

Act 3- Changing Tides

Chapter XXVIII

Change had begun across the valley. In the weeks since her training began, the greens of the trees had begun to turn yellow and orange. Caribou had begun to move in vast numbers. The grasses had begun to die back turning into oranges and reds of their own. Despite the changes, not much else differed.

Much was the same below. The forest was much the same. The people of Emerton continued on as they would at any other day. The animals of the area moved mostly the same. As for Elise, much had remained the same as well.

Both Alto and Elise moved through the woods, baskets upon their backs filled with sticks, several canisters of water attached to the sides of their baskets. Both carried on looking around and then moving forward. The sun now high in the air shined down upon the two casting its warmth and providing wildlife with some excitement.

She smiled looking around with not a drop of tension in her body, Alto with a rather bland expression that seemed empty as he looked around. She glanced back once at him with a grin as she caught notice of his look. An eyebrow raised on his face, “What?”

“You seem to be put off. Are my weekly chores too boring for you?”

“The hell are these stupid chores? Why do you not have a cart or anything to really assist you, hack!”

“Cart broke, gotta do it by hand and foot with no help.”

“This is horrid!”

“Oh man, you’ve no idea. Vulper DOES have a cart but, it’s only for meat collection. Speaking of which, there’s a deer about two hundred meters off to your left. If you’d be so kind Alto?”

“Ugh,” he groaned, turning to his left, “Fine fine. I take it back, these are hard enough without my interference. Never again!”

With that howl he wandered away, disappearing over the tree line. Elise chuckled, turning to her right where she then began to move towards. She ran down a trail, the colors of the forest all around. The variety in colors of the flowers, the motion of wildlife, the sounds of nature. Her ran became a casual stroll as she moved along.

The sun shined brilliantly above, snaking through the trees in such a way that a lit path lie before her feet. Birds flew overhead, her gaze now upon them as they flocked away, “So peaceful,” she murmured to herself as she moved, the sun’s warmth washing over her.

On and on, smiles and warmth, her sweater gradually sliding down though not completely. Seconds had turned into minutes as she moved, still far from out of breath. As she moved, she remained unaware as a presence stretched nearby. In the shadows a figure stood, one observing her as she moved.

Her movement stopped, her feet stationary, her mind focused. Her torso tilted left as did her head, eyes gazing back. Behind her were large gray wolves in the distance, exceptionally large standing at about two meters in height. Several had been observing her, several which then turned and darted off at once, “Wolves?”

Her pulse quickened as she turned around completely, the sound of a twig snapping relatively close, followed by only a single crunching foot step. Brush brushed against itself behind, and not via wind. She looked off to the brush, eyes set, “Whoever you are you can stop staring. I know you’re there.”

“I apologize,” came the silky smooth response of a female, “It’s not often I just run into people in the wilderness, so I felt curious.”

From the shadows approached a woman dressed in all white: a white great coat, a white shirt, white jeans, white shoes, a white hood that was down, white gloves,

and white socks. Her hair light brown and shoulder length, her eyes a bright pink at the core with a slight purple around them.

“Who are you?”

“I am a simple Sage you might say. Oh but I trust that you’re looking for a name so I shall provide one for you. I was born to the name of Lucy, Lucy Lex Bashwold. And you would be?”

“I’m Elise, Elise Bakuuva.”

The woman halted in plain view, her eyes moving over Elise slowly just as Elise’s scanned over her. A slight smile grew and fell from the woman, “A pleasure to meet you Elise Bakuuva. Might I incline as to what you’re doing out here?”

“Chores mostly. My people require me to gather wood, water, and supplies,” she replied with an adjustment of footing.

“You sound as if you are a servant. Most unfortunate.”

“So I am. Does it matter?”

“I suppose not, each individual has their own ways of living life. Though I will say, not all viewpoints are what they’re cracked up to be, for you never know what lies beyond your solitary confinement.”

“{The devil is this lady?}” Elise thought to herself, looking over the woman one more time.

“Remarkable creatures, aren’t they?”

“Beg pardon?”

“The Amarok, or I guess simply the big gray wolves as most put it.”

“Amarok?”

“Amarok, a term used by the Inuit people. There are many stories about the Amarok, how they can be vengeful yet very helpful. I simply find myself taken aback

by the beauty of a natural world from time to time. They say that if an Amarock takes interest, a person has a very bright future ahead of them potentially.”

“Riiight. Um, sorry but I just-”

“Oh, pardon my ramblings. I understand my words can be simply confusing young Elise. I’m not surprised. Most humans are blind to the words spoken that can mean truly a lot. All I can say is that there is no future in serving a fake people. I can tell by your aura. What you have to try and prove yourself to is not what you see it as truly when you walk among it. You’ll only rise high enough to see the vile nature of what it is you serve and it is not something anyone should have to experience.”

Lucy spoke as she strolled forward passed Elise.

“Most humans... you’re not human I take it?”

“I am something just as all beings are,” Lucy replied from behind, “If you don’t mind, I must be on my way. I am looking for a friend here in these woods.”

“A friend in the woods? Perhaps I can- huh?”

Elise turned her body and looked behind where she was positioned, gaze following the path taken by Lucy. As she finished her turn, the woman was gone. Elise’s eyes darted around, finding absolutely nothing. No tracks, no brush, not a single sign that the lady had been there. She stepped back, looking next to where the Amarock had been. Nothing.

Her head shaking she slowly moved away, “Well that was... weird. That woman, she wasn’t human was she? The way she spoke, no way she was. Crap, who the hell was that? Is she-”

“Elise!” came the call of Alto.

She spun around again to meet his approach. Her head tilted, eyes shifting and looking right around him. He approached with nothing but the clothes he had on, “Alto? Where’s-”

“Oh uh, right. I uh, I ran into a member of your clan. Big guy in a black trench coat.”

“Vulper?”

“Yeah, that’s the guy. He took what I had and the deer, put it all on a cart. He told me to find you and deliver a message real quick. The guy wants to talk to you about something.”

“Something?”

“Yeah, he didn’t say what.”

“Oh no... what could I have done this time?”

“Eh don’t worry about it. He didn’t sound angry; though he does want you back at the caves ASAP.”

“Gotcha... let’s meet up again tomorrow then for another day of training alright?”

“Heh, sounds good. Good luck Elise,” Alto chimed as Elise strolled right by him, heading off for the mountains.

Chapter XXIX

“Loserlise, loserlise, loserlise, hahahaha.”

“Eat it Belama,” Elise grumbled.

“Oh, is that an invitation? Nah, sorry, beanpoles aren’t my thing.

Besides, I’m not into the gays,” the woman chuckled back.

