

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 7

The sun aglow brilliantly overhead and casting full force upon the plaza below. The dead mamba lay piled up, white knights marching through. Civilians were out and about watching at a distance of course, and the men in black were all well on their knees and bound by the knights. A few of the local lords stood among the knights, waving arms and mouths to one another.

Some distance away from the crowd, observing, was Elise with her hood again back up and in place. Beside her approached Captain Halkot.

“You know you really do have a knack for getting into trouble,” Halkot spoke once within audible talking distance.

She turned herself then to face him, “Funny way to say *hey thanks for stopping the mutant scorpions from eating everybody.*”

“Yeah I’ll get right on that,” he mumbled stopping beside her with crossed arms, “So what did you find out about our bug man?”

“Why ask me? You’re the cop in this situation, you tell me,” she retorted.

“Did you not actually ask? Eh... his name is Daniel Ozaro, a mercenary. He could not or would not elaborate on much. Says he was hired to kidnap William Providence, and before that he did attack the convoy to take some of the lords hostage. Says it was an older woman, met just north of Fort Delrus down stream.”

“So... we’re essentially back at square one then.”

“We? Look- while I appreciate what you’ve done, at this point I’m going to have to ask you and Vulper to stay away from this mess. Now that the knights are involved, they’re going to start looking for answers. Your allies could get caught up in this. In fact I would recommend laying low.”

“... my superiors aren’t going to like that,” she mumbled.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled, "There isn't much more I can do. In fact, if I were you, I would disappear while you still can. Reinforcements will be shipped in before much longer. True you are human; but the young Lord Providence and his guards might be able to point you out."

"..... alright," she said with a sigh closing her eyes, "You're going to owe Vulper one."

"Vulper owes me three. We'll work it out," Halkot chuckled.

From there he moved forward and broke way from Elise. As for Elise, she turned and began to move away from the plaza. Rounding around a group of people and off to the gate. The streets were mostly empty this far out, most people still locked up following the earlier chaos.

A short walk, the gates before her. And at the gates just across stood both Thomas and Destiny. The duo waved as she drew near the very empty gates, unguarded even. Both jogged over as she hit the gates.

"Elise!" Destiny called moving over.

"What was that earlier- what just-?"

"Same guys who attacked the lords earlier tried to take them hostage again. I don't know why but it's going to cause some trouble for us. We need to get back to the clan. We need to tell Calagras what's going on."

"Alright well- you're the boss."

"Yeah, lets get going. We can pick Mark's team up on the way, they should be waiting for us. Come on!"

...

Knights marched around the main square. Captain Halkot moved along the street with a couple of local guardsmen, Yato and the knights coming out of a building.

"Anything?" Halkot asked.

"Heh- no vampire boy, nothing," Yato spoke, turning to Halkot while his knights continued on, "You know something? I find it just DANDY that it was another vampire causing this. You couldn't have figured it out with your own vampire powers?"

"Asks the inquisitor whose job it is to know his enemy, and could not figure it out just the same."

"OooooOoOooOooo canny- well captain, it's just, KINDA frustrating you see," Yato continued, "We have several incidents of these local big shots being attacked. All we have is a merc, hired by another merc, who hired some mercs to go merc-ing with

him, and the guy we have doesn't know anything other than it was some woman who hired him from someplace forever ago who was also a merc. Make it make sense!"

"I get it Yato. I don't know either."

"Could be that the mountain clans are prepping for their lower land brethren to arrive?"

"You're not from around here Yato. The mountain clans of the valley want nothing to do with the humans. Attacks up here have been rare."

"Yeah well maybe they are starting to be less rare. Have you ever considered?"

"I don't think that-"

"But I will say-"

The two broke out in argumentative discussion. The knights and local guard stayed back, at ease, as the two captains continued to go back and forth. A distance away knelt the Mamba Controller. Bound and well restrained.

He glanced left at the argument. Then he glanced back ahead and looked up.

"..."

A couple blinks.

SVEEEEEEUUUW-

Splunge!!

"HRGH-HYAAAAAAAAA!" the vampire wailed out flopping back with an arrow blown into his chest.

The sun flashed over him just as the knights and captains shot round. Flames erupted in an instant, blowing through the arrow shot and the face, quick to consume his entire body.

"PUT HIM OUT QUICK-"

"It's too late!!"

Flames engulfed the body and charred it dark. Out of sight atop the roof stood a figure, one dressed remarkably identical to Daniel. Another assassin with a bow stood with them.

"Get some men on the rooftops! Now!!"

This figure turned and moved along with the assassin- who muttered, "... the rat has served his function."

The sky above, a dreamsicle golden orange overhead. The forest laid out before the group of seven who made their way quickly through the mountain's roaming trails. Mark at the head, Elise and Sam to the outside, Thomas and Destiny to the middle, with Scott and Drake making up the rear. Not fanned out, rather together.

