

Truths in the Dark

A crow's caw, several squawks from a trio in fact. The glimmer of what might seem as moonlight from above. Creaking trees and waving branches casting small shadows from the lack of any true light.

SMACK!!

A ghoulish wail, two figures flung between the trees and across a dirt path into tree trunks. The impact was hard, their bodies slumping over and collapsed unto the ground near immediately. Another couple of hard whacking sounds and out popped a few more, one high up into a tree branch- crumpling in and folding around the vein, flopping off and crashing to the forest floor. A few more groans and another simple series of crackles, bones and bark both.

A simple hop and a skip off of the path led to a scene of about a dozen and a half undead slapped all around the clearing, some with limbs hanging by only a few strands of the clothes on their backs, others torn to pieces or with holes punched right through. Another thwack and out spun two more to the ground, splashes of dark green fluid gushing out like antifreeze being splashed on a wall.

With their fall not a single thing dared to stir. The air grew still.

The dim crackle of a running flame, capped by rocks in a ring, surrounded by a radiating darkness the likes of which was relatively common in the outside. The creaking forest of eternal abyss, adorned by seven surrounding the glow of the fire. An occasional owl hoot hoot, the cry of a coyote. A thick white line surrounded the small clearing that sat glazed in a bath of bath of orange and yellow.

From one corner of the section the powder was dropped by the handful, courtesy of Dante with his magic purple pouch. The hunter looked up and approached the fire, soon taking a seat right next to the young Bakuuva.

“o’right ‘en, thas that.”

“This damn forest is crawling with those things. You sure your little lines will keep those zombies out?” questioned Yeager.

“Easy peasy lemon squeezy. The bastards won’t be able to cross ‘et.”

“They aren’t zombies,” Elise spoke, looking up, “Not in the traditional sense. These are creatures raised using the Infernal Resurrection Technique, often nicknamed Infernals. They’re one of the few types of undead that are weak to silly things like salt lines.”

“One of the few types? Gods that’s disturbing,” Shree murmured.

“Disturbing... so a Vampiress can find things of their nature disgusting. Interesting,” Illiya spoke, looking up, eyeballing the female knight.

“Tch- don’t be such a bitch you little brat. I’ll make you regret it,” Shree growled back.

“You’re in no position to make threats. I stomped your lot pretty easy after all, and you seem more like the type to worry about a broken nail than anything else anyway.”

“HEH HAHAHA, oh she’s got you there Shree-”

“Grrr- shut it Yeag!”

“Hmph... so you’re the princess of the Sarzento Kingdom, eh?” Fen Rao murmured looking over to Adalaine, “What brings the likes of you all of the way out here in the first place, hmm?”

As the question was asked, both Elise and Dante looked across the way to the lowered expression of the young princess, a somber expression at that. The crackle of the wood, splintering and charring up so nicely. The glow of the fire, washing over her face like waves at a beach.

“We’re... looking for help.”

“Come again, help you say?”

“Why would a kingdom like Sarzento need help? I thought you guys were like, super strong demon slayer mother truckers or something,” Yeager asked.

“Gotta say, I agree with the Vampire. Sarzteno has a reputation. Your people conquered Drachen Lands and dealt with a Vampire Plague centuries back. Rich as can be too- why would you lot need help all the way out here?” Dante added.

“Well I... it’s because uh... you see-”

“Sarzento isn’t exactly the safest place anymore.”

“Illiya wait- it’s not that... alright it is that bad,” Adalaine spoke, looking up now across the way, “My people have a problem, a problem that my father and his advisors are ignoring.”

“Please, do go on.”

“Hmph... it’s not the business of any outsiders-” Illiya grumbled.

“Ah see, thought you lot were lookin’ for help. Now you don’t wanna share? What good does that get ya?”

Illiya’s glare struck back at Dante, his smug expression shining, “... because, it’s not the business of those who ally themselves with *their* kind.”

“What was that now you brat?”

“Our... kind?”

“Illiya!”

“Perfectly acceptable,” Fen Rao responded, “Mortals trusting the supernatural, as they so call it- never meant to be. We kill, we drink blood- usually humans in the mythos. And Vampires are responsible for causing most everyone here suffering, if not then pain in accordance to their ancestors or country. We’re monsters that can’t be reasoned with. We kill, we destroy, we get off on it, all just another Tuesday for us. Right?”

“...”

“Thought so.”

“So close minded,” Elise murmured.

“Close minded eh? Hmmm. Elise, right? Tell me child, what exactly IS your story? You had mentioned yourself as a child of the Drachen, and you seem exceptionally forgiving to what we are. I find myself curious.”

“Not much to really talk about when you get right to it. I spent much of my life with a Drachen Clan by the name of Vulfax on a planet called Earth. I was a slave to the wishes of a fake father for many years before I learned that I was not of their kind. In that time, I met many interesting creatures of the night. Some the generic high off their ass blood sucking type, others more... reserved, I guess you could say.”

“Heh. If you were raised by Drachen then it makes sense I suppose. And yet you appear to have a sense of humanity. Hoh, perhaps it isn't simply being around *our kind* that is the problem. Hey, maybe even the stereotyping is wrong there.”

“Tch-” Illiya grunted, looking away.

“Illiya please. Lets just try and get along with them ok?”

“Get along? How can we possibly work with this rabble highness? Three Vampires, a girl raised by savages, and some thug with no manners.”

“**Burrrrrrrrrrrrrrp.** Ah thanks, I appreciate the compliment kid,” Dante chuckled.

“So tell me your *highness*, what exactly have we done to offend your guardian?” Yeager asked.

“It's... it's nothing. Nothing you did. She's just-”

“Overly protective?”

“A royal pain in the ass towards commoners?”

“Time of the month?”

“*Excuse me?!*”

“That first one, actually, sort of. Sorry- a lot of things have been going on at home lately. My father hasn’t exactly been, umm... attentive to the needs of his people.”

“I’ve heard some tale of the situation, hiding it will get you nowhere,” Fen Rao muttered, “Your nation is facing problems with the native Drachen, isn’t that right?”

“Hmph, I’m surprised you’ve heard even that much. Our leaders have done their best to silence this news beyond our borders,” Illiya grumbled.

“So what’s the story?”

“...”

“Go on Illiya, tell them,” Adalaine whispered.

“Ugh... very well m’lady... Sarzento is dealing with domestic terrorism. There have been signs that it is Vampiric in nature, just as our previous conflict with them hundreds of years ago. It is the belief of some of our leadership that it is a ploy by the Drachen Tribes to overtake and destroy our civilization.”

“Vampire attacks are on the rise as it is,” Dante spoke, “Ya sure it’s related?”

“It’s not my place to assume anything. My job as a *Code* is to protect the royal family. Her highness believes this to be unrelated to the Drachen though, something deeper. Her father refuses to support the notion, so we’ve been left to ourselves to gather allies to prove her theory correct. Thus far we have had no such luck in finding aid.”

“Round o’ bad luck I’m afraid. Course the Confederacy wouldn’t be of ‘elp to ya.”

“No... we tried already. Without my father’s word I- I’m not sure what we can even do.”

Elise’s gaze shifted to Adalaine, who again had her own face in the sand by that point. Illiya’s right hand patted the princess’s shoulder a few times before sticking. A slight frown formed as she looked to the two; though her attention soon was pulled away once more-

“So what’s the plan for escape then Dante? Your partner had mentioned that we need to vanquish these cultists to escape,” Fen Rao questioned.

“Ya thas ‘bout right. This forest is an Eternal Hollow, a magical forest that loops spacetime. The people at the town back ‘ere built a catalyst to undo the curse; but those undead raisin’ loons took it over and ‘ave made this forest their keep. We figure they still ‘ave the key to leave, just gotta take their base and we’re good ta go.”

“So... your three teammates attempted that and were captured no doubt. That should speak volumes for what we are up against.”

“It does; but we’ve got friends back at town. And with you people, we can certainly overcome the odds.”

“Hmph. So you say and so we shall see. Very well. So long as Miss Lightning over there can keep her cool and not fry us after this.”

“If she does Fen, she’ll be dealing with me,” Elise spoke up, looking over again to Illiya and Adalaine, “That... would be a shame though.”

“A shame?” Illiya questioned, “How so?”

“A shame because I think I might actually like the two of you.”

“Huh?”

“What?”

“You both... remind me of some people I used to know.”

“Well isn’t that just touching haha. This is going to work out great. Hey teach, you’re still sure about this? You don’t think we’ll be hosing our own kingdom by succeeding here?”