“Your use of being gay as an insult is disgusting. There’s nothing wrong with that,” Elise grumbled back.

The woman bent forward over Elise with a smirk. Both stared at each other for a short while, eye contact not breaking for even a blink. Finally Elise turned way, “Witch,” she muttered looking to the female who towered above her one last time before walking away.

“Hey weakling, I’m talking to you!”

“Ha, let it go Belama,” came the voice of Rusty from behind.

Belama’s head turned, taking full view of Rusty. In the meantime Elise continued ahead a few paces, coming to a halt though with the feeling of Rusty’s stare.

“Ah sorry man but I don’t like crippled weak crap,” Belama chuckled.

“No Drachen likes a weak Drachen. If we keep on with her and eventually, EVENTUALLY she might get the clue that none of us want her here eh?”

“Eat a dick brother,” Elise growled carrying on ahead, “You people can all go to hell.”

“Oh and Elise, you really should learn to keep better company. That little dog friend of yours, Alto was it? He’s not someone you should be hanging around with. Who knows what kind of trouble that one brings to the table, eh?”

“Oh bite me.”

“C-c-can I? O-o-oh please Elise, c-can I g-give you a hug? Hahaha! She was smart to try and die knowing what we do to traitors but hell, she couldn’t even kill herself right. Vulper reckoned that she was alive for days unable to move while every living thing in those woods ate off of her, haha!” Belama laughed.

Elise stopped, turning sharply with eyes full of fire. Belama went on, "Such a failure that she couldn't even kill herself right, the wolves did it for her. Now she's just shit and a corpse on the forest floor, hahaha!"

Elise turned fully with a growl, her hands forming into fists with nails digging into her own skin. She shook, violently with that turn. Belama’s widened a smidgen, her posture softening, her feet dragging back a half pace. Elise opened her mouth and spat back, “You old hag, I’ll break your god damn back and throw you down a pit!”

“Try me little girl, I’ll show you how frightening adults can be in this world!”

“Alright that’s enough you lot!” came the bark of Vulper, who turned around a corner.

Those present before Elise stood at attention at the sight of Vulper, even Rusty. He moved closer, barking, “I thought I assigned you lot your orders already. Hop to it!”

“Yes sir!” they all barked, quickly flipping around to depart.

Rusty backed away, the last to leave. His eyes moved from Vulper to Elise, then back to Vulper. With a scoff, he was gone. Vulper stood with arms crossed, his eyes burning and glaring upon Elise. She turned to face him, expression locked, arms at her sides, “Vulper.”

“Sorry about that Elise,” he replied, “Elise, I want to talk to you if I might be allowed to do so.”

“Well everyone else seems to enjoy spitting out whatever they want so go ahead I guess.”

“Come, we’ll walk and talk,” he said with a turn, walking down the tunnel.

Elise sighed and followed. They moved down the hall casually, turning only once. As they moved, Vulper began, “So I can’t help but notice you’ve acquired a katana and a novel about self-defense.”

“What are you looking through the stuff in my room? I don’t know how to-”

“Lord Bakuva’s orders, I look through everyone’s stuff in case of an uprising.”

“Disgusting. Ugh, what do you want?”

“Curiosity. I take it that you’ve been trying to learn to fight, a good start. Now I’m just curious about what you’re learning. Clearly you have the help of that Alto boy so I expect the results should be good.”

Elise turned her head, not saying a word. Vulper turned his own head back to look upon her, and continued on, “I’m not like many of the feeble minded people of the clan. I recognize potential when I see it. You have my

support right now, regardless of what you end up doing so long as it benefits Vulfax. Now I'd like to ask again, what have you been learning?"

She looked back ahead at him, "Defensive Postures for Fencing, Quick Strikes, Thrusts, and Body Movement Observation."

"Good good, those are basics and very important. So what technique have you been practicing?"

"Aikido spoke to me along with Jiu Jitsu and Judo. I looked at Taekwondo but I don't really think kicking high would suit me."

"Anything offensive?"

"Krav Maga and Wing Chun. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is another I found interesting. Really they all kind of sound similar but they do have these distinct differences that set them apart. I like the idea of using my opponent's own weight against them and all that."

"Anything specific towards offense?"

"Oh. Uhhh Muay Thai I believe is the name. That one is about using your body as a weapon like say turning your hand into a dagger or something."

Vulper broke out into laughter as they continued on through the tunnels. The flames around them crackled, a few of the Vulfax members looking at Vulper with eyebrows raised. Elise glanced around, a little red in the face; though still following. Finally Vulper continued on with a clap, "Amazing, you've picked nothing aggressive. And yet that suits you just fine I suppose. Then again it is a belief that the best offensive is a good defense. Still, might I offer some advice?"

"Of course."

“Don’t focus your all on your body. Train your mind first and foremost.”

“Alto has said the same thing to me, trying to break my body and my mind to get me to move forward. Why is that?”

“Need you even ask? I thought you were the smart one. Heh, well. The mind is a tricky thing. Or to be more specific, what we do with our mind is the tricky thing. See, people like you often place mental limiters as to what you can and can’t do. Now obviously there are cases where those limiters are real. The odds of a homeless man becoming a billionaire are slim; though if they look in the right places, they might be able to find a home of some sort.”

She looked at him head on, arms crossing, her head shaking. Vulper moved on with his own arms well-crossed behind his back. He continued on, “Once you are broken to some degree, you either fall flat on your arse or you get up and go in swinging. You’ve already been pushed by all the crap you get around here. I remember when you were barely passed my waistline and you were already being pushed to near death.”

“I’m aware. So your point is I should have an open mind?”

“Listen Elise. A warrior can have all the strength in the world but if they lack an ideal mind or drive then that power is meaningless. Right now you’ve got both, and you’re developed enough to do something about your misfortune. You’re ready to bash someone’s brains in in a fight, even with so little experience. Smarts of course also play a factor in proper battle. For example again, if a person is up against an opponent stronger or smarter than them. Might I recommend figuring out proper strategies or focusing exclusively on outsmarting your enemies?”

“I guess that makes sense.”

Vulper came to a halt at a fork in the path, one tunnel going left and the other right. His arms crossed as he let forth a sigh, “You’ve come further along than I thought you would girl. I know you’ve only been training for a couple weeks but, like all animals, we are born with a hidden instinct. House cats have the tenacity of a wild tiger if put right to it. Humans, supernatural or not, are no different. Other than the Drachen, all have come from dirty ape people, unless you’re a creationist. We all have that instinct. You’ve always been capable, and by being broken time and time again... and especially by Alto’s work, you’re getting closer and closer to achieving what you desire.”

