

With a final low growl the beast came to a halt a good few meters in front of them but did not move. The two braced as William backed away. Nothing... and nothing still...

“... what is it waiting for?”

Fabric flapped behind them. Both guards and the young lord turned round. Three figures stood behind them. Two folks dressed in garments like the earlier assassin, while the third stood eerily. A black tunic, pants, gloves, a huge cloak with a hood, the white skull mask over more black garments that covered the entire head.

Blazing eyes peered through the mask, Vampiric eyes.

“A- a Vampire?” William murmured.

“Lord Providence please stay behind us!”

“Oh yes- because that will undoubtedly be what protects your lord when you face both a sueprnatural entity of the night and an unstoppable moving fortress,” the masked vampire spoke.

“Who are you? What do you want?!” William barked back.

“My dear young lord, you are who we want. A hostage would be most advantageous to what we are after at this stage. It is as simple as that.”

“All of this just for that?”

“Indeed. Now... take him.”

The two assassins crept forward, and behind the group moved the Scorupi Mamba. Its breath and snarl, snapping pincers. The two assassins drawing short swords ready to go. The vampiric mastermind standing back and observing simply put... until his focus turned.

"I was rather wondering when you would acclimate us with your presence my dear," he randomly called aloud.

Both assassins ceased and began to look around. Both guards and William did just the same. At first no one saw, until the vampire in the mask turned his focus which is what led them up a rooftop to where Elise stood.

"How did she find us?" one of the assassins grumbled.

"Is it not obvious? She used the high ground of the rooftops in the same manner that allowed to to stifle our earlier acquisition of the prince," the masked vampire spoke.

"An articulate vampire?" Elise questioned having heard all of it, "So you're the one responsible for the Scorupi Mamba here and the convoy attack earlier?"

"Quite right my dear," the masked vampire spoke turning to face her now, "I am indeed the one responsible. And in turn you would be the conniving mysterious warrior responsible for disrupting our prior action against said convoy, yes?"

"{Good lord his smart guy talk is starting to annoy me-} Well that works for me," Elise stated as her right leg arched up.

All watched as a bow flew straight into her hand which she quickly took aim with. Eye on her target and hand on an arrow she pulled. The vampire blinked as Elise quickly let go and fired a shot. He side stepped though the arrow did quickly pierce through his cloak.

From his side step he launched. A mighty bound up through the air soaring for Elise's position. She quickly jumped back and threw the bow, taking up her rapier just as the masked man landed. His focus remained on her.

"My my, I had hope for a slightly more invigorating engagement for one who had the gall to cut down my previous servants," the masked man spoke, "Instead you pronounce yourself forth in the open and allow for such easy play."

"Look I'm sorry but if I have to hear you talk like that anymore I might end up with a migraine. Lets cut right to it alright?" Elise retorted raising her rapier.

"Such disrespect- very well. For if you are in such a hurry to die this day then I will comply with your request," he spoke stepping forward.

Reaching into his sleeve he pulled a sword hilt. A small Gladius, certainly shorter than most. He shot in swinging. Elise shot back a step, taking up her sword in her right hand this time round and positioning her left behind her back.

She swung up, angling the blade to deflect. As the Gladius screamed against it with a clang. Weaving under she swung up and struck. The vampire's weapon bounced up as she whirled her weapon round and swung at his midsection.

The masked man slid back while bringing his sword down on top of hers. The clang of the weapons though short as it was as he created distance. On the streets below the assassins moved against the guards who had begun to clash- daggers versus broadswords. Their dance and flurry, the agile assassins against the defense oriented guardsmen.

Above the masked man began again. He lunged in and thrust forward, the rapier swung to counteract. As he powered in she swung round up and over right down atop. And as he came down she'd deflect with her own sword blocking with the same angle as before.

His Gladius met only the thin metal of her weapon though hers did not buckle despite the force of the vampire. She did not aim for total blocks, only deflections. And with each swing of the Gladius she would move her own blade and offset his swing.

She whipped round and swung, blocked by the Gladius. Twisting back 180* she took another swing with a back strike. As he blocked she spun again and aimed at his side. Again- a block, though her blade swung down and gashed across his leg.

He yowled out and stumbled, a bit of smoke radiating out of the wound.

"A blessed blade?" he grumbled.

She offered nothing and stepped in with another diagonal swing at his shoulder. His Gladius flew up to block and the two weapons again clashed. She moved back with her right foot and then stepped forward again taking a swing at his waist. His sword dropped to block, the metals colliding though quickly she swung up.

The vampire stepped back in evasion- then tore forward with a thrust. A quick sidestep and her foot swung up with a flip- SMACK!! Straight into the mask which sent him stumbling back. His cloak flapped, the sun landing on his wound.

Flames erupted temporarily in that spot and he roared in anguish, spinning back around and smacking the wound with his gloved hand. Elise though wasted no time and shot in with a thrust. His blade shot up and smacked against the side. As her blade bounced off though she whipped her arm- the tip of her blade tearing through his side.

“EYAGH!” he howled stumbling back as more smoke rolled from him.

She held position and flicked her weapon, maintaining her fencer stance. The vampire however stumbled further. Smoke drifted from his abdomen as he stood with the sun at his back.

“Nrrrgh...”

“Shocking that a human can trade blows against an all powerful vampire isn’t it?”

“Shallow cuts at best my dear. Though you may deflect my attacks I will eventually land a powerful blow and you shall fall. A rapier is no match for a powerful blow from a Gladius.”

“A thousand cuts will tear anyone apart eventually, and I haven’t begun to get serious. Lets see how many it takes for you to falter~” she mused.

The vampire shot forward swinging the short Gladius. Elise swung up but not for the blade- instead the hilt. Her own edge rode along and struck true. The vampire yelled out again and fumbled his steps back.

Smoke drifted from his hand and a bit of smoldering blood dripped to the ground. She stepped back and thrust forward, her feet hopping as she took a drive at his center. Another yelp and another moment of falter as he fell back. She paced ahead again as he swung the Gladius- a single hop and then a downward swing.

His eyes went huge as the slice appeared in his mask. A simple crack and the skull broke off revealing his face. The two pieces clattered to the ground as did his Gladius. The sun hung behind him while Elise stood in front of him.

“Y-you. H-how did?”

“Not so articulate now are you assassin?” she said with a bit of muse once again, holding her sword directly to his chest, “Call off the Mamba or I’ll run you through or nick your hood. You’ll burn either way unless you give up.”

“Ngh... but if I do that they’ll kill me-”

“And you think I won’t?” she retorted immediately, raising the tip of her blade to the man’s face.

He stared up, a face racked with dread.