“I can’t be too sure of anything Yeager,” Fen Rao replied, “All I know is that this future holds the greatest of possibilities. And so we shall explore it. Do not forget what our objective is, to insure the security of our people.”

“Yeah yeah. Well tell you what ladies, before we go any further I’m going to need a snack.”

A crackle of green forged itself around Illiya for only a second, with Dante’s right hand placed over a pocket in his coat. Elise glanced over to Dante, then to Illiya, and finally back to Yeager- not yet shifting or moving aside from her eyes.

“Oh relax- I don’t mean you people. I meant it’s time for me to go catch something like a deer or whatever. I don’t drink people food.”

“What?” Illiya murmured, her scowl fading.

“Yeah? What- you think just because I’m a blood sucker I drink people? Please- if we went around doing that then we’d be drinking our own people. Sheesh guys, just ask your Drachen girl there, she’ll tell you.”

“Elise?” Dante murmured, looking over to his partner at that exact moment.

Elise’s face shown with absolutely nothing, a blank and bland expression, her eyes shut now as she leaned her body back with her arms crossed behind her head. Dante’s arm lowered, as the rage around Illiya also faded. Both Shree and Yeager stood and backed away from the fire, both turning and heading out across the white circle. Fen Rao’s own eyes closed and his arms crossed over his chest, a slight grin formulating.

“How long did you know?” Fen asked aloud.

“From the moment I got near those two earlier. Blake and I noticed it right away,” Elise stated, “For those who are or have been around Vampires long enough, it becomes easy to tell which ones drink from humans and which drink from other sources... just by looking at them.”

Shree blinked, the cowboy in black standing right behind her with a revolver held to her head. Across from her, a katana blade was held firmly to Yeager’s throat. All around them were puddles of mud and piles of slush, and then the guards rushing around that had survived.

"G-gyeh- what the hell?" Yeager grunted.

Shree's gaze zoomed around her, staring at the puddles, at the armor, at the one behind Yeager. The glow in Elise's eyes, bright green and vibrant even when surrounded by the darkness. Unseen to her, just behind, her captor's eyes also aglow.

"H-hey now. Hey hey hey now le- lets not get carried away here uh, alright?"

"How the hell did they catch us? No- how the hell did they beat the dummies??"

"The answer... is simple. Your mentor over there called it so perfectly, it would be an insult to have to repeat it. You spent a literal minute arguing with your friend over there too, far too easily distracted."

"This sensation... you're a Vampire too?" Shree asked, slightly turning her head, stopped as the end of the revolver jabbed her in the back of the head with another gun pressed into her back.

The glowing gaze of Elise shifted slightly, lurching over towards Blake, and then back to the one in front of her as that glow in her gaze intensified a bit, "These two are... Blake, try not to kill that one."

"I know. Same goes for you Elise!"

"Hmph. I'm impressed," Fen spoke.

"That's the secret. Why you never killed their people, why you aren't that worried about us making this deal, why you never outright invaded or sent multiple legions in after the convoys. You aren't a Vampire Kingdom, you belong to a kingdom that turns its defenders into Vampires for insurance."

“Howzz-” Dante mumbled, staring wide eyed, while across from him Illiya was doing the same.

Fen Rao’s own eyes were now open and staring at Elise, quivering slightly for only a moment before resolving themselves. Elise stared back, her own eyes aglow with a bright green, her expression unchanged as it remained wound and serious. Adalaine blinked, looking to Fen Rao.

“Well how about that? You figured out our little secret. No wonder you’ve been so soft towards us. Yes, you are correct. In exchange for the gift of the sun, we swear ourselves to power... all to protect our *pride*. Galahan’s past is in Vampires, victims ourselves. Thanks to the actions of a few we were able to get out of that mess, and now- this is how we’ve continued to shield ourselves. Glastol is nothing more than a sacrifice for our own peace.”

“You would sacrifice an entire nation’s freedom just for your own? That’s just-”

“Selfish? Maybe; but it is the way the world works Dante. You take, or you are taken. Heh, those two knuckleheads for example, they have been robbed themselves... years and years ago.”

Elise’s eyes shut, looking away as the rest continued to listen in- Illiya with her raised brow, Dante with his stone mug, Adalaine with her own confliction.

“They lost their folks to *Hunters* from *The Church* when they were young. It was a botched mission I was the head of years ago. We wanted to find allies, new lands, new opportunities. We were led in by some we felt we could trust and sold out. I lost a lot of good people that day, undead and living. I had them turned in hopes that it would help them become stronger, and they agreed to it to protect our small nation. To protect that which you love, you do what you have to do; even at the cost of the well being of others.”

“I know... all too well how that goes,” Elise murmured, eyes half closed, still looking away.

“If I may Princess Adalaine. If you want to protect your people, you need to take action. If you don’t act on what you believe in or for what you hold dear, it is very likely that it will be

stolen from you by more like us... or by the selfish bastards that still linger out in this world. You mustn't make that mistake, ever."

"I... I won't- Mister Rao, I won't give up."

"Heh... this takes me back. It reminds me of years ago when I-"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!"

All heads popped up instantaneously, eyes big. Adalaine's, Illiya's, Elise's, Dante's, even Rao's.

"The hell was that?" Dante muttered.

"AIYEEEEEEEEEE!!!!" wailed a feminine sounding voice.

"That was Shree!" Fen growled, jumping up immediately.

The old man wasted no time, bolting from his spot and shooting right through the brush before anyone could say a word. Just then came Elise, popping up in the blink of an eye and standing where Fen had been seated. Her coat flapped down, catching up with gravity and the momentum. Her emerald scowl shot out, following in Fen Rao's direction.

"Dante, stay with those two. Fen and I will check this out."

"A'o'ight. Be careful though Bakuuva, don' let yourself get caught."

"I know-"

Arrival

“YEAGER!”

“DUCK!”

CRASH

A combustion, lighting up an entire radius of the dark forest in a blow of red magma fused sparks. Two bodies flew back and crashed to the ground as a horde of undead began to surround them, some even marching through the freshly ignited fire. As one hit the ground on their side though, one remained on their feet with a small black stick in hand. Holding it out and with the mere press of a button- the stick extended immediately to ten times the length it was before, and from a slot on the side detracted a large scythe blade.

Yeager shot ahead with scythe in hand, twirling it above his head and swinging down, lashing through several of the zombies and ripping them to pieces. Another overreaching swing and down went a few more with heads and arms and torsos sent flying in pieces. Behind Yeager, Shree finally shot up with a stick of her own quickly extending. Halberd heads popped out of both ends, quickly expanding into place as she went in herself with a few swings.

A dozen down, and many more still raging with eyes aglow of that dark green near them. Swing swing swing and slash slash slash. Down went more one to two at a time, their numbers yet to thin however. Above with a thump came another, standing on the bark of the above tree. A figure with arms crossed and back leaning away- a smug grin spread across.

A plain man, black hair, sort of short, glowing eyes, plenty of eye shadow and white face paint- fangs present. Beside him another with wires extending out of their fingers much like puppet strings yet again- black hair again with long bangs and a goatee, plain beyond that. Two others hung out on the ground around the clearing, also not undead or anything special.

Grip

“Wha-?” came the mutter, a thick arm sticking from the ground, the hand to which was attached grabbing hold of Yeager’s ankle.

“Yeag!”

CRUNCH

“YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

The ground shattered beneath Yeager to which a big burly figure broke through. One hand slammed upon the ground, and the other swung up sending Yeager flying into the air. The clang of his scythe hitting the ground, and the deep grunt followed by a groan as the big guy hurled Yeager through the air with one toss. **SLAM-** right into a tree and a subtle flop to the ground, the undead quick to close in around him.

SPLASH

Blood and guts sprayed through the air, followed by a rattle of bones sounding almost like fallen logs. Shree tore through the crowd and stood immediately over her partner, halberd swinging like a baton and carving right through. The snap of a finger, echoing from up top. The crowd of undead maintained a radius though no longer approaching.

“Yeag!”

“I ain’t dead don’t worry. The fucker snapped my damn ankle though, my mobility is shit now-”

“You won’t have to worry about mobility for much longer,” the man with crossed arms called out from above, “My buddy Jaxx here will have you fixed up right on que for a performance in no time.”

The man with the goatee grinned, flexing his fingers slightly. As he did so, different clusters of the undead began to circle themselves. Ring Around the Rosie it seemed at first though only a few seconds in the circles broke into pairs, each pair square dancing of all things. Weaving in and out, hand in hand.

“Heeheehee,” Jaxx giggled, “You’re too kind Ant. They will make for a FAN TUCKIN FASTIC pair, a new bride and groom!”