“I’m only a little over a month into this Vulper, I don’t-”

“Look, I know why you’re actually doing this, I just didn’t want to have to spit it out. I know you’re wanting to get stronger after what happened with Elen.”

Elise said nothing, simply turning a glance further towards the darkness down a ways.

“Some have been pushing you to fight. You’ve thought about being stronger for yourself and for Vulfax. Up until you found Elen dead by her own hand, you weren’t set. Now you want nothing more than to grow stronger for sake of those you hold dear.”

“... yes,” she simply replied.

“Attaining power for those you love, so none else pass on, it’s good. I’m glad you’re jumping to it finally. Love and friendship. I’m no reader but I know people often call that a joke or a floap.”

“Trope.”

“Right right. Well, even so, it’s a good one. See, when you have something to protect, or someone, you work quicker and harder. Given enough time, you’ll surpass anyone in Vulfax. I have faith in that, and in you.”

Elise turned back to face Vulper, her eyes more open and slightly shaken. Vulper nodded. A smile crept forth from her with a, “Thank you.”

“Instinct and smarts are absolute. And to test this, well, report to Combat Cavern B. Thomas and Destiny are there waiting for you, ready to push you. If you are successful at holding them back together, then you are close to ready. Take any and all time you need after to perfect your craft though as they’re only novices like yourself. Well I have to be going now. All I can say is to do your best, and that I look forward to seeing your progress Miss Bakuuva.”

“Heh, thank you Vulper. I’m not really used to anyone giving me genuine advice. Most people just tell me to drop dead.”

“Again, I know potential when I see it. Those who are wounded fight back the hardest after all,” he chuckled heading to the left, “Carry on Miss Bakuuva, carry on.”

Chapter XXX

“Haa. Hyahh, ya!”

The clashing of blades could be heard, the sound of fists being caught and kicks being blocked within an echoing tunnel. The tunnels of Vulfax, where the clanging of metal on metal roared. Down the bends and passed the torches it grew louder and louder as it went deeper into the tunnel system. Rock crumbled as at once the sound of a blade slamming against the rocky surfaces could be heard with a loud scrape.

Another kick was heard being blocked followed by the sound of shuffling feet. The sounds originated from a rather large cavern as three people danced around with weapons drawn. Elise flipped backward with a toss from her right hand with a katana in the left. Landing upon both feet she swung out, the edge meeting the edges of two other weapons held by Thomas and Destiny.

Destiny held a small hand ax while Thomas wielded a simple set of twin daggers. The two flipped backwards away from Elise who remained stationary now, breathing a little coarse as they moved. She coughed once as her katana raised up in front of her. Destiny smiled slightly with a nod.

Thomas gave a nod, “Well parried Elise, I’m actually amazed.”

“Thomas,” she coughed before letting out a sigh, standing firm again with normal breathing once more, “I’m a very quick learner. Blocking isn’t that difficult once you wrap your mind around it.”

“Did she really just insult me Destiny?”

“Only if you consider it an insult Thomas. She wasn’t insulting your intelligence directly I don’t believe.”

“Well so long as- wait, directly? Destiny!”

“Allow me to speak my thoughts on the matter Thomas. It’s only offensive if you let it offend you. Now what’s next?”

“Well you could try and come at us?”

“Hmm, alright let’s try that then.”

Elise shot forward quickly, her torso ducking left as her legs continued to move. With but a leap she spun into the air twirling around as she came at both Destiny and Thomas. Destiny took a jump back as Thomas raised his blades. Elise swung her own.

CLANG

Her katana locked with the twin daggers as she came down, the force driving him back at once with a slight skid of the feet. With teeth gritted he stepped forward at once with a push back. Both held point, Elise forcing the katana down with one hand on the hilt only while Thomas continues to hold back with both blades.

“Good lord you’re pretty strong,” he grunted pushing back.

“I walk kilometers a week carrying water for the clan and other things, why wouldn’t I be?” she quickly remarked back pressing Thomas harder.

“Ha what’s wrong Thomas? Going to let yourself get beat by a girl?”
Destiny laughed.

“Shut up Destiny I’ve got this. What the wha-”

All at once his footing was lost resulting in him stumbling back. Another crash down into his daggers sent him dropping as Elise held her katana’s tip above Thomas’s throat as he crashed down. A smile rested upon her

face as her eyes seemed to dance, “Distraction is the number one danger in battle.”

“Yeah but letting little Miss Nothing fight is just as bad,” came a laughed followed by several others.

Attentions turned and focused upon an approaching group. Several entered the room putting Elise on edge quickly, “Why are you here Gulfer?”

“We came by to see little Miss Nothing flop. Also we came to report that Rusty got his face beat in by Sacho again.”

“Again? Doesn’t he ever learn?” Elise growled.

“Rusty just keeps on challenging Sacho, I don’t get why he keeps challenging someone he can never beat. I suppose anyone who could beat Sacho though would go at the top of Rusty’s shit list,” Thomas grumbled.

“That’s a reasonable assumption, him and his- huh?”

“Elise?”

“{Anyone who could defeat Sacho would not only be better than father’s second born, but also would be responsible for defeating an Elite. That would be recognition for sure. Would I stand a chance though?} Hit me harder guys!”

With shrugs, both Destiny and Thomas flew back at Elise with weapons flying, clashing with her katana. Her katana swung with blinding force, slamming against both their weapons as both blocked together. She held stance, feet planted, both hands on her weapon. She looked down at the ground with half closed eyes as the two pushed at her.

At once she flipped backwards, kicking off of Thomas. Onto both feet, she blocked as Destiny shot in and swung. A block. She stumbled back as

Thomas swung in too, both knocking her back. Her katana practically flew from her hands, her right holding tightly right at the edge. Both swung again, nailing the ground as Elise spun round to re-wield the weapon.

“{Not good enough, not good enough! Ugh, I’d need a plan to defeat Sacho, a damn good one. Dammit, of course not. I don’t have the experience to take down someone who isn’t a newling. At best I’d just get one hit or maybe two. Come on, think back Elise. You’ve had plenty of good advice thrown your way as of late. What was it that Vulper last said again? Ah yeah, he had said to not worry as much about my body, to train my mind.}”

“First is that you don’t focus as much on your body. Train your mind first and foremost.”

“Why is that?”

“Need you even ask? A warrior can have all the strength in the world but if they lack an ideal mind then that power is meaningless. Smarts of course also play a factor in proper battle. For example again, if a person is up against an opponent stronger or smarter than them. Might I recommend figuring out proper strategies or focusing exclusively on outsmarting your enemies?”

