

Act 7- The Clan of Vulfax: Elise's Destiny

Chapter LVIII

The moon slowly began to climb down, not a creature stirring in the forest below for the most part. Owls rested on branches with eyes closed, deer hunkered down, even coyotes laying bundled up with their packs. In the clearing lay several individuals in various positions and locations. All of Holly's crew lay resting, many asleep. One alone sat in a branch above looking off into the moonlight.

She gulped, her fingers running across her lips with a bit of green slime wiping off, "There, that should be enough to keep me going," she murmured.

Quickly she leaned to the side and dropped down, landing on both feet. Glancing off to Holly once, then back ahead walking off with a katana sheathed and a backpack to her, "I'm sorry Miss Holly, everyone, but I can't let you guys suffer over something that is not your responsibility. This is a matter for Vulfax and Vulfax alone."

"How will that solve anything Elise?" came a comment from behind.

Elise stopped in place, recognizing immediately. Her head tilted giving a glance back to see Sora standing with arms crossed, "Sora?"

"Why do you think you need to take this on yourself?"

"You heard what Holly said, to bombard the area just to wipe the possible enemy out. I can not allow that."

"After everything Alto and you said that they did to you, you want to back them up yet? That's idiotic. I heard you wanted them all to pay."

"A change of heart. If this is a mistake then it is mine to make. No one else needs to die. If I can take down Azala I can save the clan and prevent the bloodshed."

"You're living in a dreamworld right now Elise, Drachen are bloodthirsty creatures. They won't stand to reason."

“So I have heard,” she murmured in response, looking to the sky, “And yet I can’t help but think back fondly on some of them and the moments I had. My false brother Britt, my friends, my superior Vulper. For better or worse, I grew up in that clan and it helped shape me. Stupid as it might be, I repeat, I will not turn my back on them even if those remaining have turned their backs on me.”

“So you forgive them for what they did? That’s childish Elise.”

“Oh I don’t forgive them but at the same time I can’t leave them to die. It’s difficult to explain how I feel Sora. My friends died for the clan, under bad orders or otherwise. Those who remain serve because they believe in the clan. I don’t want their memory to fade to ash.”

“That’s too bad then Elise,” Sora said standing ready as if he were waiting to dash ahead at her, “I can’t let you go out there. Britt and Vulper dug their graves by remaining with a bunch of vandals. If you go any further I will stop you myself, and if not I will wake the others to help.”

“Is that so?” she murmured slowly turning around, a breeze flowing through the air as the two looked to one another, Elise’s hands clenched into fists.

Chapter LIX

Dawn broke the silence, daylight creeping along the tops of the trees. Birds chirped and flew off. Deer trotted to a halt near the clearing where Holly's group last lay. Many lay upon the ground asleep, David and Milly included, all resting. Flapping wings moved overhead, feet resting on Holly's cheek.

Slowly her eyes drifted open and her head moved, the bird flying off. With a few blinks she looked around, viewing everyone at once, well, almost everyone. At once she shot up and looked quickly around. Laying against a tree was Sora, eyes wide open and somewhat bloodshot, a cut on the side of his cheek with dried blood. He breathed though he did not move.

Holly crawled forward quickly, placing a hand on his head. Her eyes narrowed to see his spin around, "Alice!"

Alice shot up quickly and looked to Holly, "Wha-what huh? What's going on?"

"Something's wrong with Sora, and I don't see Elise. Quickly, fix him. I suspect that he's been drugged."

Alice crawled over quickly and sat up, her right arm extending until her palm rested upon his head. Darkness moved around her palm which then turned a light blue. At once Sora began to twitch, slowly the bloodshot look of his eyes fading. With a mighty gasp for air he heaved forward, "Ugh. Oh sweet lord, thank you Alice, oof, thank you," he coughed quickly.

"Sora, what happened?" Holly questioned, "Where's Elise?"

"Ugh, tried to stop her. She cut me with one of her damn daggers and poisoned me with a paralysis drug. She said she was going to go take care of Azala and Clan Vulfax."

"What? Why didn't you stop her?"

"I tried. I was going to wake you guys, then she hit me before I could yell out or do anything."

"She doesn't stand a chance, like an ant up against a hornet's nest," Alice muttered.

"It's too late now. She'll have to be taken out with the bombing, right Holly?" Sora muttered.

Nothing.

"Holly?"

"Alice, contact Wesley. Tell him to order a delay on the bombings, and reroute all available units to the desert region."

"What?"

"Huh?"

"I've had faith in Elise so far. She's a smart kid who knows what she's doing. Let's hope that it all goes right. Ready ourselves to move out at once."

"Yes ma'am!"

"But, Vulfax is a threat, they need to be taken out as soon as possible!"

"Sora, there's a reason why you're not captain of a squad. You've much to learn yet."

Rock crumbled, the smell of blood in the air that slowly drifted. Behind stretched a forest and in front the mountains. Elise stood, looking

straight ahead. A coat wrapped around her with the hood down. She looked up, nodding with narrowed eyes, "I'm ready to face you, Azala."

A rip could be heard, hair quickly flying off in the wind in thick strands. Her arms raised, one hand holding the length of her hair behind and in the other a knife. The hair holding hand released, letting long strands blow off. Forward the knife moved, up and over, again slicing through hair. More danced off as the length of her hair shrunk short.

The back of her head was cut short while the sides remained slightly flowing, the front's bangs also cut. Her eyes moved to watch as the wind took what had been her own, "I'm going to miss the long hair, it took forever to grow out. But against what's ahead of me, I can't go in with such a weakness."

Ahead she moved again, the rock crunching beneath her feet as she then went in. Her steps began to echo as she entered, the walls reflecting the sound of her walking quite well. She moved with a hand on her sword with the bag in the other, turning down the hall going right. A yawn was heard up ahead, an individual visible in the entryway to a room.

The individual rubbed their eye and ran a hand through their hair, "Mmm. Another day, another- huh?"

Elise strolled right by the individual without so much as a passing glance, her facial expression oozing determination and nothing more. The individual blinked, "Was that-?"

"No way, Elise?" another individual murmured from another entryway.

"Why is she back here?"

Elise ignored all and pressed ahead, turning right once more as the sound of murmurs echoed behind her. A few paces, a turn to the left, another

right, and after some time one last turn left. Forward she moved, a large cavern before her filled with voices.

“And so Belama, I want you to investigate the happenings at the border with Clan Aldaeren. You will go there and report back once you-” the voice of Azala was commenting, though quickly it died off.

“Once I what sire?” came the voice of Belama as Elise entered the room.

Stationed around were several individuals, all looking up to Azala. His expression puzzled looking forward, looking at the entryway. Elise pressed on as people began to turn, some quickly looking shocked.

“It's Elise-”

“What is she doing here?”

“I thought she was dead.”

“What even?”

Off to the right stood Rusty, Britt, Melony, and many others in a circle. All turned as the mention of Elise filled the air, Rusty and Britt showing signs of shock while Melony appeared immediately disgusted. Elise stopped in the middle of the room, her eyes deadlocked immediately on Azala as she stopped, “Azala, it's time that we settled this!”

Chapter LX

Over half of the barrier now had begun to turn a mix of orange and red, dark energy hands and arms stretching on and on as it began to crack apart even more. White steam blew out from the cracks with an aura of red. Aura skulls could be seen flying out crying, many moaning, many exploding. Below the various Hive agents stood continuing to focus on the Curse as they continued to break down the barrier.

All stood by, some appearing more lost in concentration than others. Shadow turned his head, letting his eyes wander towards Dustin, "We're going to have company by the feel of it."

"Which company is that?"

"Elise has just arrived at Vulfax's HQ. I suspect she is there to defeat Azala and rally the clan against us."

"Ha, let her. She can't hope to accomplish a damn thing," came laughter from Xander.

"I wouldn't be so certain Xander, remember she's come a long ways in only a matter of weeks," Chrom replied, his head turning, "You should know better than to underestimate someone."

"Yeah yeah, I know Chromwell."

"Hmph, calling me Chromwell. Your tone is undesirable."

A couple pairs of eyes looked to them though that was the extent as many more focused on the barrier. Slowly all looked back, all except for one set, "My my those two get on my nerves."

"Let it go Segador," Cortez murmured.

"Enough everyone, focus on the Curse, we're nearly done."

"Copy that, Lord Leon."

Flames crackled in the cavern of Vulfax, Elise before Azala with eyes alit by the flame within her heart. Flameful eyes, fierce and darting, simply darting to eyes of an abyss of eternal darkness. Azala stood with arms at his side as Elise stood with her hand on the butt of the hilt of her sword. Her facial expression serious, her eyes locked, murmurs drifting around both.

Britt moved forward, arms away from his side, "Elise, please, I-"

"No Britt, I'm having this out with him right now for the sake of the clan."

"And what exactly do you mean by that, for the sake of the clan? From my perspective you are simply an outcast who abandoned us and has now returned with hostile intent. Speak of your peace girl for we only see destruction."

"Yes, abandoned a mission that was supposed to get me killed by someone who abandoned the clan long ago, Dharkanian."

Azala's eyes narrowed as murmurs turned to shouts of opposition towards Elise. Britt looked around as did Vulper and Rusty, the three confused judging by their expressions. Atop the ledge Phil looked down to Elise, then to Azala. Elise stepped forward, "I know the truth Azala. I know about how you tried to kill Vulper and myself because we risked undoing what you sought fit for Vulfax."

"Listen to this girl," came a chuckle.

"This idiot is loco."

"I say we-"

"Silence!" Elise spat.

Everyone fell silent at once, some who had been approaching her taking to step back. Her free hand clenched into a fist, that arm quivering with rage as her eyes shut. Her head moved down as her teeth gritted. Seconds passed as she slowly looked back up with open eyes, the emerald of her eyes bright.