“Tch- you sick fuckers no... Shree is like a god damn sister to me. If you’re gonna break us you sure as shit ain’t doing that!” Yeager spat back.

“Aye no biggie, little incest never hurt anybody. Heh, I’ll take pleasure in playing with your bodies after you’re gone, conjoin you just for that you bigots,” Jaxx spoke with a grin.

“You two are supposed to be like me and for the life of me, I don’t see it,” Ant called out, “I just see a couple of weaklings who sure as shit act like they’ve never fed before. Why is that?”

Shree took a single movement back with the halberd held level in her right, gaze zooming around- to the brute, to the puppet master, to Ant. Yeager himself began to stand using only one foot and the tree for balance.

“Sure enough Yeag, that guy is the only one. The rest are-”

“Yeah I know I know. That doesn’t realistically change our circumstance though. We need to wait- wait? Where did that big guy go?”

Creeeeeak, CRRRRRRRRRRACKLE CRACK- as the question was asked the tree behind both splintered, the trunk just above Yeager’s height splintering off and collapsing to the right with the bottom flung left. Out stormed a strongman, jacked as can be, his right fist swinging round.

BLAM!!!

“Gyuh!”

“Shree!”

Shree flew forward, blood trickling from her mouth as the strike nailed her in the jaw. Yeager himself swung round and threw a punch of his own straight into the gut of the big guy.

“HRRRRRRGH-” he grunted, stumbling back.

“I’ll rip your fucking head off you bastard!” Yeager spat with a single jump into the air, spinning his good foot for the man’s head.

Spewwww BANG!!!

An explosion engulfed both the big guy and Yeager, with the latter hitting the ground and rolling away near immediately, smoke drifting from his armor. The big guy stumbled away with burns covering his face and arms, his hair singed.

“Guh- oh Anne you fucking bitch, it’ll take me weeks to heal from that!” the big guy barked.

One of the two on the ground, stereotypical emo looking with black hair and blue eyes and baggy clothes, held in hand a bow. She paid no heed to her squad mate, instead looking at Yeager. The young knight, actively pushing himself up off the ground, appeared significantly unphased even as he coughed forth smoke. Across the way stepped Shree, a little bruised but more or less intact.

“Huh, well hell,” Jaxx spoke, “Can’t tell if it’s the armor or if ol’ Ant here was dead ass wrong about them being weak. Wouldn’t be the first, his eye for talent sucks sloppy man dick.”

“Oi!” Ant spat turning his head over and spitting at Jaxx.

“HYAAAAHAHAHAHAHA!” the brute laughed, stomping forward, “These two are great, lets add them to the collection already! Then we can deal with their friends. Hopefully they are just as exciting!”

The dancing zombies moved in around the two, changing from square dancing to hop scotch hopping across the ground.

“Heh. You cultists are a bunch of dumb asses,” Yeager chuckled looking up.

“Hoh? Why is that?” Anne questioned aloud, aiming another arrow, her bow close to her face as the shot was being lined up.

“Because if you did your homework you’d know that you totally fucked the pooch here.”

“Why is that?”

“Because aside from the princess kid, we’re by far the weakest out of the group... and we aren’t that far from camp. They’d have to be deaf, daft, and dumb to have not heard this!” Yeager laughed.

“So in short, you’re screwed~” Shree chirped.

“Oh yeah?” Jaxx asked, “Let me be a classic schmuck and ask that age old question. Them and what army?”

“This army you dumbass!” came the retort of Elise herself.

Kuhplunk- ZOoooooooooooooooooooooooooom CRASH!!!

A crater opened up, dirt was blowing upon the breeze, and the wires were all flopping to the ground- and with them the undead ceased their functions, remaining only stationary. A grin crossed Yeager’s face and a smile spread over Shree’s. This left a confused Ant looking at where his puppeteer had once been. The others however were all looking to the newly formed hole in the ground, and the very VERY apparently unconscious Jaxx. A single step and a loud echoing touch down from Elise as she now stood where Jax had stood, her glare locked to Ant.

“HRRRGHUUUUUU-” came the croaking of the big guy below.

The brute dropped to his knees almost immediately, falling face flat. Behind now was the older Fen Rao, looking down at the hulking human. At that exact moment the ground blew behind Anne the archer, her body falling back and the arrow being launched straight up into the air into a branch. The blast ruptured out as the young girl vanished inside of the pit. In sync with Anne’s departure came a hole appearing beneath the other figure lurking in the shadows, swallowed by the ground and vanishing- both holes closing.

“... well that’s just not fair at all,” Ant murmured, sweat flooding down his face.

“Are you two alright?” Fen asked, stepping forward towards both Shree and Yeager, a somber expression crossing over him.

“Yeah, just a slight annoyance,” Yeager mumbled.

“We probably could’ve won but we figured it would be better to wait for backup, just in case,” Shree added, “Sorry Fen.”

“Hmph... good work you two. You did good in that case,” Fen concluded, a slight smile spreading around him.

Back up top Elise stood unmoved, still looking up at Ant. All the while Ant himself was looking down and around. Locked unmoving undead, a team disappeared and defeated so effortlessly. And then back to Elise, the glow in her eyes intensifying.

“Care to give me a good reason to not light your carcass on fire right this second?” Elise questioned aloud, still looking up to Ant.

“I uh- you uh, hmmm well- you see I uh- shit is this, Drake my man? Uh- alright now, look here, you definitely don’t want to hurt me, alright?”

“I’m listening, please, do go on.”

“Ya know, me being a... a guy who can really look at a situation and, has the instinct to tell what’s what uh... how about we cut a deal here? I can tell that my team and I got sold down the river so- give us a by and I could tell you something useful?”

“You would sell out your order just to save your own skin? Bit cowardly now isn’t it?”

“Hey- fuck them, they didn’t tell us shit about any of this they just said to attack a bunch of chumps in the woods. Uh alright, we have an accord? Yes? Good uh- so that uh, that town you guys came from. My boss is burning that down as we speak and turning everyone there into more soldiers for us.”

“... what?”

“Y-yeah! They were going to torch it and be rid of it. They just figure with the Sarzentans and all-”

“Fen!” Elise yelled out.

“I heard, we need to move out now Elise or else Lox Town will be turned to ash!”

“Yeah you see- now isn’t that good? Now you’ll let us go righ- huh?”

Both Elise and Fen froze up, both at the same time, both with a dead struck look of straight faced worry instantaneously. Ant himself stumbled back, his mouth hanging open and wrinkles erupting around his face, eyes swelling with a sudden gasp. On the forest floor now beside the hole opened by Jaxx’s fall, one singular cloaked figure. Fen’s head shot up as the sound of fabric flapped just behind his position, a second presence appearing.

Ant’s step took him back, back right into something solid. A low thud, sending him a few paces forward and spinning around. Elise’s own gaze wandered up, where there atop with Ant stood a third shrouded figure. All three cloaked in darkness, all three with eyes glowing silver so bright that they illuminated the dark practically. Ant fell to his rear, gazing at the tall figure now hovering over him, a low sob escaping him for only a moment.

In unison, the gaze of the trio sharpened, glaring upon those in the proximity of what was to come.

Trio de la Muerte

Three flapping cloaks, three hooded individuals, three sets of glowing silver eyes, three particular glares. And all the vampire ANT could do was crawl backwards away from the one who stood before him, until backing right into the tree trunk itself. Elise's glare upwards to this one synced up with Fen Rao doing much the same, looking at one of the ones on the ground. All the while the two young knights had their own sights set upon the last one.

Elise laid a firm hold upon her katana blade at her side, with the two young knights prepping their own. For Fen Rao it was nothing more than sweat and a low, barely audible gulp.

"F-Fen?" Shree murmured.

"Nrgh... I know, they are," he spoke low in reply, a slight growl behind his voice as he did so.

Elise turned a quarter step, now sizing up that which stood before her. An ominous aura, unseen to the naked eye, well versed to her. A wafting blood red aura circulated around the individual above, as it did for all others, spreading out and weighing upon the air. A rain of force, a rain of death.

"{No doubt about it... these guys are the real deal,}" she thought to herself.

"Little baby Ant," the above one spoke, a deep female voice with ice cold perception, "You and Drake have both lost your crews... and yet I find your attempt to bargain your way out of this mess simply repulsive. Lord Soreis would be so disappointed to have turned such a coward, and yet-"

The figure's eyes shifted, glancing from the cultist down to Elise. That emerald glow in her eyes, that stance- ready to rip forth her sword and do battle. A killer edge no doubt. Below trembled two, with a third in a state of unease though prepared nonetheless.

"Hmph. I will deal with you later, little Ant."