“{If I lack the experience or strength, I need to out think them. That’s one of the things he was getting at right? Strategy would be the key. But that’s basic to fighting. On the plus side if I find something good it would probably work. Most in this backwater hellhole would take me lightly, that’s the key I need.}”

Her mind flashed, drifting back. Mental pictures popped into her head, pictures of the novels of her past. *Herbs, The Art of Healing 101, Crackpot Crackers to Herbs, Canada's Wilderness.*

"{Hemlock,}" she thought with a blink, "{That could work but what if I'm unable to land a hit? No wait. Distraction. Right, I've had it in this battle. I got at Thomas while Destiny called him out for being beat by a girl. He lost his stance because of distraction. Sacho wouldn't take me seriously at first if we fought, he considers me lesser than Rusty- no but he'd know something is up if I challenge him out of the blue, right? No, no, my profile is that of a weakling. He'd think nothing of it!}"

Her head perked up. Ahead of her stood both Thomas and Destiny, both out of breath. Her eyes darted off to the side, then right back towards them. Her eyes remained at the ground, at their feet, "{Concentrated Hemlock with plenty of binding agents. I could use that and take him on to insure that- but what if I don't need. No, I will. I need to keep Lucy's words in mind too. So few within the clan would be honorable enough to take the defeat, I will most certainly be needing that. That's it, it's all there!}"

A smile perked up as her eyes returned to life. Thomas and Destiny looked at her, an eye raised a piece. They turned heads, exchanging expressions to one another, then exchanged back to Elise. She stood there, smiling, standing with utter confidence.

"I've figured it out, the perfect sequence," Elise spoke aloud.

"Figured what out?" Destiny questioned.

"I know how to beat Rusty and win over the clan potentially, and it all lies with me defeating Sacho."

“Sacho, are you nuts? Even Rusty can’t beat him, he’s tougher than you!” Thomas spat.

“Tougher yes but not smarter. Not to be too arrogant but I doubt Rusty would consider tactics other than brute force. Distraction, alternative weapons, side objectives. If I can win over Sacho, I’ll prove that I’m not just some worthless pawn that can be easily thrown away. Plus, I might have enough recognition so that people leave us alone from now on. And yeah, I know it’ll work. I just need to play my cards proper and hope Rusty doesn’t beat Sacho before I do. I’ll need only one more day of training and preparation, then I’ll be ready.”

“What, you think barely over a month of training can beat Sacho? Man you are crazy,” Thomas laughed.

“Dunno, I think I know what she has in mind,” Destiny giggled, lowering weapon, “Good for you Elise. Come on, let’s wrap this up.”

Her katana swung with true force, right into their weapons now raised. She flipped forward, launching off the ground with a single kick. Her other leg flew, foot crashing down on Thomas’s right shoulder, as he stood to Elise’s right while Destiny was to the left. His neck and head flopped and his arm scrunched up, his balance lost as he tumbled off to the side. With a roll, Elise landed and turned with her blade swung right into Destiny’s.

Thomas lay on the ground with a cough. It was at that moment that Elise acted, kicking at Thomas’s hand to send a dagger right up into the air. Caught with her free hand, Elise used it to block Destiny’s ax. The butt of her sword’s hilt slammed into Destiny’s ax-holding hand, sending it flopping out.

Another kick and Destiny flipped back and crashed. Both lay on the ground, heads up, looking right at Elise who stood with a smile.

Chapter XXXI

Elise ran along the dirt trail, winding around trees and moving uphill as a large dog ran after her. Dirt flew behind as feet crunched along. A turn to the left and she quickly ran off trail across the grass, the dog barking.

“Yeah yeah I know Alto I know, quit yell- quit barking.”

Elise jumped as she came up over the next hill, sending herself right over an opening that went down into darkness below the dirt. Her feet stepped down and continued on for another hundred meters, where they then halted with a skid.

“Heh- hee- oof, h-how, urk, how was that?” she huffed breathing a little raspy.

Stumbling across was a no longer transformed Alto with fur flopping off of him, “Guh, oof. My God, you run like mad-”

“Stamina, strength, and determination. Hoof though I’ve never done that,” she coughed.

“So many kilometers, God.”

“Hahaha. Pacing is everything man.”

“Oh shut up. How did you even do that without training for such a run?”

“Heh, who knows. For once though I outdid you Alto.”

Alto collapsed with a cough, down to his knees.

“Whoa. Haha, after being pushed by you for so many weeks this feels rewarding.”

“Glad you’re enjoying it,” he coughed again.

“Come on Alto, let’s get on with the next thing.”

“Crap.”

To the left she jumped as branches fell continuously to the ground from above. Alto leaped from branch to branch in his transformed state, swinging claws to lash right through though unable to completely keep up as he huffed. With another roll Elise turned round and hurled a large rock up into the trees.

A yelp cried out and then a thud not more than a moment later. Alto lay on the ground with fur falling off and his limbs changing.

“Yes.”

“Ugh, what the living Hell is with you?”

“I’ve had to practically eat dirt for over a month. Now it’s your turn,” she laughed turning towards a tree.

With a hop her arms wrapped around the trunk. Up she scooted quickly as her arms loosened up going into a straight climb up. Alto’s eyes followed with slight freight, “Elise?” Elise flipped off and landed upon a branch as Alto’s eyes followed. He gulped as a branch came down at him.

CRASH

With a yell he rolled off to the side, “What the heck?”

“Sorry Alto,” she yelled hopping from branch to branch sticking close to the trunks. Alto’s eyes followed yet again as she moved, his expression one of bewilderment following her movement until she was no longer in sight.

“Oh crap,” he muttered charging after, “Wait up!”

Her fists swung, blocked hit by hit by Alto's palms. He ducked as she swung wide, next blocking a flurry of kicks and a round house.

"Louder!" was the only thing he said, shouting it out.

In response Elise let out a yell of her own and struck again. This time Alto took a slight step back before continuing to catch the strikes. She ducked as the air swooshed above her head, proceeding to next flip backwards several times as Alto sent off a flurry of kicks. She flipped once more and landed on her feet looking to him, "Harder!"

Alto leaped forward with a grin and swirled around with a spin kick. The connection was heard as a thud, leg blocked by both of Elise's arms. As Alto began to step down his kicking leg was grabbed by both of Elise's hands, her feet shuffling as she heaved with a yell. Alto yelped as he spun and flew off into a tree trunk, "Ah man, my back. Damn, not bad at all Elise."

"Heh heh heh, yeah I know."

"Just a month and you've come so friggen far."

"I've always had it like you said. I had it from a lifetime of servitude and manual labor."

"That's astounding, truly. You've still got sword practice though."