"You planned the attack on Stark Pack with Dustin, just so Vulper and I would die. At the same time you'd have a reason to act more vicious to outside clans due to *our* failed plan to take out the pack. This would let you grab more power for yourself and only yourself."

"So you've gathered the truth have you? Heh heh, but what does it matter. Vulfax is protected so long as they submit."

"Why not tell them why the clan is losing hunting land and being restricted? It isn't because of the humans, it's because Dustin has commanded you to restrict Vulfax to benefit his clan. Dustin's allies have been transferring resources from this area to feed a growing army of other Zaherian, Vampires, Drachen, and anyone else loyal to his network. How would everyone feel if they knew they were going to be bombed because of the standings with that enemy that gives no care in the world about Vulfax, an enemy you work with and allow to go through what was once Vulfaxian territory?"

Murmurs rose again as Phil turned fully to Azala, "Sire? What is she talking about? I thought-"

"Silence Phillip. The girl is simply rambling nonsense at this point."

“Am I though? You’re working with Dustin who in turn is working with an enemy that threatens the entire world. The world government, enemy to Dustin’s bosses, want to bombard this entire area just to wipe us out because they fear what you’re going to do. Azala is about to drag the clan into a war they can’t win just so he can retain power.”

“That’s a lie, there’s no way,” came a comment from the side.

“Azala has lead us for generations, there’s no way he would do that to the clan.”

“Elise is talking nonsense, take her!”

Several rushed at Elise immediately. Her eyes darted around at which point a white glow appeared surrounding her left fist. At once she flung it forward, unleashing a bright bolt of Light Energy straight at Azala. The attack startled those rushing her, all stopping and watching as it traveled at their leader.

“Lord Azala!”

Azala blinked and quickly flung his own fist forward with a grunt, unleashing an energy bullet of his own, a bullet devoid of color. The two attacks impacted and exploded in front of Azala, the smoke quickly drifting around him as darkness continued to glow around his fist. His teeth gritted and showed, a snarl leaving him. Eyes shifted from Elise’s fist to Azala’s, shouts of shock quickly roaring out.

“Magic?”

“What were those lights?”

“What I possess is a gift from those who stand against Dustin and his comrades, the gift of Light Energy from The Tribe. What you’ve just witnessed

is Dark Energy from Dustin's people known as The Hive. Let that be proof enough for you all," Elise growled.

"You damn- worthless brat!" Azala spat, looking around as shouts continued.

"That power is like Elise's isn't it?"

"Wait, does that mean that-"

"Elise is telling the truth? Azala is a traitor?"

"It can't be-"

Two individuals quickly leaped from the crowd behind Elise, their arms bulking up with fur appearing. Howls and snarls left the two as Elise turned around, the howls then only to become yelps as she did so. Both went flying off and crashing into the walls of the cavern as two new individuals shot down in front of Elise.

"Hey, those two are Stark Pack!" came a shocked yell.

"David and Milly?"

The two rose up and quickly turned to Elise, nodding. The three then looked back up to Azala, "David and Milly failed Stark Pack and were ordered to be executed by Dustin's superiors for knowing too much. Let that be another blow to Azala's credit. And as I said, his activities are going to bring destruction down upon all of Vulfax."

"Damn it all, I knew I should have killed you when I had the chance. Holly wouldn't have known a damn thing if I had shifted the blame."

"How could you work with them and betray all of Vulfax? Dustin couldn't have persuaded you that much and I doubt Shadow could have gotten to you."

"That would be, my doing," a voice replied, dark and echoing.

A grunt was heard alongside the sound of ripping and liquid spilling. Phil stumbled forward, a pike exiting through his chest. Shouts of shock filled the room at once, Elise's eyes growing wide and shaky as Phil fell forward off the ledge, revealing behind him none other than-

"Alto?"

Alto stood in place of Phil wearing The Hive's robes. At once the dark blue hair of Alto turned black and his eyes began to change color, becoming amber quickly, "Actually you can call me Toby, now that my role as a spy is done."

"Wha-what? No, it can't be," Elise murmured.

"In truth Elise, there's so much you've yet to fully comprehend," he called out as others moved out from behind both him and Azala, all wearing armor painted black with the red star patterned across. Following suit came Winston and his three.

"What is this?"

"What? Startled by my appearance? Ah, now I bet I know what you're thinking next. Hoping that I'll say I am brainwashed and acting against my will? Sorry to say Elise but I am of my own accord at the moment."

"No, this can't be real. Not you, anyone but you!"

"Again I am sorry to say but I am of my own accord. You see, I acted as a spy for both Dustin and Shadow this entire time. I studied the various Earthly Supernatural organizations on orders from Lord Shadow and acted as liaison between him and Dustin for the longest of times, helping to find new blood to recruit into our arms."

"But why?"

"Because like Winston I've come to accept what this world truly is. A dark pit of Hell with no qualities of redemption! Do you know how many wars these humans have started all on their own? How many lives they take for their own selfish gain? It's the same with any human and any entity born to this accursed world."

"I asked you why, not for a speech!"

"**Why?** You think your life was crap Elise, try living on the streets without any powers at all like Winston, homeless and starving. Try living in an orphanage where they abused you in every way imaginable like I was! Winston, his team, and myself, we were nothing until Lord Shadow approached us. He granted us strength, he gave us a purpose. He told us to make contact with Dustin, he told us to find others for the Hive. He told us we would change this world for the better."

"Orphanage? No, you were born to the Pack of-"

"A cover up for my opportunity to gather information. Truth of the matter is that I used you and many others to collect data on suitable candidates, and then I collected data on you in particular once Azala and the rest grew concerned by the thought of Holly using you as a spy. I knew from your words ages ago that Holly Bell was of The Tribe's Royal Bloodline, so I used your name to join up and collect data."

"You're the traitor that they're after then, you're the one who helped invade that base in Switzerland!"

"Heh, guilty as charged, yes. I provided data on the facility; though Lord Shadow saw to the rest. Holly eventually came to suspect me on that

regard, which is why I had Winston kidnap me to get me out. I couldn't have just walked out due to a certain seal Holly put on me that would have prevented my escape. I fulfilled my mission rather well and helped Shadow even find the temple."

"No, then if--"

"Correct. You're part of the reason why all of this happened. Your connection to Holly was the key that enabled us to act so quickly. Because of you I joined up making her think I had nothing. Like a fool she accepted me right in and over the next few years I collected what I needed, while also doing a few other assignments. And now, here we are."

"My fault you say," she murmured looking down, a bit of blood dripping from her palm as her nails dug into her hand.

A few tears dripped down as she looked back up, glaring at all who stood atop the ledge, "Then it is my job to take you all down. You're definitely not the boy I knew for so many years, you're as much of a traitor as Azala is!"

Azala laughed as Toby smirked, the rest breaking into laughter at the same time.

"You truly think you can stop all of us on your own? Vulfax bows down to Azala loyally, your fate is in our hands."

"Toby, I say we have a little fun with Elise. The rest of my clan can hang back, right? Actually all of you hang back as well, I want to squash this fruit my damn self."

"Heh, so be it. Lord Shadow won't really care either way."

"Hey, I thought he might have wanted her alive?" Winston chuckled.

"Perhaps Winston, perhaps. We'll just have to tell him capture was not possible and that she lost control of her own power. The girl knew too much to begin with. I figured it would comfort her to know the whole story before she died," Toby chuckled, looking down at Elise.

"I've stood alone for many years, taken serious blows to my heart. I'll get over this one just the same you dastard," Elise spat.

"Then by all means, bring it on."

Azala rose up and quickly jumped forward, dropping like a rock. The ground beneath him shattered as he landed, rock flying up and cracks flying out. Elise quickly unsheathed her sword and held it in her left hand, extending it taking a defensive stance. Her left side stepped forward as her right stepped back, the right arm brought back ready to fly forward with a punch as white energy grafted around it.

Azala's right arm reached behind him and pulled out a large weapon, an ax the size of an adult man with a cleaver the size of a semi tire. Down it swung, blasting through the ground in front of Azala, then back up to prop on his shoulder. A smirk spread as all eyes shifted around, many worried looks among the crowd to their lefts and rights. Vulper slowly stepped forward with a look of horror on his face, "No-"

Rusty looked left and right, his face puzzled while beside him Britt stood motionless with a blank expression. Azala stepped forward with an echoing laugh, "Mwahahahahaaa! How I have waited, oh how I have waited to take you down you arrogant child. For so long you've been a thorn in my side. Now you shall die!"

Chapter LXI

The ground beneath Azala once more shattered as he launched himself forward with a single leap, his ax raised up high into the air. It came screaming down, smashing through the ground not long after. Elise had taken a step back just in time, at which point everyone else began to back away. David and Milly stood ready but only for a moment as Elise shouted, "David, Milly, step back. This fight is mine, a fight for Vulfax!"

"But-"

"Ahahahahaha!" Azala laughed again, this time with a somewhat metallic-like echo, "Foolish child, what hope have you got?"

"I have all the hope I need to put an end to this. Once I deal with you, the rest of them will fall," Elise spat in response launching forward swinging her sword.

Azala's hand quickly shot up and caught the blade, no blood flowing as if rock had caught it.

"How did he-" David sputtered stepping back.

"I'm not the same little girl that you ordered around anymore Azala, this fight is mine!" Elise shouted as light quickly flooded out of her left arm and into the blade.

Azala yelled out in rage, releasing the blade as it slowly slipped from his hand. A white glow coated it, tight to the blade. Elise yanked the weapon back and drew with it a cut and blood.

"GYAH! You worm-" he barked stomping back, the ax raising and flying down, slamming down atop Elise's blade held high.

The ground beneath her cracked from the hit as her knees bent, light continuing to flow into her weapon as well as around her knees. With a grunt she slowly pushed up, "Grrr- I'm not going down like this, hyaa!"