CRACKLE

“Heghy-” Ant choked.

The vampire known as Ant slammed hard into the bark, the bark cracking and splintering off- fragments of wood piercing through his back as it was drilled into the tree. The cloaked figure stood before him; though not facing him. No, the figure’s gaze was set upon Elise just below, her cloak flapping as the winds from Ant’s impact coursed outwards. Elise’s grip quivered at the prospect, her expression of determination now being replaced with one of wincing rage.

Below, Fen Rao pulled a large ax from between his back armor and his cape, wielding it in one hand, the handle quickly extending just as the weapons of his pupils had. He stepped up, holding it out, the ax head dual ended and nearly the size of his torso as it jolted to life and stature. His teeth gritted, fangs laid bare, and his eyes glistening.

“Heh heh heh heh heh,” the two on the ground chuckled.

Shree took one step back, her left side trailing behind, then moved her right. Another step, and another step- right into Yeager’s side. He in turn looked to her, a hint of surprise crossing his own expression as he looked to her from behind.

“Shree?”

“Yeager, concentrate!” Fen Rao hissed, shocking the young knight back into readiness, “These three are not ordinary foes. They are not human like the rest, and they are not lowly Vampiric like us. These three are without a doubt, true blooded demons.”

As he spoke the word demons, the two on the ground held their hands to their hoods and flipped them back-

The first, a male. A seven foot tall hulk of a man, exceptionally fit by appearance as the cloak dropped off to the ground. Wearing a skintight black shirt, sleeveless, particularly well at showing off his abs and muscled up veiny arms, combat jeans and boots. Upon his back a massive broadsword the kind of which screams big anime sword, and to his sides were twin massive stone

sledge hammers. Short buzzed black hair, spiked atop, a jawline that screams handsome, and brown eyes carrying that silver glow.

The second, a female. A six foot nearly six and a half foot tall woman, very slender and curved with a bouncing display for a chest- literally. Adorned by black and dark purple battle mage robes with a bottom skirt. Her arms, visible and thick, heavy duty in the same accord as the man's. Flowing black hair patterned with dark red throughout as it went down to the middle of her back, bangs all spiked and wild in different directions, bluish violet eyes with that same silver glow to them.

And finally atop with Elise with her own hood flung back. A five foot nearly six foot woman, well toned all things considered and not as robust as the other woman. A black coat hugged her with a midriff that showed abs, lots and lots of abs with that same skin tone. To her sides where the long sleeves of her jacket hung, twin black hooks that seemed sharp as scythes hung loose yet tight to her body. Shoulder length black hair, silver eyes that were purely silver.

"We are of the *Demigrah Cult*, known by our contemporaries as the *Trio de la Muerte*," the one near Elise spoke, cold and raspy.

"{Trio de la- these guys are the ones!}" Elise yelled to herself.

"And you pumpkins are the ones who have been dealing us some serious blows, two squads and loads of our undead-" the other woman added.

"Heh heh heh, well that just won't cut it Sereena," the man interrupted, "What do ya say Maja? Should be rough 'em up and take 'em whole? Or be done with 'em?"

"Hmph. Rengard is right, lots of resources have been burned up due to your friends Little Elise," the woman above, Maja, continued.

"How do you know of me? Or us in particular-" Elise replied.

"Surely by now you've heard that we've dealt with three of your lowly friends. The Vampire, the Drachen, and the Elf. Though it would appear that the Hunter is not with you... and here you have those three from Galahan. Interesting choice of tactics, Lightonian."

“Tch. You smug bitch. You ripped a lot of intel out of my comrades by the sounds of it,” Elise scowled.

“Naturally my dear. Information is a valuable commodity, and they had loads to offer- including, how to get beyond the gates of that little village. Heh, yes- even if you left here now it would be too late to save anybody. By the time you would return, all you would find is red pulp and new undead forged from your former friends! Yet another failure you will have to live with, Bakuuva.”

“Hrgh!!”

A crackle of energy could be heard, a glow of silky white strands emerging around Elise and soon swallowing up her entire body. That glow of her eyes magnified, becoming steadfast and blazing. Below on the ground both Fen and his disciples looked up, a spot of dread and confusion wafting over. The brilliance of Elise’s glow began to fill much of the arena though not the lower level of the woods yet.

“Rao, go. Take your students and get out of here, I can’t promise that you guys won’t be caught up in this!” Elise spat out.

“E-Elise I-” Fen Rao began.

“GO!”

The trio of knights backed away, soon turning and bolting, All three of them shot out quick as can be as the light around the area only intensified. As the light struck Ant, his body smoldered instantly- smoke bellowing off and into the air with cinders. As it touched upon the three though, it did nothing. And by now all three were now looking upon Elise, all taking stance, all ready to leap into it.

“Well well, now it’s getting interesting,” Maja spoke with a slight grin and a rise in her voice.

“Your kind... your kind are the ones that disgust me. All the death and torment, it’s all just a game to you isn’t it? Well no more, I’m going to burn away you and every one of your fellowship until you’re all nothing but ashes!!”

“HA! Such provoto, yes. You will make for an interesting test subject. Three enhanced Vampires of the Order of Demigrah... against a Lightonian, our natural predator. So show us, show us a good time!” Maja yelled out, her arms flung out, ready to embrace to coming battle at hand, ready to embrace Elise’s own resolve.

CRRRRRRRRRRRACK!!!

In the blink of an eye, Elise’s fist slammed straight into the side of Maja’s face- her cheek morphing, her head side struck curving, her eyes huge with pupils so very faint and ghostly. The crackle of bone, the thunder of the strike. Even as her face moved from Elise’s fist the impact did not fade way, looking as though a face made of putty had just been clobbered with a frying pan- the bit of spit flying from the vampire’s mouth through the air.

KRAM!!

Her arm pulled back, and fist launched again straight into Maja’s gut. Another echo of spit spurted out and all over Elise’s face and torso, the very branch that Maja had stood upon. Leafs twirled and flurried away.

SLAM- CRACK!!

One more blow, a round house straight to the side of the head. Off she flew with a spin, Maja being taken by gravity as she fell from the top. Crashing through one branch, snapping the large limb, and then through another- finally slamming her back and arching in conform to the next. Her arms flopped, a pained howl escaping her in that very moment. Elise herself stepped down where Maja had been standing, her back to the suddenness of the oncoming allies of Maja. Both Sereena and Rengard hovered in the air for a moment above before coming down, the man with his own fist formed and the woman with her leg guillotine dropping for the top of Elise’s skull.

Shift- down Elise dropped, hands to the bark in evasion of the punch. One single kick in the air, one solid blow sent to Rengard's gut. As if he had stubbed his toe and drawn blood, his face contorted in anguish. The large man fell back and slipped from the surface, giving Elise an opening. One quick spin and one little hop with her hands and she went. Weaving around the drop kick and slamming an elbow right into Sereena's throat.

A gargled gag left her mouth with a good deal of saliva just the same as it has for Maja. Only a few seconds in and she was standing in place of Maja, with the two from below ground now falling back to the ground.

"HA!"

Three raging blasts of white light sprung from Elise's hands, two traveling straight for Rengard and Sereena with the third sent straight for Maja. In the blink of an eye they struck, casting explosions that swiftly engulfed all three vampire cultists. Bark, twigs, and leaves flew with soaring winds from the blasts. As she stood her hair was whipped around violently even in front of her face, her coat trying to rip from her and fly back.

Down she glared, watching. The smoke clouds cleared in no time, revealing the trio. Maja now stood, staring up at Elise as the smoke bellowed around her. Sereena herself was still picking herself up off of the ground, and Rengard himself was coughing whilst waving the smoke away with his arms. Elise's glare grew more narrowed, more enraged, radiating from her cold dead expression of hate.

"Well well, impressive actually. We finally found one that knows how to fight," Maja spoke as she reached for the large hooks at her sides, taking hold.

"Yeah, heh, it's kinda thrilling now isn't it?" Rengard chuckled, reaching up and over his shoulder, grabbing hold of the broadsword.

"Speak for yourselves, it's going to take me an eternity to get the damn sawdust out of my hair!" Sereena barked, slipping two black rods from her sleeves and into her hands.

Above Elise continued to glare, once more placing a hand on the hilt of her katana, swishing her left foot forward and crouching slightly, “Well come on then, lets not stop the festivities this soon. Come at me!”

The Game

Around the campfire continued to sit the likes of Dante, Illiya, and Adalaine. Not much said among them, not much movement. Just stationary, with Dante even leaned back against a rock. Both of the girls were still next to one another, a log behind them. The only sound to be heard at that very moment was none other than the crackle of the wood in the fire.