"Bring it, I'm ready."

Elise flew back and crashed against a tree as Alto's weapon had made contact. The strike acted much like a swat, more than enough to push her back it seemed. She ducked right dodging another thrust. The clapping of wood present as their two weapons hit.

“You might be good at countering but you have yet to land any decisive blows. Get it together.”

“I know, just shut up!”

Alto stepped back with a glare sent to her, one quickly shocking her as she viewed it, “You’re weak like your brother has said, you know that? You let your docile fear control you and it is that fear that’ll get you eventually killed, you know that?”

“Just shut up!” she barked clashing again.

A grunt heard yet again though this time as Elise was sent off to the right with a crash, Alto’s leg up in the air. Again he launched himself at her slamming his weapon down against her own. Her arms quivered as she pushed against.

“Try all you want but you won’t do it the way you are. You’re not getting it. If you want to be great you need more than just the need, you need to have the want as well.”

“I do want it!” she spat swinging back to block.

Crackling of wood could be heard on that last block as both stumbled apart from each other though only for a moment as Elise closed in swinging away. A thrust to the lower left of Alto’s torso, quickly blocked. A wide swing across the middle, also blocked by a quick turn of Alto’s weapon. A final thrust forward at the chest, blocked by the broad side of the weapon.

She pulled back, to which Alto switched to go for a thrust as well. Her eyes shifted as she pulled back and quickly swung with both hands at the side of his weapon, “I need to become stronger!”

Alto's eyes widened as the blow turned him with a slight stumble, his own stance temporarily disabled. Elise quickly spun round and kicked up, foot connecting to Alto's chest now open. With a mighty yell she pressed, leading to a loud yowl from Alto who flew back and crashed onto the ground. His wood sword skidded away as he stood, now face to face with the tip of Elise's wood sword. His eyes drowned, hers burning. At once a chuckle came from Alto, to which a smile appeared on her.

"Heh, looks like I've been surprised finally."

"You purposely ticked me off so I'd get aggressive, not cool."

"True but it proved my point. You can't be constantly defensive or you'll never win."

A pause came up between the two as the sun continued to set. Alto glanced around and sighed as Elise glanced at the ground. Alto looked back to her for a moment before continuing, "Anyways, I think that's enough for today. Let's just say Day Five of your training is complete despite it being early. You've come far with dodging and awareness though you've still plenty to learn about actually fighting."

"You still didn't have to push it like that."

"Elise, you've spent the last few weeks unable to do anything but block until I got too aggressive. Against a real opponent you'd have died many times over due to your own pacifism. It's alright to not want to fight as has been pointed out but ultimately you still need to be able to defend yourself and fight for your beliefs. If you don't do that then you are lost."

"I will bare that in mind."

“I’ve helped you with the basics of fighting and you’ve learned the rest on your own through reading. With that brain of yours, you’ll do fine against a good few opponents so long as you strategize.”

“Strategize and I know.”

“Well, this’ll be our last meeting for awhile now I’d venture to say since I’ll be out of town. You had best not go out too much unless it’s during the day, even to train.”

“With the Priests on the prowl that is probably for the best.”

“And on that note I urge you to be careful. And with that, I wish you luck I well.”

“I will, and thank you.”

A smile crossed Alto’s face as he gave one final nod, standing, “Very well, adios then.”

With a turn he began to walk, “Keep on training Elise, always.”

“Thank you Alto, truly. When we next meet I hope to be able to kick your butt without aggression.”

“Ha, what an oxymoron.”

“Oh shut up,” she laughed as Alto walked through the trees, disappearing before long.

This left Elise to sigh and glance down, placing the wooden sword against her where it latched. With a turn she faced the trees herself, “{I have a long road ahead of me. He only helped me with the basics. I’ll need experience if I am to progress any further. Guess that means it’s time, time to talk to Father.}”

Chapter XXXII

Wood crackled, the crackles echoing off rock walls and floors. The sound of the whistle of the flames as the wind carried them. Slight chatter heard though soon nothing but silence from whoever it was. Footsteps were heard echoing as they scrapped along the ground moving forward into the tunnels. Echo by echo until they soon stopped before a mighty cavern filled with bodies.

Elise stood at the entrance to this cavern with many peers surrounding on the floor, all eyes facing her. A cloak wrapped around her with the hood down. Atop a ledge overlooking the entire cavern stood several, those who had stood before. The Elite of Vulfax, the two brothers, the mother, and the father. Azala's eyes gazed upon Elise with serious fire brewing behind, Britt's somewhat with concern, Rusty's with humor, all others staying neutral.

"Father," she spoke out, "I have come as instructed."

She stood at attention not taking her eyes from the man as his expression changed to one of slight rage.

"So I can see my daughter. I must say I am surprised you even bothered to waste your time," Azala replied with a raspy voice.

Silence filled the room after those words as the tension climbed, so stiff it felt like the torches were igniting the entire room.

"A waste of time to you perhaps but to me, vital."

Murmurs could be heard among the crowd, not loud enough to be made out though muttered nonetheless to the point where Azala picked up on them from high above.

"Vital? Do go on child."

“Father. I’m tired of being called useless. And I’m tired of my friends being pushed around, after what happened to- ngh. For the last month and some days I have been learning and training for the sake of being useful to the clan. I wish to prove myself by taking on a mission of your choosing, if you would have me.”

Laughter broke out among some of the crowd immediately, even some among those standing beside Azala.

“You think you can suddenly fight after barely a month?” Rusty laughed, “That’s rich. It takes a warrior years to hone their skills, even for prodigies!”

“Haha, and the thought of her in a fight? That’s rich.”

“Elise, fight? Oh please I must be drunk again.”

“A woman fighting oh come on, she should be prepping our dinner.”

“Yeah, luring back men with her body.”

“She’s not even good for that!”

The laughter continued as did the insults though Elise didn’t even bat an eye. Azala’s eyes narrowed as he observed this. Britt glance down to Elise and then back to his father.

“Silence!” he barked out at once, silencing the entire group with one fell swoop, “So you think you’re worthy of representing all of the Clan of Vulfax do you? Not even two months and you believe yourself to have the skill you need to take on someone of this clan that can prove your worth? Then I want you to prove your worth right here and now.”

“Allow for me to fight Sacho. If I can beat him, something my brother could not do, then that should speak my worth would it not?”

Laughter was heard again though only for a moment as Azala barked out, "Sacho!"

Sacho stepped forward from the line atop the ledge and quickly took a leap up. He descended quickly with a swoop, landing with a loud thud on the ground on one knee. He stood tall with a sheathed broadsword on his back. The tailcoats of his Great Coat flapped as they fell to the side of his legs, his hair flowing out the sides of his Ski Cap.