With that yell she flung herself up, the ax flying into the air. Azala stared wide eyed as the ax flew up, staring beneath it as Elise swung and cleaved through his chest, "GYAAHH!" he groaned leaping back.

Again he slammed down, blood oozing from the fresh cut on his chest, the ax smashing down again. "It is the will of Vulfax I carry Azala. They will be lied to by you no longer, harmed by you no longer, controlled by you no longer."

"Grrr, you wretched little brat, do you think my power is weak enough to allow me to fall here?"

At once the wounds on his hand and chest began to shine a black light, the blood turning to powder and flowing away on the wind as the wounds closed shut. Again Azala laughed and moved forward, "Ahahahaha! You little ingrate, what do you know of Vulfax and of this world? I have been around eons longer than you child. Power is what matters and it is power I intend to get."

"Hmph, even at the cost of your body huh?"

"What's that? Gah, my body is- no, what have you done?" he said, gargling slowly as the color left his skin, his body turning to liquid.

Darkness flowed out like a river of muddy water, his voice becoming deep and echoing, gurgling with a deep growl. His eyes faded to black with only a vague dark purple visible, then the dark red pupils. Shocked murmurs and gulps could be heard all around as his face became much like that of a skull

made of darkness with dark tentacles flying all around. He breathed in and roared out, dark sands drifting way, "**Gyahhh!** How dare you Elise?"

"Lord Azala-" came a murmur from the crowd.

"How could this happen to him?"

"What is he?"

His clothes faded mostly as his body continued to flow, only an old ragged coat remaining behind. Vulper stepped forward, nothing but shock on his face much like everyone around him. Above Winston looked down with a puzzled expression, his three comrades somewhat in horror, while Toby simply looked on calmly. At once the liquid energy exploded with a dark mist roaring out until it became a flame.

"This is what Azala has become for his power. My Wolfsbane stopped his transformation and has revealed the real him."

"Mwahahahahaaaa!" he laughed, his voice echoing again with a strong metallic sound to it as slowly the dark water ceased, slowly his color returning.

He stomped forward, his voice slowly returned to normal, "Impudent child, what do you think you know of me? Anything is worth the cost for power. There is no tole too great. What you see is simply true greatness, a form many of the best of the Dharkanians take on, Dark Mode. For me though, it is still a cocoon of power until my body restructures to the new power."

"Clan Vulfax I urge you to see this man for what he truly is!"

"I knew all along that you would come to try and ruin what I have worked for and I will not allow it Lighonian."

"The joke's on you. Shadow already discovered what you and the rest thought of me was wrong, I'm as much a mortal as any other person born of this planet. Your own fear and lust for power has become your downfall."

"Ha, hahaha! This is rich, truly. Now that you have seen what I am I suppose I've no choice but to kill you," he chuckled slamming the ax down, his hand leaving it as slowly he walked forward, his body slowly returning to its somewhat liquid state.

Elise stepped back and took stance again, this time with the sword behind her and her punching arm out, ready to thrust the blade forward if need be. Azala slammed to a stop only a few meters away, "Until now you have yet to see the true power of a Dark Wielder. Now I shall show you the essence of Dharkanian strength."

His left side lurched back, the arm flying and stretching back. Quickly his left hand clamped onto the ax and solidified slightly. Up the arm went and over like an arch forward, stretched and crashing down to Elise. She looked up wide eyed and stepped back quickly, barely missing as the blade crashed through the ground with intense force, force enough to blow her back off her feet. On the ground she crashed, looking up as Azala's arm slowly retracted without the ax. All eyes looked, seeing it buried into the ground nearly all the way to where the bottom-most hand would be placed on it as a weapon.

"Holy crap, he slammed it that far in with just one hand?"

"He's-"

"Oh man, can Elise even stop him at this point?"

Slowly she stepped forward, her eyes locked on Azala's form with the sword now held to her side with a single swipe. Azala cocked his head, his

voice gurgling as he watched Elise stand, his eyes narrowing as his pupils became slits. His growl could be heard growing louder and louder as Elise looked at him ready.

“BRAT!” he barked out charging forward, his feet stomping down as he drew his fist back and flung it forward, his entire arm stretching at Elise.

She looked up, hearing people shouting her name. Eyes shut, slowly she raised her weapon. As the fist was only a meter away her eyes shot open and she swung down. A blinding light could be seen illuminating from the sword, a large crescent of Light Energy launched forward from the swing straight into Azala's fist, ripping through. He yelled out as it continued on through his arm, roaring as it cleaved through his body. He stumbled backwards as a loud crash could be heard behind from the energy crashing and slicing into the surface behind.

Darkness flopped and melted out like butter in a hot pan, darkness that had been cut loose from his arm, “Miserable cow!” he yelled out as the wound bubbled.

“Holy crap!” came a surprised shout from Belama off to the side.

Elise held her sword out, “I'm not a child anymore. Your chance to kill me has long passed. You are just as unfamiliar with this power as I am, Azala.”

Above Toby looked down at Azala's wound, a slight growl coming from him, “Damn it all, I warned him that she would catch on to manipulating energy quickly. He should have killed her when he had the chance. Winston, do it.”

“Right.”

Azala's arm retracted and quickly became whole once it was of normal length again. Elise looked up, the sound of laughter heard. Winston and his three comrades had jumped down and were aiming straight at her at various distances apart from each other. At the same time Azala's arm flew out, his hand grabbing and ripping the ax out, quickly swinging it around from the side now.

"No way to block five attacks at once Elise!" Scourge laughed out.

Several claps could be heard at once, three crashes and one slam, then a loud clang. Elise had turned round and quickly blocked Azala's swing using her Light Infused weapon, while off to her right Winston's three comrades crashed down. Zoey, Scott, Samantha, and several others had crashed straight into them while Vulper had crashed right into Winston.

Both Vulper and Winston slammed down onto the ground, standing. Quickly they launched at each other as Azala retracted his arm yet again. Elise turned, face to face with him, and then towards Toby who approached from behind. Her sword held at the ready, her eyes locked, she readied her stance.

"Hear me Clan Vulfax, our leader is a traitor. Capture all of them and back Elise up!" Vulper shouted, to which a huge roar of yells could be heard as quickly everyone swarmed forward.

Toby snapped his fingers, an act which summoned many more figures from up above. Wolves and Beasts shot from the ledge and crashed quickly into the clan's ranks, shouts and sounds of battles heard all around. Vulper quickly tussled with Winston as Elise stood off with Azala and Toby before her, "Round two, traitors."

Chapter LXII

Elise flipped forward with a corkscrew jump and swung out, Azala leaping back barely in time. His ax went up and flew down, a fact Elise did not ignore as she quickly stepped right and swung down. The ax cleaved through the ground as the katana slammed through Azala's arm, cutting clean through. He wailed out and stumbled back, the severed portion liquefying completely as she shot forward.

Toby spun and slammed a blade of his own against Elise's, Dark Energy radiating out of the blade as he held it strongly against her. The two stepped firm and held against each other with pure force.

"Why work with the Hive? They're pure evil!"

"Not everything is as one sided as it appears Elise," Toby grunted in response, both kicking off from one another and stepping back.

Elise looked ahead to Toby, eyes somewhat teary, "I don't get you, not one bit."

"I didn't expect you to, after all, you knew me simply as Alto," he murmured, his amber eyes slowly fading, "Alto never existed in the first place, merely an imaginative name of Tobias Tazaki, or rather Toby Tazaki. It is a persona used only to spy and no longer lives."

"I just can't even begin to imagine why you'd end up like this, serving the wrong side."

"While you serve a side that would impose their will on what is not theirs? Under rule of the supernatural, this world prospered. Yes mortals were kept in poverty, it was the era of things. Humans were well kept because they

were vital, and yet look at the world now. War, terrorism, murder, it's all the same with these humans who fail to respect what was granted to them and as for what was, I find it to be a mistake."

"So you would damn an entire world off of that? I don't get it Alto, truly I-"

"That name means nothing Elise. And of course you wouldn't, you haven't been outside of these walls until recent and even then you haven't seen the world for what it is," he said as his eyes became hazy with little color to them, "I was born blind to an orphanage, abused, bullied, and then cast out onto the streets for much of my early childhood. I was around things you could only dream of, trying to survive in a world that did not welcome my kind. Then Shadow found me near my end, he saved me and offered me a better choice. He spent a short bit of time training me, making me stronger until I could start repaying my debt."

"So he used you?"

"Where you see use, I see equal debt and a return of gratitude. My ultimate task I already explained, getting to know you so I could work with Holly later on by using your name. I've been around a great many years longer than you Elise, I've had a lot of time to think over it and this is the decision that I have come to."

He paused as Elise glanced around, looking to see Azala approach again now healed with his ax in hand, smirking.

"I can't help but think back on a certain phrase along the lines of pain being inevitable, while suffering is only optional. Indeed pain is inevitable in this world for the victors who helped shape reality were in the wrong. Suffering

can be viewed as optional but in reality, that's just as inevitable for those with no options. Finally Lord Shadow is going to change all of that for us and give to us a new world, a better world!"

"By letting The Hive take over? Do you know what will happen if that happens?"

"It hardly matters. Ultimately what they do between now and the end will not matter. If you had been wise you could have lived to see it but now, I think not. It's just as my time as Alto the Wulfn Zaherian, irrelevant."

"Irrelevant to you perhaps but to me it was something. Hmph, if you're blind then how can you see me? I thought you couldn't use the Celestial River?"

"Use? Bah, again with that. As for my sight I simply let the Celestial River show me everything I need. Echolocation in a way but with the River itself. Surely you noticed something off with my sight every now and again, like that slip up with the air cannons during training? I lied about lying. That was a genuine mistake on my part. Now are we done with the questions? My sword has a destined fate to meet your arrogant brain."