“... so... you two ever-”

“No.”

“But ya didn’t even let me-”

“Yeah well I don’t care.”

“Mmm...”

Kerblunk blum blung

A trio of explosions from afar, not terribly distant. Dante’s head rose and turned into the direction with a blink, as did Illiya though minus the blink, and Adalaine simply shifting her sights outward. All now looked out for a few brief moments in the direction of the sounds before turning away.

“Huh... that’s odd. Someone’s turnin’ up the heat. Eh, ‘lise probbly pissed someone off again. ‘minds me of this time when-”

“DANTEEE!” came a yell from the direction of the explosions.

This time all three of them sat up, looking to see three figures come rushing in at top speed- Fen Rao, Yeager, and Shree. All three were bolting at certainly above human speeds, skidding to a halt near the boundary where the salt was placed, the younger two huffing as they stopped. Yeager placed a hand on a tree and leaned to it, huffing.

“Wha, back so- what’s up Vamp? Find a twig that looked like a cruci-”

“Cut the crap, Elise needs help pronto!”

Dante shot up in an instant, popping off of the ground and to his feet, glaring out at Fen, “Wha’happened? Why’re you ‘ere?”

“Your Lightonian friend lit up and we had to go-” Yeager choked out.

“She’s fighting that trio group that captured your friends!” Shree quickly added.

“By ‘erself?! Fuck that that crazy bitch, idiot!” Dante barked, tearing off immediately from the campfire and right over the white line, pushing well passed Fen Rao.

“Hey, wait up, I’m going back with you you numskull!” Fen Rao spat out.

“B-but Fen-”

“Shree if we don’t take action now we’re not going to make it out of here and our people will be doomed to the same fate! Those three are too powerful for her to handle on her own. If you’re with me, then lets do this- just stay out of the path of her light!”

“R-right!”

As the three left the area the young princess took a stand, to which her guardian then shot up with a shout, “Adalaine no! This is not-”

“Illiya please, we have to help!”

“Adalaine-”

“Illiya she’s agreed to help us, if we lose her we might not make it out of these woods. Please!”

“Tch-”

The illuminating glow of a brilliant white blade swinging through the ever present sea of dark, clashing with and fending off a strike from a large hook-shaped weapon. A figure whose swing had been blocked, backing away as Elise swung round and blocked another strike with a

black rod from a different assailant. Said striker stumbled away, giving way for the towering Rengard to come in with his broadsword swinging out horizontally.

Her sword swung round, clashing with the massive weapon. A strike with enough force and with the churning of rocks, away sailed Elise through the air. Back she flew, uprooted by the hefty strike. And as she flew, so to did her sword, slashing outwards at the air- and from the blade of her weapon flew a crescent sword slash of light energy screaming through the air, carving right through the branches above the trio. Up they glanced with Rengard even grunting, all bolting away as an avalanche of wood and debris came raining down overtop their position.

“Tch- little brat!” Rengard spat, glancing ahead, his eyes widening, “Hrgh-!?”

Elise hovered in the air right in front of the brute, her left arm already wrapped around her shoulder and swinging right at the vampire’s throat.

“NRGH!”

CLANG!!

His feet ground to a halt, his right arm angled up and pulling his sword up in a bid to block. Elise’s sword slammed hard into the broad flat surface of Rengard’s sword dealing only a slight scratch to his cheek. From there she pulled away, kicking off of the side and launching backwards at Maja.

“MAJA, DODGE!”

The brooding woman looked back, watching as Elise again swung her arm. A good few meters from Maja’s position and out flew another slicing wave of energy damn well airborne.

“GRRRHA!”

One solid leap, taken at the absolute last second. Just as her feet reached a meter into the air that energy slash came screaming by just beneath, the rubber of the bottom of her feet being torn way. Maja’s weight brought her down, right at the time a *SCHLUNG* filled the air, followed by

the crackle of wood and bark. One swift glance behind her proved exactly why, a tree falling right for Maja's position.

"NEH!" she grunted, slamming her left foot to the ground and only her left.

Maja flew to the right, narrowly avoiding as the tree slammed down mere moments after. The branches crackled and splintered into the air near Elise's position, raining down around. The collapse transpired right behind, and not so much as a flicker of concern had crossed her in that time.

The vamp looked up, her hooks slamming onto the ground. Across from Elise stood Rengard with his massive sword in hand, charging forward once again and swinging it down. The light warrior wasted no time, swinging her sword up and bracing, SLAM!! Down came the ax, or in this case the sword. The ground beneath her feet crackled and buckled away, the glow around her sword fading way slightly for only a few brief moments, one hand on her handle and the other on the back of the blade.

"{Hrgh- such force, with just the edge of his blade? His strength is ludicrous!}"

Rengard growled as he continued to press, placing both hands now upon the weapon. His body twitched and roared as he continued to apply force. All the while Elise's legs buckled back; though not yet giving in. Her eyes flashed, her legs giving.

Onto her back she fell; though as she did a single kick was sent forward. From the bottom of her foot flew a light blast straight into Rengard's gut, detonating in an instant. The howl of the muscle man rang out, the clang of his blade on the ground as he himself skidded back. The edge cleaved through rock and ground as it was drug along up until he stopped- whilst for Elise she was rolling from the blast's smoke and spark cloud, on both feet and with a hand unto the ground. The brute blinked, seeing no sword in her hand... and then raising his free hand to his face, a fresh cut now appearing.

"Tch- fucking hell can this girl rock," Rengard chuckled, standing up firm and raising his weapon as behind him the sword Elise had held was now planted in a tree.

Across from him to his right the ground split open, rock and dirt flying up into the air a few meters and splashing back down after, Sereena's form pulling from the ground, "Guh why is that a good thing you chowder brain? Makes our job harder!"

"Bitch you love it when they squirm, don't talk to me like you don't! And why the bloody hell are you in the ground woman?!"

"Fuck you Ren, I don't like getting slapped up with this shit!"

"Tch. Hell, there they go again," Maja grumbled, looking from them to Elise.

"Well it's not my fault if you can't pull your damn wei- wei, wayyyy... guuuuuuh-"

The hulking warrior groaned out, the end of his blade slamming down broadside to the ground as he himself dropped to one knee stumbling forward. One hand slammed down, allowing him to catch himself, spitting up a little afterwards. Vomit, or in this case only the diluted stomach acid, splashed up along his chin and on the ground in front of him. His eyes shook for a moment, his heaving intensifying briefly.

Both Maja and Sereena shot looks up, Maja's stern and serious while Sereena's was more confusion and a splotch of dread.

"What's the matter over there Ren? Pick yourself up already, come on!" Sereena barked.

"Wh-what the ffffuck didja do to me?" he huffed.

"Hmph, so that's how it is," Maja murmured, taking the focus off the giant, "The light blasts from earlier stung but not enough to affect our core constitution, and the only damage dealt so far is-"

Blood trickled from both of the wounds on Rengard's face, one to the left on the jaw and one to the right on the forehead.

"A poisoned blade, no doubt about it. Yet for it to work so fast- I find myself bewildered at that actually."

“A special combination of different plant powders and other extracts. My two favorites are Hemlock and Wolfsbane- I’ll let you do the math on that one.”

“Hemlock alone wouldn’t be so lethal so suddenly, and Wolfsbane wouldn’t take something like us down on its own... unless whatever you’ve bolstered it with both accelerates and amplifies the effects. Most impressive Lightonian.”

“Heh, there are a couple things you’re only grasping at, and one thing you’re completely wrong on. But rather than reveal my secrets at the risk of you learning a flaw and exploiting it-” she spoke, bracing herself, “What I will say, is that I am no Lightonian.”

“Hoh? Well then, you are indeed interesting Elise Bakuuva, most interesting indeed,” Maja chuckled, “Though perhaps it is time we all stop messing around, what say you?”

Behind her, Rengard rose. His massive cleaver slammed into the ground, his silver eye glow beginning to turn orange, veins on his forehead practically popping out. As for Sereena, she merely flipped her hair back and once more picked up the rods. Maja on the flip side, stood with both hooks in hand, angled for attack. Elise was left on her own, without a weapon, standing as she did glancing around.

“You’ve only been playing around?”

“Oh yes. I’ll give you credit kid, that little toxin hurt for just a bit there,” Rengard chuckled.

“It’s pointless little brat. Your light and your poison, they mean **nothing** to the likes of us,” Sereena giggled.

“Heh, yeah, this has been fun kid; but I think it’s time to wrap this up. After all, we need to go hunt down those friends of yours and- ***SCRUNCH*** HUFFWAK!”