The calm before the group as they weaved through the trees. While few stood around when compared to the greater forest of the valley, there were still numerous clusters along the mountainside heading into Vulfax territory. As they continued their climbs their heads would perk up. Coming slowly into view a couple figures ahead of them, several of Vulfax.

One stood out at the helm wearing a ragged black tunic and basic sweatpants. Overall he appeared extraordinarily plain. Short shaven platinum hair that was rather a mess, ice gray eyes. Not a weapon upon him unlike those surrounding him.

Elise blinked as the group came up on this Vulfax convoy.

"Master Jungregho?" Mark questioned aloud with a tinge of surprise.

"You're late," the man grumbled.

"Late? Late for what?" Sam questioned.

"Hrghhh... come. There is much to discuss about what happened in Emerton."

Jungregho turned and walked passed his warriors, of whom turned about and proceeded. Elise's group stopped shortly to look around at themselves before too carrying along. Elise herself remained with a blank stare a few seconds after, then followed.

"UNACCEPTABLE!" a grungy roar called out.

SLAM!!!

Crrrrrrraack-

A rather large chamber, lit by torchlight. Shadows strewn about, up the smoothish walls and along the carpet. A large chamber with two tunnels, one aft of a group facing a group of mostly sitting people, the other tunnel directly behind and cloaked. The table of wood split with a deep dent cast by the fist currently embedded within.

A large elliptical table of older pattern and scrolls, oil lamps and charts, quills and ink reservoirs. Candles with a low hiss compared to the crackles of the surrounding torches. Shelves with more charts and scrolls, random crates and chests. Several seats lay behind the table with several being empty and only a few occupied.

Elise's group of seven plus Jungreggho stood, the latter with his arms crossed behind his back and the rest at almost attention save Elise herself who stood rather... off kilter at those before her. The fist of one man ripped from the hole it created. He stood there practically hunched over the table now with both hands placed firmly down.

Strands of salt-pepper unkempt ash hair, blazing amber eyes almost with a tinge of red, wearing a battle tunic wrapped in a cloak lined with fur. The wrinkle in his scowl and the grit of his bare teeth. Fiercely staring upon the group before him... with particular scrunge upon one of emerald gaze. Elise stared back with a lowered head and a quiet face.

Two more unnamed vessels sat around the table with one being two seats away from the angry man and then another beside. Eight seats in total at present. The first of two, shaggy reddish-brown hair and glimmering green eyes with serpent-like pupils, dressed a tad more noble with vest and coat and pants and shoes. The other rather plain as a man in a torn black trench coat with ragged dress shirt and ripped tie, short cut slicked-back black hair and sunglasses upon for some given reason.

The green eyed man glanced to the angry man while the sunglasses wearer sat idle. Jungreggho stood almost at attention with a stern scowl all his own as he cast sour upon Elise. Her group had parted leaving only herself and Mark at the center of the wrathful expressions.

The salt-pepper man stood firm and removed his hands.

"This is rather," he began with a growl and deep voice holding a Spaniard-like accent of some variety, "Unacceptable, is it not?"

"Lord Bakuuva, allow me to explain our actions if you would for a moment sir. We-" Mark began.

"SILENCE!" he shouted before again slamming his hands down, "This reprimand is not for you, hombre. No, it is for the young blood."

His focus shifted squarely to Elise who in turn flinched a look away.

"Explain it to me again, aye? You took it upon yourself to... as our informants report- expose yourself to the humans? Now why is that?"

"Uncle, I-"

"Hold your tongue and do it well brat," he growled with venom, "You may be the adopted filth of Lysander, a mere pet at best- yet I do not have to acknowledge you as anything but. Now. Explain. Your. Actions."

His sharp nails tapped around the table as he kept only his left placed.

Her head jerked slightly as she shifted to look upon him, a soft glance at the man of reddish-brown hair briefly before continuing, "Sir... it became necessary."

"NECESSARY?!" he spat rather literally with spit flying out, "Your primary asset to us is your ability to integrate with the sheep. Exposed you are not worth anything lass. So remind me again what your relevance to Vulfax is if you can not accomplish this, aye?"

Elise's gaze shifted to the green eyed man, then back to the one yelling at her.

"Well? Speak!"

"Because if something happens to the Lords or their families we could face the wrath of the Inquisition, the Kingdom, and who knows what else. The humans are already unsettled by the growing revolutionaries at the base of the mountain. If anything else happens we could-"

"Enough of your caterwauling woman!" the man spat again, "The humans are of no threat to us, nor is this Inquisition by that ridiculous cult!"

"Azala," the green eyed man began, "My daughter has a point you know."

"Silence Lysander!" Azala shouted turning to his brother with wrath, "Even you can't excuse this blunder."

"What blunder? She protected the human lord's son. I would consider that beneficial to Vulfax come the future," Lysander grumbled.