"You can hide your feelings all you want Tobias but I can see through it. You're wearing a mask to hide it even now, how you really feel about this. Such a tragic face."

Elise looked to him, his expression blank. Slowly his lips began to move, slowly biting them, then moving as he spoke, "It is far too late for regrets. I've come forth to dispose of you and that is what I intend to do."

"It pains you and so you act like it is the right thing to do. I understand, but for the sake of Vulfax, I must do to you what you intend to do to me for your master."

"**Gah**, enough of this. Tobias, let's be on with this, shall we?" Azala gurgled.

"Right," he murmured standing ready now.

All around them battles were fought, screams and yells heard, the sounds of blades clashing. Slowly Toby stepped forward with narrowing eyes, his coat flapping as he moved. Elise slowly stepped forward on that note as well, her skirt flapping now slightly torn, a glow appearing around her momentarily before fading. Azala stomped forward beside Toby, growling with a smirk, his ax raised.

Quickly the three darted at each other, their weapons raised. Elise's sword slammed into Toby's, while her fist slammed into Azala's. His ax flew up and down quickly, crashing through the ground. Elise flipped back, the ax passing between her calves, a bolt of Light Energy blasting out of her foot straight into Azala's face as she flipped back. As it impacted and exploded she shot ahead and slammed her blade into Toby's, the two quickly flipping back away from one another as Azala stumbled back roaring again.

Winston flew off between them from Elise's right to her left, crashing into a group as Vulper shot by in pursuit. Elise glanced to see Azala's face reform slowly, the hole in it closing up, "{Damn, I'm never going to be able to beat him if he keeps on regenerating like that. Oh man, what do I do? Everyone in here is weak to light and clearly he's pulling off of the dark corners. Dammit, what should I do?}"

Elise looked ahead, her eyes darting around for a short while, then locking on a flame. Behind a flame danced from the torch, “{That’s it, Holly!}”

Her mind flashed to the last fight against Medontei and his cohorts, reflecting over every detail, “{Holly controlled the light that was outside of her body by influencing it. That’s probably just concentration with the Astral Plane right? If I can pull that off, I can mimic Zero’s Atomic Migraine but with Light Energy. I could rip him apart and due to the light he couldn’t regenerate. Brilliant!}”

Azala primed himself with a growl and launched forward, howling out with a grunt, the ax raised high, “There!” she shouted swinging her sword down, unleashing another crescent of energy that slammed straight through Azala, his roar heard as his body split.

At that very moment Elise then punched forward with her free hand, a bullet of Light Energy sent flying forward. Azala blinked as a bright light flashed before him. The bullet shattered, exploding into many streams of light that quickly curved around and in mere moments connected like rings. Elise’s hand opened and clenched shut, at which point the rings slammed together and shrunk around Azala. His scream could be heard as the light swelled and began to engulf him. Toby stared in shock for a brief moment, bolting forward then after.

CRASH

David and Milly both came down on him, kicking Toby away from Azala and Elise. He skid back, looking up as David shouted, “If you want her you’ll have to get through us!”

A loud roar could be heard behind as the rings slowly shrunk more, a sphere taking shape as the light spilled out around Azala engulfing him completely. His echoing, gurgling yell of pain could be heard as Elise opened her hand one more time. She looked right ahead and nodded, "For Vulfax," she murmured, closing her hand shut.

A loud howl could be heard as the light then exploded, the blast engulfing Milly, David, Elise, and Toby though not the blast. All those around turned, looking in shock as Azala's roar faded out.

Chapter LXIII

Tree leaves shimmered and grass crunched. Many ran through the forests of the valley, clouds covering the sky above. A blinding blur of white and blue headed the front of a pack of several, head glancing back, "Hurry, we need to go faster!"

"Miss Holly we can't keep up with you, slow down!"

"We can't afford to stop now, we have to keep going Sora!" Callie yelled out.

"Dammit-"

"Elise will be fine Sora, that's not what I'm worried about. The Hive are at the barrier, that's what has me right now."

Ahead they charged, on and on several minutes away from the mountains in front of them. Holly's eyes shot right immediately, the sight of wolves leaping in the distance with blue and green skinned individuals below, their moans now audible.

"Damn, and now Wulfn and Zombies. Get ready for combat," Holly growled out.

A howl of agonizing pain rang out as the light scattered from the blast, Elise holding stance as the light faded, all the fights around now stopping. In the middle of the light stood Azala with many tears and holes in him. His right arm fell off, the left torn in half, his left leg and lower torso gone, a hole straight through the middle segment of his torso with only the sides connecting,

and then half of his head gone along with half of his remaining leg. It appeared that only a sixth of him remained.

With a roar he dropped to his remaining knee, black ooze bubbling out and washing away with black flakes drifting off above. Slowly stubs began to form from the wounds, stubs that simply popped with more dark smoke drifting off. At once his shoulders broke off and slopped across the ground, liquefying immediately with a steam drifting off.

“Guh- to think my dark power could be overwhelmed by such a- by such a... by such a, urk-”

“By such a little girl?”

“Grrraaaa-”

With a final roar his body broke apart, fragments of darkness breaking off as his entire body splintered away until nothing was left of him, all rest liquefying. Many looked on in shock, Winston looking at the place where Azala had been, Toby shaking his head. Elise looked to where he had been, then to Toby and Winston, “No one steps over Vulfax like he did and gets away with it. You two are next.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that Elise,” came a voice from ahead, a very familiar voice.

All eyes looked up to the ledge behind where Azala had stood many times before. Dustin stood above in the robe of The Hive, looking down upon Elise, “You have certainly come far, child.”

“Dustin,” Elise growled, watching as Dustin jumped up and down, landing right next to Toby.

To the left of Dustin landed another, this one with a midriff shirt and blue jeans and a light-weight coat black in color with red stars. The second individual had long flowing gray spiked hair, bangs spiked ridiculously large extending in front of his face. Dark eyes glowed from behind the hair of this individual.

“So here we have the three dastards who have completely screwed up this valley. At least that’s what I’m assuming since you three have Hive uniforms.”

“Mmm, David was so right, you truly are canny. Speaking of whom, I see you saved the trash. I suppose one man’s trash is a little harpy’s treasure though as they say, am I right? No? Well whatever.”

“I take it that your arrival means that-” Toby began.

“Yep, the barrier is down. We fully corrupted the thing, then watched it explode. Total grass land with an Aztec looking temple standing at the center. Lord Leon ordered me to return though with Shadow and two others.”

Shadow stepped into view atop the ledge looking down with sharp eyes, “The other two went after Holly. We figured we’d deal with this treasonous clan prior.”

“The only traitor of this clan was Azala though to be fair, speaking of whom, Szayel if you would.”

Szayel’s hands quickly clapped together, silver lines stretching from his pupils along his eyes, “Gotcha. Now, rebirth!”

An explosion of darkness appeared before Elise, darkness drawing itself in from every corner of the cavern. Slowly, bit by bit, a humanoid figure

formed. With a mighty roar the darkness exploded, liquidizing and then becoming like Azala, "I am, reborn!" came the gurgling wail of Azala.

Azala stomped forward in his mutated form breathing in heavily, as behind him Szayel's eyes returned to normal. Elise's eyes grew wide, shaking, her face stretching with her mouth quivering.

"No way, they revived Azala?" came a murmur from the crowd fighting.

"Azala never died, Szayel simply gave him more power to reform quicker," Dustin commented.

Elise's eyes narrowed fiercely at once, looking to Azala. They passed from Azala to Szayel, then to Toby, then to Dustin, then up to Shadow who now stood with folded arms looking down. Shadow's eyes gleamed in the darkness above, "Hmph. Now what will you do Elise? Against a near immortal force, a man who can revive the dead, a skilled fighter, a dark lord, and then myself? What can you do?"

Chapter LXIV

Shadow's arms remained crossed, his eyes still gleaming as slowly his subordinates approached Elise. Azala took the lead, behind in approach being Szayel, then Toby, then Dustin. Elise slowly began to step back as the fighting around her continued. Dustin chuckled on his approached, Szayel with a snicker, and Azala with a growl. Her eyes danced around, all around people too busy as the fights drug off into the caves slowly, fewer and fewer remaining in the main chamber.

"Damn, five on one now. That seems cowardly, doesn't it Azala?"

Elise chuckled looking ahead to him, a smirk spreading slowly.

"Bah! I do not need backup to crush you Elise. Now you will experience my full power, hrgh-" he grumbled, darkness pooling up quickly around his chest.

Elise blinked, the darkness separating now as Azala's hands moved away, a giant blood red sphere with a black aura forming. Her eyes grew large as the ground around shook and the air itself became dry. Blackness could be seen swirling outwards from the core of the sphere as it fully detached from Azala's torso. With a yowl almost inhuman it fired heading straight at Elise.

Her body twisted, both fists flying out to her right unleashing light. To her left she flew, propelled by her own attacks, narrowly missing as the sphere flew passed and crashed behind. Through the rock wall it flew, melting clean through in fact as it charged away.

"I missed? Heh, no matter," Azala gurgled.

From behind Elise there came a sword. Her body twisted again; her sword slammed against and quickly parried a strike from Toby. A yell left as she flew off, a jet of darkness having slammed into her from her right, darkness fired by a laughing Dustin. Across the ground she rolled.

Her back crashed into the wall, slowly twitching as Elise immediately flew back up, “{Dammit, I’m in over my head this time. Azala and Toby were bad enough, add in Dustin and a man who can revive the dead, then Shadow who is just watching? This is too much.}”

“Heh,” Dustin scoffed.

Elise looked to Dustin quickly, her eyes narrowed.

“Honestly child I am amazed. To see your will not broken and to see you not even going all out, it makes me wonder where you even are.”

“Elaborate!”