Blood sprayed from Rengard’s chest, it coated the broadsword that stuck out from it, it trickled back onto the arm and hand that held the weapon, and it clung on pretty damn well as the figure stepped up, “Well now loog’it what we’ve got ‘ere. Havin’ a round o’ fun without us again kid?”

“Heh,” Elise chuckled, eyes closed and turning her head away, “You always were good at making an entrance... Dante.”

And so it was that there, behind the impaled Rengard, stood Dante- his broadsword sticking through the brute vampire’s back and out the chest.

Battle of the Hollow- A 3-Fold Smackdown!!

A sputter of blood, splattering down his chin and onto his chest. The biological gold poured from the gaping wound despite it being sealed by a sword. The clang of the brute vampire's sword echoed as it fell flat to the ground. His hand journeyed the distance, taking hold of the blade sticking through him, a grunt escaping him.

His face contorted, rage seeping through the expression as he gazed down. His grunts and growls, leaving him and with them went the blade. With firm grip on the blade he placed his strength upon it, shoving it back through. Behind Dante stumbled, the sudden jolt of the force back kicking like a horse at first.

"Dante!" Elise yelled out.

"Gyeh-" the hunter grunted, releasing his hold on the sword and jumping back, just in time for the blade to pop out of Rengard's back and land upon the ground.

"Hmph, a newcomer," Maja grumbled.

"Yeah one of the Lighntonian Girl's friends. How exciting!" Sereena squeed.

"The fuckin 'ell? I know I got the bastard in the heart-" Dante spoke, his face shaking.

"HEHN-" Rengard grunted, chuckling a little after the fact, "You guys don't get it do you?"

As he spoke those words he had begun to reach down, grabbing hold of and hoisting up his massive blade once again. It swung about, the dull back slamming onto his shoulder as he turned himself, glancing back at Dante. Dante's shaking turned into a quiver, watching the flesh around the chest wound move and buckle. Vines of flesh weaving together, the wound disappearing- consumed by the flesh.

"Regeneration-" Dante murmured.

"Very good, verrrry gooood!" Sereena called aloud, clapping her hands now while approaching step by step.

“{*Shot ‘em through the heart, and they didn’t die.* These are the immortals the mayor mentioned; though they are without a doubt Vampiric. What’s the deal?}” Elise thought to herself at once.

“Ya vagabonds ain’t strong enough to be able ta survive that on yer own. Ye’ve got somethin’ extra now doncha?” Dante questioned.

“Well spotted,” Maja spoke up, “We are not Vampires as you understand it. We are not mere false drones wandering this realm, nor are we the truest form of demon that are spoken of in legend. We are simply... enhanced.”

“Enhanced? The hell does that mean?”

“Stick around and find out why doncha,” Sereena laughed.

“Hey now, two on three. That seems hardly fair guys, especially if they have more ants running to join them. What say you, shall we split them up? I call dibs on this guy for running me through the back, that hurt like hell!”

“What, and leave the peons for me? Bleh- oh well, at least I can have a spot of fun with that. Maja seems set on fighting Elise, I don’t feel like pissing her off over that.”

“Please Sereena, you’re too kind.”

“So it’s settled then now is it? Right then, lets have at it!” Rengard yelled, raising his sword up high into the air.

Dante once again blinked, swerving to the left as he did so. The swing of the sword flew down to his right barely missing the fabric of his wear as he moved. One twist and another swing up, another dodge commenced. Dante slipped back with twin daggers slipping from his sleeves.

CLANG

Crossed blades blocking the down swing of the massive sword. Dante dropped to one knee instantly as with only one arm, Rengard pressed with full might down. The tip of the sword alone pressed against the daggers- forcing them closer to Dante’s chest, the sword nearing his face.

“{GYEH- what monstrous strength! I can’t- hrrghyaaa!!}”

His foot flung forward and slammed right into Rengard’s gut with full force; though as it connected the vampire simply did not move an inch. The force of the blade did stop but that was it as it still held position. Standing over him the sword wielder grinned smugly, cackling a little.

“Sorry guy, your friend did that already, HYAAAH!!”

The ground split, Dante’s back slammed, a spot of blood spat up. Rengard’s fist lay in Dante’s gut, the massive sword held out to the right. The brute hung over the hunter, grinning, his teeth bare... though soon enough a trickle of fresh blood streamed between the gaps of the teeth. Rengard pulled away from Dante, placing a hand to his gut where both of the daggers were situated. Smoke rose from the daggers, blue sparks spat out from the impact zones; though even still, Rengard held his grin.

“Heh... blessed daggers?” he mumbled.

“course,” Dante grumbled slowly rising, “Bakuuva ain’t tha only one wit’ them special weapons, and I’ve got plenty more where that came from!”

“HEH!! Oh I just KNEW you were going to be fun!” Rengard laughed, ripping the daggers from his gut and dropping them with clangs to the ground.

Across the way two blurred figures were mixing it up, the clash of weapon to weapon, clang to blang to slang. Katana to the bend, bite to the katana in a swiping motion, a collision of kneecaps and a flurry of kicks. Both flipped away from one another and landed atop the same tree branch- both bolting back at each other. The sway and the swish of Maja’s hooks through the air, the reverse sword grip and swings of Elise.

Both landed before one another, the swing of Elise’s sword now in her right against the bend of Maja’s left hook. One quick shout from Elise, a single HA and her left swung forward. From her palm fired a blast of Light Energy point blank into Maja’s gut. Backwards the heels of Maja dug into the bark, a very evident scorch mark present there over the impact point. Large hooks still in hand, smoke rolling, the damage healing.

“You know what I don’t get, the use of hooks instead of something like sickles. Doesn’t seem very productive in a fight!”

“Oh, trust me, they more than get the job done,” Maja spoke with a smirk, raising them up.

“So far, I can’t quite tell how Blake and the others would’ve lost to you three,” she replied in counter, raising her katana as the white glow radiating out of it grew duller, weaker, almost translucent.

“Hmm? Seems like you’re running out of light power. I suppose without sunlight you can’t keep restoring that power. Or perhaps you’re simply not taking this seriously anymore. Well no matter. You have your tricks and we have ours, little girl.”

Maja’s eyes shifted up, looking beyond Elise. Elise blinked in that moment, the sound of rushing winds behind her. One swift glance back came the revelation of multiple figures moving through the air and coming down upon her, low moans and groans. The snarls of dark green fire from corpses aplenty, all armed with melee weapons ranging from swords to pikes.

Wires flung around and crossed, coated in the flames. Elise’s head whirled back and in a split second she flickered out of sight, dodging as the ambush came crashing down. Moments later her form appeared again in a different tree allowing for perfect view. The mobs of undead there having done super leaps, the swarm on the ground once more moving, and the source of the wires.

Jaxx, muddled and bloodied, stepping out of the hole in the ground he had been blown into. Then out of the corner came the big tough guy from before. From a hole crawled Anne, and from another the last member aside from Ant himself. As for Ant- he crawled forward on the branch. His skin blackened, his skull... partially visible. He looked up, the eye on the side that shown only skull now blood shot as he locked onto Elise.

Many trees below with the lot of them had begun to split open, blood pouring out and gushing with fresh new bodies all animating with those dark green flames. More and more wires present, all connecting back further in the woods. Some bodies marched forward towards Elise’s

direction, and others back the other way- further far far out a horde of them lingered, surrounding none other than the trio of knights themselves. Wires ran up a tree, connecting back to the sitting figure of Vamu, a smug expression crossing him- and at that time so too did the others come in.

Drake, Hanz, Da'Shire, and Megan. They all surrounded that mob of undead which surrounded the trio of knights. And there, there right behind that group even, another squad of five present mixed into the trees. Dozens upon dozens upon even more dozens of bodies all brought to life with the dark green flames glowing around their eyes and pores.

Elise stammered, glancing up. Wires, coated in a dark blue flame that appeared almost purple- wires flowing through the air and connecting to none other than Jaxx's team. Multiple embedded themselves within Ant, and several flocked around Jaxx. These wires traced up to another branch where there- sat with her legs swung over the branch and dangling, another puppeteer.

Her attention turned back, looking to Dante as he rose up huffing, and then over to Maja who stood there with an ear to ear grin. Maja's arms waved from her body and stretched out, beckoning or so it seemed.

"HEH," Rengard chuckled as he stepped forward towards the injured Dante, "Come into OUR forest and think you can take US out? Nah nah nah, that's not how this works."

Rengard held his sword out, pointing the tip ahead at Dante, snickering to himself. All the while Dante kept huffing, a hand over his gut as he breathed in and out. Across the way, Sereena stood with her arms crossed in an ever so smug way.