Elise glanced to down Sacho and then back up to her father in a matter of moments. Azala nodded to her returned sight, "You will fight Sacho as you wish and you will win. Should you fail then you will not be brought before me again, you will work until your place has been learned."

Snickers could be heard as the shifting of feet and head was heard filtering through the air though it quickly fell silent as gazes rested upon a nodding Elise, "I accept."

Everyone shut up at once. Many eyes turned to Elise one last time with wider eyes and fuller pupils. Even Rusty looked on with an expression of shock as his jaw hung low. Azala raised an eyebrow, "Hmph. So be it then. Sacho, are you ready?"

"Yes sire," Sacho responded standing ready to charge, "I am not afraid of some girl who has probably spent under a week playing with sticks in the mud."

"And you my daughter?"

Elise moved her shoulders up and upon doing so the cloak flopped down. She stood now in a torn fluffy dark-red dress that went down to her

knees, torn black leggings, black boots, torn off short sleeves, and to her side the katana sheathed.

“That month is all I needed to get the basics down. My mind is superior to Sacho’s in more ways than one!”

Sacho’s eyes squinted, “Hmph, you come to face me with a dress? Are you that idiotic? And you think yourself smarter, ha.”

“We shall see what I am Sacho. Never once said I was smarter, just that my mind was superior. That can mean many things, like creativity. Also, I like how you comment about the dress yet here you are in a bulky coat that blocks your legs,” she replied, her right hand on the hilt of her katana.

Sacho glanced at the weapon and then back to Elise’s face which shined fierce, “Such determination. Let’s see just how much you’ve improved shall we?” he questioned out loud, “Though I have to wonder, a month. Are you actually ready for this?”

“Again, I know enough. At least, I know enough to take on a bunch of brutes like you.”

Sacho took off, closing a gap of twenty-one meters in a matter of three seconds. Elise’s stance changed quickly, her Krav Maga knowledge quick to show. Her legs slightly bent, both arms after held up with fists formed. Sacho’s right arm flew back as he closed in, feet skidding as the first punch was thrown. Elise smirked with a quick duck, the fist flying overhead.

“Mmm?” Sacho murmured.

Elise’s hand flew, grabbing just above the elbow of the thrown arm. Her left leg moved ahead slightly past Sacho’s right foot. Her right hand slammed into his jaw, enough to move him back a tad. It was then that her left

foot stepped back as the right leg came round behind Sacho's right; with one swift hook and a yank back Sacho's leg moved with her own.

"What?" he spat as his top moved back as his bottom was swept forward.

Elise pulled her leg back completely now. With a crash her arms moved down with hands still on Sacho, slamming him into the ground. He spat as he hit while Elise simply jumped back a notch taking stance again. All around murmurs of surprise and loud exhales were heard.

"Judo, one of the arts of combat I studied. Not bad eh Sacho?"

"Beginners luck," Sacho muttered standing back up, quick to move at Elise again with a fist flying.

Her left arm went out, pulling back just as the fist connected to her open palm. She grabbed hold and pulled, right fist flung right into his midsection, right foot kicking at his, and with a yell she heaved him. Sacho's eyes quivered, his mouth open yelling, "What?" as Elise heaved him into the air and released, hurling him back towards the ledge.

She let out a breath as he crashed into the ground and rolled. Elise positioned herself once more and faced him with a slight smirk as the warrior stumbled up with his back still to her. The crowd broke out into laughter directed towards Sacho.

"Haha Sacho can't even handle Elise, getting so owned."

"Hey step it up Sacho, she's making a monkey out of you."

"What are you doing you idiot? And you're a Vulfax elite?"

"All of you can go to Hell," Sacho spat, "We all make mistakes, just look at Rusty's existence."

Laughter broke out again as a yell was heard from up above. Elise took stance again in full taking a few steps left, her eyes not leaving Sacho as he turned back around to face her. She gave a nod, her arms tingling, “{I don’t welcome a long fight against Sacho. I need to end it with this next counter.}”

Sacho slowly stepped forward a few paces before stopping twelve meters away from Elise, “I have to hand it to you, you have most certainly improved Elise. I think I’ll actually play with you for a little bit and see just what else you can do. Although if you keep throwing me I’ll have to end it because that rather annoys me. Still, better than Rusty for once.”

“Heh. Thanks for the compliment. That sounds good to me Sacho. I’m eager to show off what else I know,” she said slapping her right hand over her heart.

“Then let’s go,” Sacho laughed rushing forward.

Her eyes sharpened as Sacho’s speed doubled, the gap closing within no more than a second, “{This is it!}”

With a grin on his face he sent the punch out at Elise’s face. Once more she ducked and as she did the sound of fabric ripping could be heard. Elise’s arm flew up as did the red dress. Sacho’s eyes grew big once against as his fist and face both flew into the dress, a bit of silver and white dust flying out upon impact.

On the ground spinning her feet was Elise in a tea shirt and black skirt with her jean jacket on again. A sweep kick flew into the back of Sacho’s feet causing him to flip backwards, “Gah!”

Elise shot up with both hands grabbing his right arm and with another heave he flew. A loud crash was heard as Elise swung Sacho face first down

into the ground with her right hand, the left on the hilt of her katana quickly pulling it out. Both hands rested upon the hilt as she twisted her arms, holding the tip of the blade above his head. The torn off dress drooped while his head rose up, his nose a centimeter away from the tip of the katana.

“W-wha?” he stammered.

The room was completely silent with no further laughter or murmurs, everyone with widened eyes slightly stumbling. Even Azala had taken a step forward looking with eyes opened slightly more. Elise looked down at Sacho, “Sacho. It doesn’t matter how much I’ve improved, not against you. Experience usually trumps all and I just knew that I couldn’t afford to draw out the fight or risk getting you riled up. I knew from the moment I walked in here I’d have to end this in a couple moves. This is what I meant about my mind being superior.”

“If you were so concerned about me overpowering you, why me in a fight?”

“During your fight with my brother, although you wanted to put him in his place you took your time until he got you triggered. I knew you would most likely play with *the most mocked person in the clan*, especially if I showed some form of improvement. Although I couldn’t guarantee I would fight you or that you’d fight me like you did him, I figured it was worth the gambit. My father could have easily told someone else to step in and denied me my request.”

He coughed, his eyes now opened completely as his face became far less puzzled, “Y-you planned this?”

“Hahaha. Sacho, I’ve always told you to not play around with your opponent. Elise is a bookworm, I’m not surprised to see that she read you like one. Your own desire to play was your undoing,” came the voice of Vulper, shouting from above.