“Think about it. Abused much of your life, fighting people responsible for that, against Azala and myself when we were the ones that got your friends killed, against another who basically betrayed you after lying to you the entire time you knew him. Your resolve is too weak it would seem.”

“You have no right to judge my resolve you dastard, especially when yours is non-existent.”

A blast could finally be heard behind, a glance to the right to see some mild light peering through the new hole, sunlight. Steps echoed in front, her attention focused back on the four as they moved. The slushing of Azala's steps, the echo of Toby's, the clomp of Dustin's, and scratch of Szayel's. Slowly.

"Holly's not going to bail you out this time, give up!" Dustin shouted.

"Holly, to your left!" came the shout of Chelsea.

Holly's head turned left, her back arching as the sound of something soaring through the air passed above. To the right into a tree crashed three arrows dripping with poison. With a swift glance to it and then from where it originated she stood again, "Caldori!"

Callie ran quickly from the side up to Holly, huffing, "Y-yes?"

"This guy is getting on my nerves," Holly grumbled.

Before the both of them approached an individual in Hive Uniform, beneath which there was only Knight armor painted black. The individual clanked forward, a red star on the face plate of the armor. In moments it stopped, chuckling with an echo revealing it to be the voice of a man, "Hahaha, so this is the Legendary Holly Bell without her power? What a total joke."

"Mmm do not be so confident Basilisx, she is still a worthy prize," came a hoarse reply as a young girl approached hovering through the air.

Long dirty blonde hair that stretched passed her feet, purple sclera instead of white for her eyes, yellow cornea, and silver pupils. Red cracks spread from the pupil throughout the eyes. She grinned with eyes big, her Hive Uniform flapping.

"Chino this girl can't even anticipate my moves. It's a joke!"

Holly glanced at the two and readied up with stance. Basilisx broke into a run forward, blades sliding out from his sleeves and into his hands,

broadsword with purple liquid dripping from them. Chino giggled and hovered away, many individuals with rotting flesh moving from her shadow moaning with arms out. At once the individuals broke into runs, their hands falling off revealing metal tubes.

Darts flew from the tubes dripping green, the green touching the ground. Smoke drifted from where the drops hit, the grass hit turning black and crumbling. Holly nodded to her right, at which point Callie charged forward with water rising up from the grass. As it died and turned black, the water ripped itself away and flew forward at Basilix, the darts, and then those behind him. Away the darts and rotting ones flew though not Basilix who simply trudged through.

“Caldori, do it,” Holly murmured.

“Gotcha,” Callie replied slapping her hands down on the ground, a surge of electricity flying forth.

Basilix roared as electricity could be seen surging out of him. He groaned, his weapons dropping and his feet stumbling backwards. Holly glanced right and quickly raised an arm, swinging down with a sword slamming it into the blade of another with both hands now. Before her was another Hive Elite, “Three of you is quite irritating.”

“Hell yes it is. Third is the charm and I will be the one to kill you Holly Bell, me. Ha ha ha,” they laughed.

A blur of white fabric and blue stars passed to the left, a fist crashing into the assailant quickly knocking them away. Holly stumbled back with a huff, “Thanks Wesley. There’s no end to their numbers.”

Multiple surrounded the two now, both standing back to back, "I noted that from the moment I arrived here with backup. Chino and Basilix are the only ones here truly living, all the rest of these guys are reanimated puppets. I suspect that Chino is a Necromancer."

"Well that makes this even more annoying. How much longer until the bulk of reinforcements arrives?"

"Oh I'd say another couple of minutes. Chino and Basilix will likely mount a retreat at that point."

"Good. We need to finish this up as soon as possible and get to the temple."

"What about Elise?" Callie questioned.

"She'll have to make due with what she can. I'm grateful that she has delayed the enemy but we can not afford to go out of our way to aid her now. If The Hive gets that map we could be facing a lot of trouble from here on out."

"Damn. Alright, let's hurry this along then so we can go and help!" she yelled.

Chapter LXV

Rock crashed and blew, swords clashing and light flying out. Elise flipped back and slammed her sword against Toby's, her other hand flying out unleashing a wave of Light Energy that crashed against Azala. The blast roared out as she backed away further, Dustin rushing at her right. With her sword glowing she quickly swung out, unleashing a slicing wave of her power at him horizontally.

Quickly he jumped up and over as it passed by, slamming into the walls behind. Ahead she looked again, blocking Toby quickly. Quickly she flipped back with a huff, "Hu- damn. I'm not going to be able to hold out much longer. I'm running out of Light Energy and I haven't been able to focus enough to draw in anymore. At least my body is holding out though I suppose, that's a bonus."

Both hands clasped the hilt of her weapon as Azala once more stepped forward, Dustin off to the right stopping with a grin. Up above Shadow continued to watch without moving a single muscle. To the right Dustin changed position, his right arm extended with his hand open, "Crakus Flattus!"

The ground shattered beneath Elise, cracks spreading and at once it split open. Down she fell though with a quick kick of her foot Light Energy flew down, propelling her back up as the ground slammed shut. Again she landed, backing up to a tunnel entrance as her four foes slowly approached again.

"Hmph, not bad. That spell usually works. Your friend Sacho actually died that way in fact, smashed flat like a pancake. Oh man his head popped like a balloon actually, it was gnarly," Dustin laughed.

"Dastard, I'll get you for that one," she growled in response.

"Hun, I'd like to believe you but uh, yeah. Sorry I don't believe you. Heh heh, Azala, if you would."

"Raaa!" Azala yelled.

Elise heaved and crashed through the entrance, slamming into the wall behind her. Azala stood where she had been, having moved in the blink of an eye. His fist raised, having a bit of saliva on it, raised to where Elise's stomach had been. Forward she slumped with a heavy heave, her left hand over her stomach no.

"{Oh man that hurts so bad-}" she thought to herself before spitting out more saliva with a dry heave.

"Not so easy is it?" Dustin commented, "Using something foreign to you. You might have a strong body but that alone can't beat us. You have no comprehension of magic nor a means to use it at this present time, and then you've barely got the concept of energy control down. If I had to guess, you can't even focus on refueling yourself in the middle of battle."

Dustin stomped forward, barking out now, "And if I had to take another guess, you're about out of Light Energy. Am I right?"

"Pft, what do you know," Elise muttered slowly standing up, her eyes shadowed out by the light casting on her bangs.

Ahead she looked, her eyes fierce and very sharp, "I may not win this battle but I'm not giving up. Even if I should die, I will die taking as many of

you down with me as I possibly can. For Clan Vulfax, for The Tribe, for this planet, for my friends, for everyone. I can not allow you to go on doing what you want any longer.”

“Heh. She’s got spunk, gotta give her that,” Szayel commented.

“She says this as Holly and the rest are slowly being overwhelmed no doubt by Basilisx and Chino. That’s just cute,” Dustin chuckled, “Azala, time to finish this.”

“Gotcha,” he gurgled launching himself forward again.

Elise held her sword forward, both hands on it with light quickly rising up through coating the blade, the last of her power being fed into it. With a step she moved forward, thrusting it ahead.

“Are you really that determined to throw your life away?”

came a voice.

Elise blinked, her head moving left and right. Around her a swirl of sky blue light danced, gold light beneath her with sparkles rising up all around. Her feet crunched on what appeared to be nothing at once, her body turning right, her torso turning so she could look back.

“Wha-where am I?” she murmured.

“Where? Hahaha. Now that is a good question I suppose. To put it simply we are in your mind,” came a voice from ahead.

Back around she spun to see a figure before her. A man hovered with his legs crossed, a visible sheathed sword to his right. Both hands rested on his lap, a black coat wrapped around the man with a colorful kimono then wrapped around that.

At once she stumbled, the area around her changing. With another blink Elise now found herself standing on a rock with water swirling around, trees visible on roaming hills in the distance. The sky above vast and blue with glittering white dancing throughout. Birds danced above, their wings flapping. Many of them were the color of gold itself, though intangible with some being pure pink.

Once more Elise looked ahead to this man. A half-black half-white Long Coat, torn half-black half-white sweatpants, no shoes, a silver shirt. His hair long and spiked, a blend of red-orange coloration. His eyes a deep blue. Elise looked over him once, then to his sword. The sword's hilt was all that was visible, though in turn it was the exact same as the one at her side.

"Who... who are you?"

"Who am I? How is it that you truly do not know your own sword?" he chuckled, a somewhat echoing tone behind that chuckle.

"My own, sword?"

"Correct. Though I suppose Holly Bell has yet to instruct you of even the way of Star Blades, yes?"

"Star what? Just how many things are there with these powers?"

"Many actually. There is not much you need to know of me now other than the fact of what I am and that I will help you. You see, a Star Blade is a weapon born of the blood of its wielder and then infused by the wielder's own power. Realistically any weapon, even a gun or flamethrower, can become a Star Blade so long as it has the required properties. At a young age your blood was taken and poured into what would become my physical body with the

metal that forged me and throughout your time with me I have slowly been fed your power which has awakened me.”

“I don’t understand-”

“Like a child I am born of your body and spirit. As you evolve, I evolve. For now think of me simply as an enchanted extension of your being.”

“I see. So in other words, you can help me with this fight?”

“Correct. I am able to teach you that which you seek, the knowledge necessary to defeat the enemy that has wronged you. I am able to fight with you as a partner so to speak as you shall soon see. I will teach you the ways of combat as the Lightonians do, I can help you fight with a body unlike any normal weapon. To put it simply, I am at your service.”

“Then I ask that you help instruct me through this battle so that we can win.”

“Consider it done. I will aid you in gathering Light Energy and assist in how you use it. I will take any blow you wish me to and dish out anything. Our time is short, time in here has almost caught up to time outside. We must return to battle at once Master Elise.”

“Understood uh, um-”

“Yes?”

“By chance do you have a name I might be able to call you?”

“Haha, but of course. I am the Star Blade known as Sephiroth, young master.”