"The humans are of no threat and as I recall they do not appear at all bothered by our kind's presence."

"And yet," the last seated man began, "If the Orcs make it up here with the other rebels along with other happenings such as this attack by the Scorupi Mamba they might begin to reconsider. They are already working with the Inquisition Azala, and the Inquisition has close enough ties to the Celestial Kingdom who do in fact hate us."

"Javin you are overthinking the issue I would argue," Jungreggho replied.

"Philippe, you may in fact be under thinking it," Javin replied to Jungreggho.

"Under thinking how? The humans would not dare begin anything with the clans of the mountains. It would be their downfall."

"Corner a cat and get scratched. The humans may decide to protect their settlements at all costs. And if they need the help of either of those factions, those factions might not care who gets caught up in it. And if any of the other clans get involved."

“Why would the other clans become involved with attacking the humans?” Javin questioned.

“Why wouldn’t they? A chance for more power and territory. Pin it on the lower races. It could work.”

“I fail to see issue,” Azala grumbled, “The humans are weak. This Inquisition is incapable of threatening us and the kingdom is so heavily bogged down by issues of its own.”

“That is the belief that you have brother but that might not be the reality of the situation.”

“You would question me Lysander?”

“I would-”

“Can we afford to trust the humans regardless? And if the Orcs make it further up the mountain then what? Do we fight or let the humans get swept up? If we show ourselves as passive-”

“But then the question of if we involve ourselves it will reveal-”

“And what of-”

“But then-”

“Gentlemen are we about done with the hypotheticals?” a cold, calm, very much deep voice called from the passage behind.

The echo of footsteps, two sets, and from the darkness a pair of gleaming green reptilian-like eyes. A tall, very well built man, sharp muscular jaw, radiant dark red lengthy hair sort of spiked out. A full beard, trimmed short, also a dark red. He wore a brilliant tunic of black and red beneath a long sleeveless cloak with shoulder guards, large baggy pants, and strange split-toe boots.

Beside this man walked Vulper and a woman who was fully robed with only a slim bit of her face visible. Dark blue eyes, a slender frame. All eyes in that chamber turned and all bodies shifted. The standing Azala stood aside and came to face the man. Those seated spun.

“If so, we have work to do.”

“Lord Calagras,” Philippe Jungreggho spoke.

Calagras stepped up to the table, accompanied by the other two. He glanced right, paused, then left, paused, and then forward.

“Need I remind you my sons and daughters, things are not always as they appear. Now Bakuuva.”

“Yes?” the three Bakuuvas in the room all asked at once.

“Mmmm... Child of Bakuuva,” Calagras corrected.

“Yes sir?”

“What is your take on the current affairs of these assassins?”

“Sir I... I believe this isn’t something we should dismiss. From what I’ve gathered, someone is deliberately targeting the local lords to cause unrest. The risks mentioned are part of that plan. If I had to guess, I think it’s one of the mountain clans.”

“Child do you have any concrete proof?” Azala growled, “Accusing a mountain clan of this, such insolence!”

“She holds point Azala,” Calagras interrupted, “Truly. The humans gain nothing from this. The Inquisition would not work with our kind. The rebels gain nothing by insighting chaos. That leaves a very obvious source.”

“My Lord-” Philippe began.

“Oh I know well enough the implications Philippe. If there is a traitorous clan among us, we will resolve it. I have already sent word out thanks to Vulper. I will be convening a summit to properly discuss this issue. And until that time comes... our unassuming Bakuuva shall be tasked with further espionage. Few would suspect the young girl, other than those who she has already upset.”

“You would use her as bait?” Azala immediately questioned.

“Do you find conflict with this Azala?”

“Hmm... no, I do not sir. None at all.”

Vulper glanced left to Calagras without turning his head for a short bit only. Elise and Lysander said and did nothing.

“Child, do you accept my conditions?”

“Yes, Lord Calagras,” Elise replied immediately with a slight nod.

“Vulper will assist you in moving forward. While you are entirely expendable on this assignment, you are also entirely valuable. Do not screw this up or your value will be lost young one,” Calagras concluded.

“I understand.”

Azala snarled slightly, “You would have us accuse our own?”

“We are not allies Azala. Each clan is its own. You would do well to remember that.”

“We are all of these mountains. You would have us turn upon one another out of fear before simply stomping out these weak humans should they come at us?”

“Do not presume to question me Azala. What I say is law.”

“Nrrgh... as you wish.”

“Now if there is nothing further to be added. Young Bakuuva, you may leave us. Vulper will find you with your next assignment. Take your merry band with you,” Calagras ordered.

“Yes sir,” she replied with a slight bow.

Elise turned and began to walk, the rest of her group following suit. She glanced back once and only once. The scowl on Azala’s face directed at Calagras’s back. Sighing forward she would exit.