“Dammit,” Sacho coughed.

“I have seen enough,” came the voice next of Azala who overlooked the situation, “Elise. Dispatch of him my worthy child and we can have words.”

Elise glanced down to Sacho and then up to Azala, “Dispatch?”

“Yes you wench, it means kill him.”

She looked upon her foe, this time into his eyes. He gulped looking back into hers. Howls of disapproval filled the chamber as Elise turned her attention back up with a step away from Sacho, the katana lowering. Azala tilted his head with fiercer eyes.

“How sad. Sacho.”

Sacho’s left arm swung into the katana and knocked it aside, his body lurching up and crashing into Elise. She was slammed down as he came on top of her. With a yell her feet went up, slamming into his. Tossing her weight up with her feet she flipped him up and went up herself. Both slammed back down, Elise now on top of Sacho.

Sacho let out a growl, Elise a shriek as she flew off and crashed into the cave wall. Both stood quickly, Sacho taking a stance of his own, “Sorry child but you’re right about experience. I won’t get tossed around by a kid who knows nothing of combat,” he commented, followed by another cough, “Especially a kid who thinks herself a warrior in only over a month just to prove a point.”

“Tch, Sacho you ass,” Elise spat as he charged forward at her.

He moved left and up, a kick being delivered to Elise’s side with plenty of force in a flash of movement. She flipped and crashed backwards as Sacho landed again, slow on the approach, “As if I would let myself fall to you. Your elder brother couldn’t best me, your sloppy brother couldn’t get me. Why would the little kid sister do it, eh?”

“Heh heh, well you got me there,” she chuckled.

“Eh? The hell is so funny?”

“Heh, as if I’d leave myself open knowing father’s view on weaklings who don’t finish their opponents off,” she coughed stumbling up more, “Well it’s funny either way because- I totally called everything you and my father would say and do. So, I sorta win.”

“What’s that?” Sacho growled again.

“Look at your hands, it should be taking affect any minute now.”

Sacho glanced at his hands. His eyes quivered, the pupils dilating as he went from looking to his hand back to her. He stumbled forward and collapsed, coughing a couple times again. All eyes shifted one more time, murmurs filling the room. At this point even Azala looked on in slight confusion.

“Wha-what is this?”

“I’ll say it again, would I have left myself open knowing my father’s stance on weakness? I predicted this outcome and have prepared somewhat of a counter. You see, when you slammed into my dress, you happened to release a cloud of Concentrated Hemlock dust.”

Sacho’s eyes went wider than ever before once more, his voice now quiet as he stammered, “H-h-Hemlock?”

Shouts of surprise were heard all around as Elise continued, "I'm a bookworm like Vulper said and as I said I predicted this outcome as I have said. Again, I knew I couldn't hope to beat you in a drawn out fight so I needed to make it fast. What I ended up doing was taking a reassuring measure with some Concentrated Hemlock dust. I read about it in one of my books. You wouldn't believe how scared I was that I'd have set it off on me instead. I used glue spray to stick it to the dress, then coated it with a plastic spray. For bonus measures I sprayed my arms with the plastic stuff as well. I mixed everything just right so it wouldn't kill me."

She placed her right hand upon her left arm and ran it down. Strands of what looked like skin fell and drifted to the ground right in front of her as she continued, "No way would you have surrendered, no way could I have beat you if this became drawn out. I knew I had to come up with something crafty Sacho. Concentrated Hemlock dust is fast acting so I'll let you do the math. Hitting the dress like you did stirred just enough of the seal loose and that broke the seal. You both inhaled it and got covered in it. Add to the fact that it was concentrated and well, there you go. It just needed a minute or two to take effect."

Sacho no longer spoke, now lying on his back staring up with dilated eyes. Elise picked up the katana after a few more steps and then approached Sacho. In moments it was as it was before, stopping before Sacho with the katana held to his face, "Don't worry though Sacho, it shouldn't be enough to kill you. If I did my math right that should only be enough to keep you like that until it works its way out of your system, thanks to everything else I mixed in. Even though you inhaled it, it shouldn't be enough to suffocate you though

your muscles and skin will hurt like hell for awhile. If you're lucky you'll be up before tonight. So, guess this means I win, right?"

Yells broke out again, yells of disapproval to Elise.

"Coward!"

"Cheapskate, that isn't a win."

"You failed."

"Bite me, I beat him didn't I?!" Elise spat.

"Silence!" Azala yelled out again, silencing the entire room.

All eyes turned back to him with that as he continued, "Well Elise, you clearly planned this victory well. I will admit I am impressed. Hmm, so be it. I'll grant you your request. Vulper, Thomas, Destiny, Sacho, and you Elise, you will all be granted this next mission so listen well."

Those addressed stepped forward, all except for Sacho and Elise.

Vulper reached the edge of the ledge and turned his head to face Azala, while Destiny and Thomas stood now in the middle of the room in front of Elise and Sacho.

"Provided Sacho comes out of that he will join you. My mission for you involves the Flats Pack of Zaherian Wulfn. They have shown themselves to be disobedient in recent months and I do believe they need a reminder of why we are in charge. Vulper knows the context of this assignment and will inform you all later. Now then, get out of my sight."

Elise nodded as she pulled her katana away from Sacho, sheathing it, "Sorry Sacho. It was the only way I could think to win without killing you. See you in about nine hours."

With that she turned and walked away towards the tunnels as Azala turned his back to the group. Everyone began to move and break apart towards the various tunnels, everyone except for Sacho of course.

Chapter XXXIII

“Hmm, I dare say, when was the last time we all met like this eh?”

“Seventeen thousand for most of us, if I’m not mistaken.”

“It feels good to be back together like this eh, even if it isn’t all in person just yet.”

“Hmm.”

An ominous blood red moon sat in the skies above an ancient forest. The wind whistling silently with the smell of blood, the trees rustling with maple leaves drifting in a dance across its whisper. The forest stretched out before the lunar eclipse, the trees red. The animals gazing up into the heavens themselves it seemed in awe though not all. Owls flew overhead and crashed through the trees.

Wolves and Coyotes moved through the woods and stopped at a clearing. Their howls were heard as they pranced forward. A scar in the land lay before many as they gathered. Down within it looked like the inside of a cave with stalagmites all around and rocks basic. The large mouth of a cave with many tunnels within twisting and turning.

Gathered round though were the figures of more than forty people though the figures themselves were odd. Many standing were simply black in color with a small blending of various other darker colors. One stood all black with dark green mixed in, another with dark red mixed with the black. All that truly stood out were the red stars of their coats and then their eyes, all else simple light a phased black aura.