“Then Sephiroth I look forward to fighting with you at my side,” she said with a smile as all around here began to fade.

“And I look forward to working with you Master Elise. It's time to finally put things right-”

“Gack-” Azala croaked.

Flames blew out of Elise's weapon, extending the blade's length. Szayel coughed as Dustin stumbled with eyes wide, Toby remained stationary with faded eyes wide, while up above Shadow's eyes perked open more.

“What is this?” Azala gurgled stepping back as the flames ruptured inside him, holes being made everywhere as the flames shot out.

With a groan he stumbled back while both Dustin and Szayel leaped away. Toby remained stationary, his head lowered. A glow appeared clear around Elise, a white glow. Slowly it shrank to just around her shirt and slowly it began to turn solid. In moments fabric could be heard flapping with the appearance of bright blue stars. Sparkles drifted as at once the white glow turned solid completely.

A Tribe jacket had formed hugging around her torso stretching down only a little bit. Elise's eyes slowly opened back up as she held the sword with both hands. Around people looked on in awe; her own clansmen, Vulper, Britt, even David and Milly. Light Energy danced around Elise as she slowly raised her flaming katana, looking fierce at those who stood before her.

“A Star Blade?” Toby questioned.

“Where the hell did she acquire something like that?” Dustin muttered.

“Damn that Holly,” Shadow could be heard growling, “She's been creating weapons. Damn orphans.”

"This changes nothing Elise, you're still a nobody with no one, Dustin and I killed those someones you once-"

"You're wrong Azala," Elise murmured, "I'm not alone, I never truly was. I-I have my friends, I have Holly, I have her people, I have Sephiroth now, the people of Emerton, I have so many people right now that I never had before. For them, I can't back down, I can not lose to you."

The flames burst away from the katana, the white glow slowly fading with electricity dancing around it.

"And so you shall lose those people one by one. It doesn't matter how far you've come. We shall still take it all away," Dustin laughed.

"No Dustin, I'm not losing anyone else anymore. I vow here and now to stop you, I vow to stop anyone who poses a threat to those who can not protect themselves. For the longest of times I wanted only to prove myself, I wanted to be accepted. Now I realize the truth, I realize what I truly want. This all ends now Dustin. I'll stop each and every one of you who would threaten another!"

With that she raised her sword and held it close to her as the light around her faded. Azala stomped forward with a growl, Szayel close by. Toby remained stationary as Dustin chuckled.

"So be it Elise, then let's put this newfound will of yours to the test. By the end of this though I guarantee that you will die to the power of darkness."

Chapter LXVI

Her eyes glowing like the brightest of emeralds, her stance as solid as a board, her grip firm; Elise stared down the barrel of fate against the four before her. To the right in the tunnel Vulper looked on with an expression of shock while behind David and Milly approached.

“Elise...” Vulper murmured in shock.

She stood, sword out at the ready. At once Azala took charge, “I’ve had enough of this, hraaa-huh?”

His ax flew forward with his arm stretching, at which point Elise swung down unleashing another burst of Light Energy that cleaved straight through the arm. Off half of it slid, slopping to the ground with the ax sent flying off. Azala wailed out, stomping backwards as his arm retracted. Dustin growled, Toby rushing ahead at Elise as Azala crashed backwards.

Toby swung down while Elise swung up, her weapon parrying with his. Backwards Toby stumbled as Azala shot forward again.

“Elise, collect energy at the bottom most part of your feet and direct it. Visualize yourself skidding along a rail. That’s the key to pulling off-” came the echoing of Sephiroth’s voice in her head.

“{Got it Sephiroth, thanks,}” she thought in response.

Light pooled at her feet as both Azala and Dustin charged her. Her eyes shut and head down though only for a moment, they shot open sharp. Azala wailed out while Dustin heaved. Off Dustin flew from a solid kick, light glowing at the point of impact at his gut as Azala’s torso fell backwards with his legs going forward. Toby and Szayel both stepped back.

"That was Light Dash," Szayel choked.

"How is she pulling this off?" Toby growled.

"It's that weapon," came Shadow's voice from beyond them, "It's instructing her on how to do various techniques. She won't be able to pick up on anything extreme like magic but so long as she is joined to that weapon, she has another advantage against us."

"That brat, cut her fricken arm off Azala!" Dustin yelled out.

Azala's torso spat out darkness to his legs like pillars, slowly pulling to connect themselves once more. Azala stomped down and turned at once, the skull face returning as he breathed in with a metallic echo, "Hrgh, I do not care how much power you obtain child. I do not care how quickly you learn. You will never be able to best us."

At once the flow of the darkness slowed as Azala's ax hovered up and back to him. Into his right hand it went as his body resumed a river-like flow with a black aura dancing around him. Forward he moved breathing out, a slight roar behind the breath. Elise turned to face him head on with her weapon positioned, "Ready to take me serious now aren't you?"

"You insolent rat," Azala gurgled.

With a roar he swung down, down over Elise's head. She moved her weapon up and quickly blocked. Beneath the ground cracked as light held her joints, glowing outward. She held up, a hand on the hilt and one near the tip of her weapon, "{Dammit he has some serious strength. Even with these Lightonian abilities I'm not going to be able to take on all four of them at once. At times like this I wouldn't mind being a prophesied do it all or whatever. But then I suppose it wouldn't be that satisfying.}"

Azala's ax rose back up to which she took as a chance to dart off to the side to keep her eyes on the group of four. Scanning each she began to think again, "{Toby knows my fighting style inside and out, Azala can regenerate effortlessly and has a ton of power, Dustin and Szayel probably have mastered their Dharkanian abilities. Either way I look at this situation it doesn't favor me in the slightest.}"

"As you said though, where is the fun in that?" Sephiroth chuckled.

"{Yeah I know. So the question becomes how do I take them down?}"

"Szayel has hung to the back of this party so far. Odds are that he isn't good in a straight up fight Elise. I recommend taking him down first if you can get close. With any luck that'll either reweaken Azala and grant you an opening to finish him or it might give you an opening for something else in general. At that point you just need to worry about using Light Energy against Toby and then overwhelming Dustin."

"{Don't forget that there's still Shadow. I'm fortunate that he hasn't cut in yet. Should it come to it though I don't think I'd even force him into breaking a sweat considering what happened with Zero that other time.}"

"Then that leaves one option that'll surely kill all of 'em except for Azala."

"A cave in," Elise murmured to herself, glancing up at the ceiling.

Shadow watched on as Azala stomped forward. At once his eyes shifted to observing Toby beside Szayel, then to Dustin who approached Elise from her right. His eyes then watched as Elise's eyes moved around and then up.

"She's watching everything like a hawk. I suspect that she has already formulated a plan. She's not stupid enough to think she can beat us. Very well then. I was hoping to wait on this but it would seem that I've been pushed. No matter, all in all it'll go the same as I have predicted," he muttered moving his arms apart for but a moment, his hands clapping together at once.

Elise blinked, her eyes opening wide. At once Szayel began to wail out, hands on his head and dropping to his knees. His eyes shut as Dustin and Toby turned their attention to him. Both blinked and quickly leaped away. Azala simply chuckled as behind him Szayel rose up yelling out in pain.

His skin bubbling, his eyes fading to black, dark mist leaving his both through every opening. Szayel's skin immediately blew off while darkness roared out of him into the air like several cyclones. Azala held his arms out laughing as the dark cloud formed by Szayel's power grew and at once crashed down into Azala.

Elise stepped back, a hand held before her face with one eye nearly shutting, "What's happening?"

"Elise, evacuate the caves immediately. If what I think is happening is truly happening then this mountain shall soon become a death trap!" Sephiroth's voice echoed.

"What do you mean Sephiroth? What's happening to him?"

“The way that Szayel was able to resurrect Azala earlier and with what's happening now, hell even with what Shadow did and how the others reacted. I suspect that Szayel was used as Azala's Star Blade.”

“What? No way-”

“Yeah and considering the amount of power I'm seeing enter Azala, who is a Drachen, that can only-”

“Oh no-”

Azala's laughter could be heard as slowly the form of Szayel shrank, more and more of his body breaking off into darkness. The skull was visible with an ax head taking its place. Elise's eyes grew big, her head shooting towards Vulper, “Vulper, evacuate the caves now!”

“Understood. All of you heard her, get out get out, get everyone out!” Vulper shouted, running out himself as other Vulfaxians quickly turned tail and began to run.

Elise herself turned and took off, sheathing her weapon at once. Behind her Toby and Dustin disappeared down another passage while Shadow simply backed away into the opening that was behind him. All of Szayel's body disappeared leaving only an ax, an ax which quickly broke with an endless amount of darkness roaring out.

Chapter LXVII

Rock crumbled away, trees dying as mud slides flowed away from the mountain. Shards of large sections blew out. Animals scattered, birds sent flying off, deer rushing down. Above the top of the mountain slowly began to crumble, explosions blaring out the sides. A demonic roar heard echoing.

From an entrance Vulper charged straight out behind a group of people and behind him ran Elise. Many bodies spilled out from entrances near this one, many upon many. Clouds danced above as the mountain fell. To the West side an entire side of the mountain shattered and slid off in a mudslide. Rock exploded from the top, lava seen flying upwards and down the remaining sides of the mountain.

Elise and the rest continued to charge, having been running for a good few minutes. Once through part of the forest Elise skidded around, turning to face the mountain. Now behind Vulper stopped, the rest stopping soon after. The clan slowly gathered, all looking up in awe as the mountain acted like a volcano. At once the top blew off, a black beam launching sky high with a radius of what appeared to be a quarter kilometer.

Elise's jaw hung as fear quickly took her as it took everyone. An echoing howl could be heard, a howl unlike any other, the kind many would say is the call of a demon god itself. Four giant sails flew out, torn sails that quickly appeared to be like bat wings. With that many sets of eyes became visible inside the beam as those wings flapped.