"We took your friends out because we're strong- each squad is capable of raising countless dead through the roots of this forest, and with Sasha up there strengthening them- it becomes downright hard to keep us down! And as for us three- well..."

Sereena's grin grew wide upon a sudden, her teeth grew sharper and grew- almost becoming canine-like in appearance. Her eyes shifted, the pupils becoming slits, grayish hair starting to sprout around the right side of her face, her ears growing outward. As this happened to

her, Rengard's teeth also changed and a brownish hair began to cover him- primarily his arms and face. Maja herself remained unchanged, facing Elise at the present with a hold gaze and the hooks raised.

"Zaherian," Elise mumbled.

The warrior of light shifted sights, looking Sereena to Rengard, back up to Maja and to the undead across the way, to this 'Sasha' above, to the ground once more where Dante stood surrounded. One final look over to the other battle waging on for the trio of knights before her sights set back to Maja.

"So what are you gonna do, GIRLIE?!" Sereena mocked with her canine grin, glaring practically up at Elise.

Elise herself turned herself, looking down upon Sereena at that point with sword raised.

"What, cat got your tongue? Have I struck a nerve brat?! Heh, well come on down here and try me, I dare you!" she laughed.

"Truth of the matter is that I don't see an easy way out of this. You guys have a lot of undead you can freely spawn, and then there are you heavy hitters. No doubt the one above could even enhance you three if you somehow got beat or killed... and yet-"

"Hmm?" Maja mumbled, raising her eyebrows.

"You're not going to kill us that easily," she spoke, eyes stern and set.

"Huuuuuhhhhh?" Sereena cooed.

Her grip tightened, the buzz of white light crackling from hilt to blade tip with an explosive rage. The crackle of wood, almost like tile breaking. The blurred bolt of white fury, Elise, shot through the air with a single leap. Her blade crossed before her in readiness, set to swing as she came up on Sasha's position.

SCHWIIIIIIING--- CLANG!!!

Elise's katana slammed into solid metal. Maja, squatted down in front of Sasha, arms raised high and weapons crossed. Elise's gritted teeth sung, the full force of her swing down on Maja's weapons. Sasha, still sat on the branch, slipped from her spot and flopped below with wires twirling around. Behind the winds swooshed once more, multiple shadows coming at her from behind at once.

Her lips curled back, her mouth curving. Maja's expression deadened, looking to the newly formed grin. The light of the blade sparked and zing-ed, radiating like a saw's blade.

"Howling Flash!" Elise yelled, the light roaring out and pouring over Maja's hooks.

The latter's eyes widened as the light engulfed- an explosion erupting out point blank. Both Elise and Maja swallowed up, the approaching shadows blown back. Sharp winds smacked into Sasha herself- flinging her right off the way, her wires skidding and lashing against the tree's wood as they became bound.

"Maja!" Rengard yelled from below, looking up as debris came raining down from the still-visible explosion.

"Gyuh- turnin' your back on yer opponent? Thas dumb, Zaherian," Dante wheezed.

"Huh?" Rengard grumbled, turning his head over his shoulder, casting sight upon the stumbling Dante.

He stood there with a huff and a puff, unarmed and staggering ever so. Rengard's own position shifted, the brute turning round and facing the surrounded hunter. Present- the biggest smile with the most intense narrowed focus, whilst Rengard wore only a hollowed reflection and a raised eye.

"Who the hell are you to talk *Hunter*? With the absolute pounding I just dished you?"

"Hell, your mama pounds harder than that!"

"Tch- playground insults? I thought you were better than that. Oh well," he grumbled, slamming his foot down, "Kill this fool already!"

The figures all around Dante began to stumble at first, then swiftly they broke into definite runs. Their steps echoed around the smirking schmuck, arms raised, snarling and howling. His eyes slipped and became blazen, his knees buckling. To the ground Dante dropped of his own accord, both of his hands slammed upon the earth below.

“Eighteen Pillar Trap!”

The ground rumbled, rocks and dirt flying into the air. Pikes of rock blew out of the ground all in a radius around Dante, skewering and slicing through the encroaching undead. Their moans and groans wailed out as they became hoisted high into the air, the pikes of earth increasing in size as they grew from the ground. Rengard blanked, bright high beams protruding from his face and reflecting the very instant in which the undead surplus crumbled.

“Your damn Infernals are no better than *Ghouls*. Mindless simple puppets, fun to slice but far too easy-”

“Well well, a Power User. Guess that makes this a little more interesting,” Rengard chuckled, raising his sword.

One quick step forward and a swing, the crashing sound of rocks and breaking concrete. Apart several pillars fell in one swing leaving a wide open gap between the two combatants, the latter of whom was once again standing with a smug grin.

“Heh, round two then aye?”

“You betcha-” Dante grumbled, raising a new broadsword.

In a blur, both flew into one another, their swords colliding. Sparks from the collision sprung out and littered the lands, whilst high above a body flew right on by with a spray of crimson like a cloud raining. It crashed unnoticed, the direction of which it originated from signifying itself with many more bodies being ripped about and flung like litter.

SMASH, CRASH, VASHFUL BASH!!

Bodies were ripped to pieces and scattered about. The groans of the undead as heads flew off and limbs dropped. Torsos torn from legs and sent afar. The trio of knights zipped round, the massive crowd surrounding. One ax swing and down went five with deep gashes, the twirl of a dual ended halberd and away flew several heads, the swing of a scythe and apart went several torsos cut clean through.

Fen Rao shot backwards through the crowd, slamming his elbow into the gut of one undead. A swift turn round and the SWING of his ax sent a couple of bodies tumbling back. His ax curled back, slamming into a thrust from Drake's saber; though the elder knight's attention soon was torn again. Another figure bolted out and slammed into him with a shoulder charge, the momentum behind sending Rao from his feet.

His teeth grit together as he looked upon Hanz, then just behind at the dance of arrows marching in. Another swing and all were deflected away by the time Fen touched back down, all in time as more undead made their way forward. His teeth continued to grit and another swing launched sending another batch of minions to the ground.

Across the battle zone both Shree and Yeager fought back to back. Wide swings out and right into the crowd of charging foes. Upon them came three of the fighters of the new group. The spin of the halberd before her caught the strikes of two whilst the swing of his scythe countered the attempted edge of the third.

Yeager stumbled, scythe held at the ready and immediately swung through more undead, "HUAH-uff! Good Christ, their numbers aren't thinning in the slightest!"

Behind him came more, striking at his back with drawn swords. He stepped and turned, striking through as his armor was struck. A slight stumble followed with more of the undead coming in. A quick glance up and for as quickly as they had moved they were then dropped.

Shree dropped down, twirling her weapon and slowly hovering to the ground as she did so, "Watch your back Yeag, you're moving too slow!"

Dings covered the shoulder guards and front of his armor, several holes in the cape on the back. Even a few cuts to the sides of his face were present as she looked him over with one glance. For her there were little to no dings whatsoever.

“Well what do you friggen expect Shree? I’m still injured here!”

“Dammit! Damn them!”

A slew of bodies flew around the two and crashed into the wall of minions before, knocking many of them away. Behind with ax in hand strutted forth Fen Rao, moving swiftly passed a few still crawling on the ground.

“Their numbers are not more than a diversion! Their main squad waits for us to be bogged down and then they attack. Meanwhile they use the numbers to keep us from reaching the casters of the Infernal Resurrection Technique. We need to come together and punch through- if we can take just one out their units will be depleted by half!”

“They’re all just human, it shouldn’t be this hard,” Shree murmured.

“Damn skippy so lets do what Fen says and take out one of the puppeteers!”

“An interesting strategy, I wonder if it will play out~” cooed the nearby Sereena, who had begun approaching step by step still wearing her grin.

The trio of knights turned, looking to the approaching foe, scowls forging as they did so.

“{Dammit, this is bad!}” Fen Rao exclaimed to himself.

The Switch

Sereena's steps ceased, the crowd of undead parted and standing to either left or right. None made a move before the Vampiress or the Vampire Knights, both parties now standing in opposition to one another. Shree's halberd raised out and Yeager's scythe held up with both hands, the ax of Rao held like a hammer might be, twin black rods belonging to Sereena held straight like daggers.

The rods twirled in her hands, rolling round until in position, her smug smile arching round. Yeager stepped ahead with his good foot, holding back the snapped. Shree on the other hand took forward and spun the halberd in hand until grabbing on with both hands.

"No," Rao spoke, stepping up with his ax slamming down.

"Fen- you can't be serious!" Shree shouted.