“How can you say we are together when many of you are here via Astral Projection, eh?” one of the individuals replied at last.

“Pft, Astral Projection. It’s only a damn hologram on steroids,” barked another.

“Shut up Xander. A hologram is simplistic showing of an image. An Astral Projection is a casting of one’s spirit mixed with their energy. Completely different if you don’t mind me saying,” replied another.

“Shut up Tadashi,” Xander barked.

“Enough,” a low pitched female growled.

Many of those standing were these Astral Projections though twelve were solid people all dressed in the uniform of The Hive. All eyes shifted to the projection of one who stood atop a rock at the front of the cavern, his pupils purple and iris red.

“Milady?” came the voice of Leon.

“Your petty squabbles do not interest me,” was the response, low in pitch though definitely female, “Now Leon, update me on your progress if you would.”

“Right. Thanks to the work of Cylux and his Shadow Partners, we have managed the destruction of Nospheross. In turn we have freed multiple of our allies from Tribe imprisonment,” he began with a glance over to the South of the cavern.

Nine approached, eight of which moved in unison. They all appeared identical minus the ninth, their hair white and their eyes icy. The ninth was Cylux, the masked warrior, heading this group. All stopped at once and stood at attention, Cylux’s eyes focusing on what transpired before him.

“Cylux? I don’t recall such a name among my empire when I last saw you all,” the female replied.

“I am the child of Galovan, if you recall him milady,” Cylux replied.

“Ah, yes, Galovan. I remember his service well. Still rather unfortunate that he died in battle against Wesley of all people.”

“Indeed. My mission to this point has been infiltration of Tribe operations and obtaining any and all data. Thus the mask, just in case any of our own associates are captured and have their minds read. Shadow is my partner, acting alongside me.”

One of the eight stepped forward, eyes shut, bowing, “A pleasure.”

“What’s the purpose of those backup dancers. Replications?” one of the twelve barked out.

“You’ll find out in time Dustin if you press hard enough,” Shadow replied, “And it won’t be pretty. Now I’m certain that is not the purpose of this meeting. We all know why we are here, right?”

“Yeah,” came the voice of another male.

All eyes shifted once more to the masked man known as Xander. He stepped forward with eyes curved as he let out a slight chuckle, “To take over everything,”

“That’s the plan,” came the voice of another from the Astral Projection crowd.

“What I want to know is why we’ve waited until now to carry this out, hmm? We waited what feels like twenty-thousand years to pull this off, eh?” spoke another.

“You have no idea how many steps it took to get us to this point Andrei. Following our defeat we lost many assets. It’s been a real hassle waiting it out, a pain slowly rebuilding our might. Now we have the numbers we need to move forward.”

“That’s all well and fine Shadow but care to explain the situation proper for us noobs? We haven’t exactly been filled in on anything you know,” barked the metallic voice of another.

“Basilisx, might I ask just what it is you think we’ve been facing?” came the response of Leon.

“The Hive has faced more than just the Tribe in these modern years. For the first few thousand the Tribe was a major contributor, then later on it was the select societies of humanity they would prepare. Even now they have many nations ratified to hunt us via Specialized Black Ops Units. Were it only the Tribe alone anymore we might have had a chance but no, it grew beyond that. This is why we have our assets readying for war,” Shadow concluded.

“War? Isn’t it a little too soon for all of that?” came the chuckle of one present, his voice a bit elderly yet well pitched despite this.

“Normally yes,” another spoke, this time a female projection, the color of red surrounding her, “But now that we’ve made our move the Tribe will be mobilizing to stop us.”

“Heh ha ha, let them come. I’ve got something for them all, something called payback!” one laughed.

“While I appreciate the motivation Tadashi it is still not in our best interest,” Shadow spoke again.

“How so?” Nightmare questioned.

“The technology of the humans has changed drastically in but a few thousand years. While it does not necessarily match that of what is on Sillith with the homeland, it easily surpasses what we have our hands on now. Even our powers alone might not be enough to take out all of the possible onslaught,” Shadow replied.

“And that’s why we’ve got people like Dustin or Szayel working for us, right? They provide the Undead arms to back us and we grant them the power they want,” Idontis commented.

“Correct,” spoke Shadow, “We will use the Drachen, the Vampires, and the Zaherian to our advantage. They will assist us as we move forward; however there is much more to it.”

“How do you mean?”

Shadow glanced to the right and then to the left before refocusing his attention at the middle of the group, “A long term war is not in our interest. We do not have the might of our people backing us like we did in years long ago, which is why we are progressing with caution and careful precision. The attack on the compound to break Cortez and many others out was planned for over a decade.”

“A decade for that job?”

“For the last twelve thousand years we’ve been moving cautiously trying to not alarm the Tribe. We’ve gathered intel, we’ve gathered resources, we’ve worked to establish allies, tracking the best of the Tribe, and we’ve worked to figure out what to do. The last two centuries alone have been more than ten times the work one would think,” Shadow replied.

Leon nodded, "Once more, correct. Tracking their elite and putting people in position, carefully calculating every possible outcome. We waited until their guard had finally lowered enough to break out our allies, which succeeded. We got who we needed inside and made our move to get us to our full potential."

"We worked under the radar and made our strikes. Our units confirmed the deaths of at least three of their Generals and several of their Commanders. Many dozens of others have also been exterminated at the same time we made the assault. Now we're playing the crunch card," Shadow spoke as he slowly began to walk forward, "They will be looking for us, trying to stop us again. It is this moment that I have planned best for."

"Why?"

"Because Sora, in the end it wouldn't matter what we did. We couldn't logically take them all out at once and we couldn't logically hit them and expect to stay under the radar. The next steps we take are crucial."

"Heh ha ha ha ha ha," laughed another, "Oh man, I can't believe this. You planned out to this extent?"

"It's necessary until we reopen the portal to Sillith," he spoke stopping.

It grew silent as all eyes shifted to one another, all eyes except those of Leon, Cortez, Nightmare, and four of those surrounding Nightmare. Shadow glanced around as he continued pacing, "We've drawn out the King, we've drawn out the Knights. These next few weeks will be vital for us to move as precisely as we can."

“I’d say we already failed then. The Temple of Light is going to be surrounded before long and it takes far too damn long to break a Level Five Barrier.”

“Who said anything about that being the plan? We’re going to draw the Tribe’s attention to execute what comes next. Their elite are the problem while the nations scramble to most likely prepare for future conflict. Their priorities will be the people and considering how slow the human political system is, I’d grant us no more than two months to pull off what we need. So listen up, I’m only going to go through this once. Follow what Leon and I have calculated and it will at last spell the end for The Tribe!”