A roar heard like that of a tornado drawing into itself everything, then the view of a large arm covered in black scales. Down it crashed with claws visible the size of houses themselves. Forward it moved, a creature unlike any other. A purple and black scaled behemoth, wings stretching of what appeared to be a kilometer plus. A single neck was visible though a head with three faces in various directions and each with eight sets of eyes. It was the final head that showed nine.

The mountain continued collapsing to the front of the beast, the side that the clan could view. Down the middle it split with the body stretching out. Up it flew, spikes visible dotting its body sticking out. Tentacles from its sides and backs blew out with spiked tips, stretching up and then crashing down as the beast freed itself from the mountain. Its wings flapped, slowly carrying it up into the air as debris flew all over within kilometers of what was once the mountain.

Into the air it went, hovering now with only a roar. Its head slowly moving back and roaring into the sky, Dark Energy rocketing out of its mouth. The clouds in turn drew no further light, simply turning black as the lands below turned red, a red light cast from the clouds themselves. This effect slowly spread away as the dragon flew forward now.

“What on Earth is-” Milly began.

“Azala turned into that? That is unlike any dragon I could have ever imagined,” Vulper murmured.

“There’s no way in Hell we can kill him, he’s like, the size of a large town,” David hiccuped.

"Is this the true power of The Hive? It's, it's-" Elise began, ceasing as two figures came into view.

Ahead of them Dustin and Toby stepped up. Dustin with a chuckle and Toby silent. The former moved up first, "Impressive isn't it? You would not believe how long it took for Shadow to grant Azala that kind of power. With that his cocoon stage should be done, leaving him as a full Dharkanian mutation. Honestly I'm a little jealous of the monster he created."

"And you should be," came a familiar voice from behind, Azala's.

Stomping down behind Dustin was a man. Dustin glanced back with a smirk, both he and Toby stepping away as the man moved forward. Elise and Vulper both looked on flabbergasted. Before them approached a man in Knight armor dark silver in color, a cape on black with red stars. A broadsword lay sheathed at his side with an ax on his back.

Shoulder length brown hair flowed away revealing purple sclera, deep red cornea, and black snake-slit pupils. Fangs could be seen in the man's mouth as he spoke, his ears pointed.

"Well what do you think? Looks a lot younger now doesn't he? Heh heh," Dustin chuckled, "Although this isn't his real body so I guess that hardly matters."

"Silence Dustin!" Azala barked out stepping forward again, stopping in front of both he and Toby, "I am in command now, and it is time to end this!"

Around the Vulfaxians darkness swelled up like liquid. From the shadows arose multiple dark figures. Rotting fleshed individuals crept forward, moving ahead. To the side two more individuals in Hive uniform approached,

Chino and Basilix as waves upon waves of enemies appeared including many dead Wulfn.

“Ahahahaha, I thank you Vulfax for acquiring my many new dolls. Oh and don't worry about Holly, I unleashed a horde of hundreds of Undead to take them out and at any minute they should be dying,” Chino giggled.

Azala stomped forward, “Now that it has come to this I think I will offer you a final chance of surrender as you are all my people. Bow down, submit to us or perish with this traitor.”

As he spoke the dragon came closer, all eyes locking in on the group. Elise stepped forward, “You leave them out of this Azala, I'm the one you want.”

“I am aware, which is why I will spare them for you.”

As Elise stood ready a hand was placed upon her shoulder. Azala's eyes lit up as Elise turned her head. The individual who had placed their hand upon her was none other than Vulper. He stepped in front of Elise to which Azala growled.

“Think about what you're doing Vul-”

“No milord, I won't. Elise has done so much for us, she has exposed so much for us. I won't turn my back on her now,” he began as others started to step forward.

Elise looked around as left and right people of Vulfax began to step forward. Zoey could be seen, then Brett, then the rest of her own crew, even Belama. David and Milly stepped forward along with several other individuals, all standing ready.

“This is our home Azala, we will not be pushed around!” Vulper spat.

"Yeah!" many others yelled out.

"Bah! You fools, you would choose death and stand behind this, this, peon?" Azala questioned.

"Where you see a peon, ugly, we see a hero," one replied.

Brett stepped forward with hands balled into fists, "Elise saved my bacon more times than I can count after the beatings I took because of your policies."

"Elise brought us care even when we didn't deserve it," one of the elderly looking individuals spoke.

"She kept this clan clean and did everything for us," a younger child commented.

"She is one of us," Vulper concluded to which everyone shouted in agreement.

Azala looked forward simply as Dustin and Toby glanced around. Elise stepped forward, her sword quickly being unsheathed and held by both hands forward as she moved ahead, "Vulfax is my home, no matter what I've been through. I realized that after I walked away, after being so concerned by what I had learned. I will fight for my home until the very end!"

Basilisx and Chino simply looked to Elise, Chino with a blank expression. Ahead of her Azala let off a scowl, his eyes fiercely looking her over, "It would seem that you truly were underestimated as a force of your own doing. Hmph. So be it. Then you can all die together!"

At once the dragon's head reeled back before them all and launched forward, a large beam of Dark Energy leaving its mouth with a loud bang heading straight at Clan Vulfax. Everyone stepped back as Elise stepped

forward, her eyes narrowed as the darkness danced in front of her, her sword raised, "I have to do something-"

"Why not let us then?" came more voices.

Elise blinked as at once twin beams of Light Energy crashed into the Dark Energy beam, both deflecting away from each other into various directions. The dragon's attack crashed far off to the left away from the group as the light crashed off ahead to the right, both resulting in explosions. Everyone's eyes perked at once, figures bolting down in front of Elise. Three of them stood, all three in the wardrobe of The Tribe. To the right stood a woman, to the left another, and in the middle was Holly herself.

"Nice shot Wes, Mother," Holly murmured.

"Nice, the new limbs are doing me well," the man commented.

Behind came a roar of feet and the sounds of guns popping and metallic screeches. Many enemies to the sides fell backwards, many howling out. Elise turned round, her eyes wide seeing many in Tribe uniform and many in soldier attire. Moving through the crowd of Vulfaxians was Callie, followed closely by the rest of the squad.

"No way, how did they survive my Undead trap?" Chino cracked out.

"Gah, always something," Basilisx growled.

Elise broke stance and stepped forward, her eyes locked upon Azala, Dustin, and Toby, "This, Azala, is the true meaning of power. All of us coming together as one to act as a collective to defeat a common threat."

Azala glared forward, his lips moving quickly with a snap, "Then let us see this so called power you believe in, let's watch as it crumbles away into the dust that it is worth. This will be the final battle, Elise!"

Chapter LXVIII

A beam of light flew through the sky and crashed before the face of the dragon. Upon impact both it and Azala yelled out, the dragon flapping back as its roar filled the air. Eyes shifted to the rear right, a man in sight.

“Father!” Holly shouted out.

“Hold position! I’m taking that dragon down myself, you all handle the rest!”

A figure appeared in the sky at once with sparkles shattering away, Shadow. He dropped down and landed before Maxwell, grabbing hold of him, “How I have waited for this, you’re mine King!”

At once the two of them disappeared with an explosion of Light Energy and Dark Energy. Wesley returned his sight forward, “Damn, now what?”

“Caldori, your team will handle Toby over there. Elise I’m putting you in charge of Azala,” Holly spoke.

“That was my plan before you even said anything Holly,” Elise chirped standing ready, “Zoey, Mark, you guys protect the clan.”

“Copy that!”

“Wes, Mother, both of you need to occupy Azala’s Dragon Form until my powers return. Until then I’ll occupy Dustin if at all possible,” Holly stated again.

“Alright but what about Basilisx and Chino?” Wesley murmured.

“Alice can likely keep them in line. Everyone good on the plan? If so let’s move.”

Holly shot off towards Dustin, who immediately shot away from Azala, the two disappearing off in the trees. Toby shot away as Callie took charge with Sora and the rest close behind. Elise glanced and watched as Alice tore off towards Chino and Basilix. With that she looked ahead and readied her own sword, "Well Azala, are you ready for this?"

"Mwahahahaha, to crush you with my true power? Alone? This should be good for a starter," he cackled.

Vulper stepped close to Elise, only for her to extend her right arm out, "Vulper. Please stand back, I know what this means to you but I don't want you getting hurt."

"At the very least allow me to watch your back and jump in if I see an opening," Vulper replied.

"Very well. Sephiroth, let's do this," she murmured returning her right hand to her blade which let off a literal flame.

"Be careful, this guy probably knows a few spells like Dustin," Sephiroth's voice echoed.

"{I doubt that. He's too proud a warrior to use magic. Those weapons of his and that Dark Energy is probably all we need to worry about.}"

Elise quickly shot forward as twin beams clashed above, light and dark. Azala's broadsword was raised and slammed down against Elise's katana. Light and Dark Energies blew outwards from the strike, both stepping back to then swing again and clash. The sound of their metal clashing for the third time could be heard, then the fourth, then a fifth. One more time their swords clashed with their sixth swings.

Elise quickly flipped back and took a quick jab at the ground with her foot, propelling herself ahead. Azala on the other hand took only a few steps back and then charged forward swinging his sword down. For the seventh time they exchanged blows against one another, darkness glowing around Azala and light around Elise.

Azala's left fist swung, parried by the hilt of Elise's weapon as it turned, a hit which sent her back again. At once Azala began to hover up with his left hand out and his palm flexed, a dark blue glow around him, "I call upon the Dark Moon's Blight!"

From above him came an energy beam dark blue in color heading down at Elise, shredding clean through a few birds that were flying overhead.

"Blast it immediately," Sephiroth commanded.

Elise flung her right fist out and shot out a blast of Light Energy. Her attack and his quickly slammed into each other, resulting in a flashy explosion of their respective powers. As she looked back to Azala she witnessed as his arm flung out again.