"Hoh? Hoh hoh hoh, ha ha that's RICH! What the old man is going to throw down with me to protect the kiddies? Oh how delicious!" Sereena laughed.

"Look sir, there's no way we're going to let you take that psycho bitch on alone. Let us back you up!"

"There is no need for that Yeager. You and Shree need to hold stead until the time arrives... I will handle this one myself."

"What, so the old man thinks he can tango? Alright, that's fine. I was getting bored watching Maja and Rengard have all the fun. I'll be sure to make this hurt~"

"You two look out for one another, this child is mine!"

Two distinct booms echoed, both Vampires darting at one another. The clack of their wears and the shimmer of their metals. **CLANG!**

The swing of his ax up and into her twin rods, the forces equal, the strikes neutralizing one another. The quiver of her arms, the shake of his one, their feet grinding into the ground and locking. Her expression flexed and open, his stern and cold.

“What?!” Sereena exasperated.

“Shocking isn’t it? How in the worlds could a nobody who doesn’t even drink from humans... possibly block your strikes?” he murmured, raising his second hand to the grip of his weapon, “You people look to it as a cheap gimmick for power, whereas I-”

“Hngh-”

SCHHHHLIIIIIIIIIIIIING!!! Clang bang rang-

The spray of scarlet in the air- backwards Sereena stumbled with a sizable gash in her chest, Fen remaining positioned post-swing as he looked upon her, “A cheap shortcut will never measure up for true dedication and discipline!”

Smoke streamed from the wound as did her own blood- spattering across the ground, a shot of screams escaping her briefly. The glow of the ax as the blood burned away, her hand raised to the chest wound immediately. The drip of blood from the wound to the ground, the flesh writhing and slithering. Her expression blank, mouth hung only a slight, the glimmer of her sights hidden by the dark.

“A-heh,” she jolted, sloshing forward, “Heeheehee~”

“What?” Fen Rao growled, watching her lips curl back into a smile, her head tilting back.

“Heh heh heh heh heh... alright. Maybe I’ll take back some of my assumptions old timer, hurgh-” she grunted, slumping forward as the flesh closed the wound up, “However-”

“GAH!” Rao cried out, his gut heaving.

The elder knight’s form flew back through the air. Before his former position stood Sereena with a leg up, a leg now covered in gray fur- claws sticking right out of her new paws with blood trickling from them. The thunk and clang of his armor, like cans banging into a wall, his back against a tree.

Clang!!

“HOWUAAAH!!” Fen Rao wailed out.

Blood slipped from his gut, pooling around and dripping from a set of black claws that dug straight into him. Sereena stood with an ear to ear grin, a snout emerging from her face which fur now began to cover.

“Oh what’s wrong, you were talking like you were some kind of big shot a minute ago. Did I get under your skin? Heh ha!” she laughed.

His grunts echoed, looking down to the clawed hand digging straight into his stomach. His chest plate hung crumpled and cracked, caved by the force of the blow; and now with his back to the wall his life essence had begun to slip out onto the ground by the daggers digging into his insides.

“We’re not *normal* fucking Vampires old man, we’re well and truly enhanced!! Your enchanted and blessed weapons don’t mean shit. This isn’t a simple power grab!”

Her hand dug in deeper, a howl leaving Fen Rao as she did so.

“Master!” Yeager yelled.

Her arm retracted, claws covered in the knight’s blood, her wolf faced grin intensifying. A giggle escaped, her hand swatting forward. Claws dug into the skin of his face, four long lines being carved in as she swung from the upper right to the lower left. A backhand followed, knocking him away.

“That tears it, lets get this bitch Shree!”

“Right!”

Both raised their weapons and both began to charge, their metals clanging around as they went in after Sereena. The Wulf’n Vampire turned, licking her claws of the blood stained upon them.

“Oh by all means, give it your best shot!” she wailed, claws jetting from both hands and feet.

“Don’t you touch them!” Rao barked, jumping forward.

“Oh please-” she grumbled, swinging around with her claws.

!Clunk!

“What?!” Serenna howled out.

Fen Rao blinked, his armor rattling as he hobbled back a few paces. Across the way both of his students drew to a halt just the same, big eyed and stirred. The Wulf’n Vampire’s claws rattled against the metal that blocked her way to Fen Rao’s body. Stationed between the two combatants was Elise, her sword held defensively at an angle with only a single hand placed upon it.

She stared into Sereena’s eyes blankly, if not a little stern. Up above in the ranks of the puppeteers, Maja stood with a huff, her hooks raised up, a look of bewilderment washing over her just the same.

“E-Elise?” Shree murmured across the way.

“Bakuuva?” Rao questioned.

“Sorry it took so long, Fen; but I needed to be sure about this,” Elise murmured calmly.

“What are-” he began before pausing, his iron clad gaze expanding with the inaudible sound of a click.

“Dante, we’re done here!” Elise called out, the battle between her friend and the other Vampire no longer in view, instead echoing in the far back.

“Done here? HA! The hell does that mean little pup? You’ve been on the back burner this entire time. Maja has been playing with you like an infant does their food. You think you’re gonna run, is that it?!”

“Just stop talking, your voice is agitating” she murmured in response, sights fixed on Sereena.

“Oh what, you think you’re going to pull something grand out of your-”

“Still not getting it? ***Sigh*** We’ve been holding back this entire time.”

“What?!” Sereena barked.

“Hrmm?” Maja murmured high up above, looking down still.

“Since you defeated our friends, we thought it best to hold back and play with our best cards held close- just in case; but your power so far- and with you about to kill Fen just now, that play is up.”

“HA! You’re bluffing right? A quick attempt to intimidate us to back out? Not happening little worm.”

“***Sigh*** Holly was right about that one. The arrogant will cling to their beliefs in their own power, even if it costs them everything. Oh well, can’t say I don’t welcome it-”

A glimmer of white light poured along the edge of her blade, the slightest of auras coating her body. Her katana held in reverse grip as she stepped back a pace, preparing her stance and ready to swing forward. Sereena’s right arm swung up and out, her mouth parting with blood and spit splattering out. The Wulf’n’s entire force behind that swing with a near pounce forward. The emerald glow, pulsing for a brief instant, the light pushing forward.

Shling-eeeng... thump bump-

The tip of her katana passed before the chin of Sereena, nicking a few hairs. The squirt of crimson hue, the warmth trickling back along the shoulder of her arm. Elise skid by without so much as a drop on her face as she stepped behind Sereena. A downward swing, flickering through the air as the thumping roll bounced off the trees.

“Hoah EEEEEYAAAAAAAAAAAA-” Sereena began to cry out.

A stump raised into the air, rockets of red pumping out of what remained of her arm as the full body of what once was rolled out onto the grass with a twitch. She stepped back, blood still spraying right out, the echo of her scream flying off the forest around her, a blood curdling scream.

Her voice becoming rasp as she trailed on, her remaining hand clutching at the torn fabric and the exposed bone.

The pulled back look, her parts practically popping from her body as her caterwaul continued. Sephiroth, the katana, hurled forward with a jet of blood surrounding it like the truest of energy auras- dispersing as the swing was complete with a spatter littering the ground around her.

“Sereena!” Maja called out.

“F-F-FUCKING BITCH!” the disarmed foe wailed.

"Crrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr me a river of blood~" Elise chimed, still monotone and dull.

“I-I’ll fucking spill YOURS!” Sereena spat lunging around with her remaining arm lashing out.

“Doubt it,” Elise concluded taking a single step forward.

Fen Rao blinked once, hoisting himself left mere microseconds after. A mighty hurl and a toss of himself, hitting the deck just then as a blast of light rippled from Sereena's back. A straight line of light in a mighty flying slash ripped through, crashing back into the trees. At first a few trees stood anchored, blocking part of the line whilst the rest shot further back into other trees before at last fading out. Bark broke from the slashes that carved into the trunks, littering the ground.

Elise's left arm lowered to her side, sword still in hand though now positioned normally rather than in reverse grip. Sereena stood in place, her hair flapping, her teeth gritted. Silence... Blood trickled from her teeth, then from her wrist, just along the arm after the shoulder, and right from the middle of her chest.

Thick strands of black and red slopped off and hit the ground, some blown in the wind. A rattle came, tips of her wolf claws hitting the ground below... and then she went. Her hand slid from the wrist as her arm buckled and broke off. Her weight carried her down to her knees, slumping back as the top half of her body above the chest slopped off.

Sereena fell to the ground in pieces, a cough of blood escaping her mouth- her jaw wrenching open without a sound. All that could be heard through the silence of the woods was the sound of meat hitting the ground- the form of Sereena now scattered as bits.