"Inchantium Gantisium," he called.

Vines shot clean through the ground and quickly slapped around Elise's wrists and ankles, then one around her throat. Azala chuckled as she was suspended, her katana falling from her hand. She gagged, her head slightly moving in defiance trying to pull away as her hands and feet struggled. At once she felt herself falling back as Azala growled.

Below the katana had spun with a white light and acted like a buzz saw. The vines quickly released Elise as her katana flew back and landed in her hand, "Thanks Sephiroth."

At once more vines blasted out of the ground in front of Elise, vines she swung at and cut right through with multiple strikes. Holding his palm beneath his mouth he breathed out, a breath of fire that quickly swelled into a cloud heading right at Elise. With both hands on the hilt and a swipe down a slash of energy flew forth and cut through the cloud of fire.

As it branched away the two foes caught glance at each other and held their weapons firm, both flickering out of view. Again their weapons clashed as both appeared in the middle of the fire, light drifting beneath Elise's feet and darkness from Azala's shoulders as he shot up. Over he flipped and landed, swinging wide with his sword only to miss.

Elise swung next, quickly blocked by the armor. Light and sparks blew out from the sword as it began to cut through. Another clang. Both skidded away from each other, a slight cut in Azala's armor as his sword came back down. Elise looked forward holding onto hers with both hands.

"You nicked him, that's a start. His bulk is slowing him down. While it might make him hit harder and block more he can't keep up. Splendid master-"

"Not quite what I'm looking for though."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember what Dustin said? This isn't his real body. If I had to guess what that means the real body is either the dragon or inside the dragon. What we're fighting is a red herring."

"Ah yes, I do remember. What's the plan then?"

"We cut down this fake and find a way to that dragon," Elise murmured as Azala slowly stepped forward.

"And then what?"

"I just need to coat you with a little Wolfsbane and Hemlock. If I can get to a soft spot and pierce the flesh of that behemoth, I'll both undo the transformation and paralyze Azala."

"Brilliant. And how do you intend to get by big, tall, and creepy?"

"Charging your blade with Light Energy put a slight cut in his armor. I just need to get a strong enough hit in and hope he doesn't regenerate right away. Then I can use my power to fly up there."

"Keep in mind I refueled you to the best that I could. Getting that high up might drain you and leave you vulnerable."

Light flew by overhead at Azala, his eyes going huge as the attack crashed clear into him. Elise turned around to see light glowing around Holly who was now surrounded. She glanced up as the dragon came at her and fired a blast straight into its face. With a roar it pulled back and with that roar a shock wave flew out of her, blasting the Undead away by the dozens, "My power is back at long last."

"Holly, a favor if I might!" Elise called out.

"What is it?" she asked turning to Elise.

Elise pointed up to Azala's true body, "Get me on its back and I can put an end to this if you keep him occupied!"

“Gotcha, consider it done. Come at me and jump, I’ll give you a boost with my own power. I have a gift for you too.”

Elise quickly ran at Holly and jumped, at which point light flew from Holly’s hands and into Elise’s feet. She propelled up and flew, her sword in hand as the broke through the sky like a rocket. In Elise’s hand flew another object, one tossed by Holly. The blast that engulfed Azala faded to which he stepped out, looking up seeing Elise fly high.

“Little brat-”

She flew up for several seconds more until she got up to the paw, then up further until she passed its head. Up a little further and then she flipped off, descending down. Elise landed on the back of Azala with that single move, as Holly then redirected her aim back to the face of the dragon, “Good luck kid.”

Elise stood now, smiling as she turned around, “Best place to strike would be the eyes-”

Darkness burst out of the dragon’s back, Azala’s body from the ground appearing at once as another figure bolted down right beside him. Dustin.

“-though it would seem as though I need to get by you two first.”

“If you can that is,” Dustin chuckled stepping forward while Azala held his broadsword out.

“I have a lot of people counting on me. Consider it done, the both of you,” Elise said confidently with a smile looking at both foes.

Chapter LXIX

Elise held her sword at her side waiting as both Dustin and Azala shot forward. Electricity flew from the hand of Dustin who skipped to a stop as Azala kept moving with his sword raised. With her sword out she let the electricity fly into it as her other hand fired another bullet off at Azala. The Drachen Warrior's hand moved in a blur of movement, the ax moving which quickly blocked the blast.

The back they stood upon rumbled as three jets of light could be seen up front, color slightly leaving the humanoid Azala at that point. Below Holly, Wesley, and Sandra both were firing a barrage of beams straight into Dragon Azala's underbelly, to which he fired a huge jet blast of darkness back. Elise glanced to humanoid Azala and vanished. At once she appeared with a spin right above Azala and swung down with light glowing around her blade, the weapon slicing through the head and striking down through the armor a good ways.

Both Azalas roared, the humanoid one melting away into liquid darkness once again. Elise pulled back and flipped, facing Dustin only at this point.

"So now it's just down to the two of us again eh?" Dustin questioned with a chuckle.

"Perhaps though unlike last time, I won't be someone you can easily knock around. I'll defeat you, then I will defeat Azala," she spoke.

"Such confidence. Then let this be it young one, my power versus yours."

"I wouldn't have it any other way you dastard."

Darkness streamed from Dustin's hands, a sword taking shape quickly in his right while Elise held hers to her left. Azala's roar was heard, the gun that sent the two flying at each other. Elise jumped up and spun, swinging down. With his sword up Dustin blocked though not without a loss of ground as his feet shuffled back slightly.

"Incarcio," Dustin commanded, flinging his left arm out with his pointer finger being the only extended finger.

A black beam flew forth though not of Dark Energy. Elise shifted left for a narrow dodge as it flew back into one of Azala's wings. A roar was heard as cracks spanned around part of the wing, a decent chunk breaking off from that hit. Elise's right arm flew forward and from her palm flew a flash of light.

With a chuckle Dustin's left arm went out and with a swipe knocked it aside, "Oh come now, is that all you've got?"

Slowly he stepped forward towards Elise, a smirk spreading; his lips moved again right after, "Last time you caught me off guard with your brain and that Hemlock. This time what have you got? You can't perform any spells, that I know for a fact. Your attacks are on the weak side, your weapon can't reach me. Face it little girl, you have nothing to hit me with this time."

"Heh, shows what you know. Then again what should I expect. You are someone who only uses others, you see value only in their abilities and not anything else. That is why you goofed last time and that is why you will lose this time."

"You certainly like to run your mouth don't you, pitiful insect."

"Well let's just say I've got this covered," Elise murmured reaching into her pocket.

BANG

"Pwah," Dustin croaked.

Quickly he stumbled back as his chest smoked, "Guh, what the fricknuts was that crap? What hit me?"

He looked ahead, eyes wide. Smoke drifted from Elise's coat pocket, a hole now visible. From it her hand pulled out and in it was a white pistol, the top of which was round rather than square; gold rings moved around the outside and especially the barrel of the gun. On the left side was a clue section with gold liquid swishing around.

"A gift from Holly, not sure if it's a Plasma Gun or Light Gun or whatever but it looks like it hit."

"You wretch!"

There was a flicker of movement, Elise quickly appearing in front of Dustin, his eyes growing huge, "And now this is goodbye Dustin, hyaa!" she yelled swinging her sword forward unleashing a slash wave of Light Energy.

His eyes widened as it slammed into him and exploded, light flying everywhere with smoke. Out the side he flew yelling, a large cut running down his face, down his torso, and down ones of his legs. Off of Azala he flew, crashing beneath the clouds and disappearing with a yell, "FUUUUUUUU-" it echoed off.

“Nice shot kid, you even got him with the blade. That Hemlock will stun him long enough for the fall to kill him,” Sephiroth’s voice echoed in congratulations.

“Heh, perhaps, but I’m not out of the weeds yet,” she murmured looking ahead to see the humanoid form of Azala once more, “So is this it then? Are we finally going to settle this alone now that he’s gone? I’m honestly getting tired of constantly cutting you only to have you come back.”

“Be careful, I’m sensing a lot of power in this body and a lot of life force. I think this is an extension of his true form.”

“{Saves me a lot of trouble then. If I cut this one down, I cut the whole thing down. Somewhat not smart on his end.}”

“He probably couldn’t split the focus any longer so he detached the core body to take you on while the remote dragon form handles Holly and the rest. Be truly careful with this one.”

“Ignorant brat, this will never be over,” Azala grumbled holding out a pirate sword now.

“For one of us it will be. Come,” she murmured.

Chapter LXX

At once the two broke into a run and as they had done before, clashed their weapons. Back they flew, skidding away from one another.

"You are beyond the point of redemption, merely a man corrupted by power that is not his own," Elise growled.

"Redemption? Who would ever need a thing as worthless as that?" Azala chuckled at once.

"What say you then to this final clash of arms. The end game."

"An amusing concept, let's do this, bah!" he yelled out, unleashing a breath of fire at Elise.

Above it she jumped, her sword swinging down unleashing a slash of light. His ax flew up and quickly blocked, a dark aura wrapped around the weapon. Elise looked forward, her weapon raised up ready. Ahead she flew with a kick and a spin through the air, her sword crashing down against the ax with her right foot slamming into Azala's gut. With a swift kick off she flipped back, dodging the swing of Azala's sword.

She landed on both feet, her head raised as she looked to him with a sword out to one side and the ax to the other. Her eyes quivered, her body shaking, her sword vibrating, "Everything."

"Hmm?"

"Everything that happened to Vulfax because of you, the many tortured and killed that were captured. The many abused for failure. The many things that you've done. All of it is just unforgivable."

"Ha, are you still on that? What a joke."

“Emotions are not something you can just brush off like they’re nothing Azala. Everyone you ever hurt, everyone you planned to hurt, everyone going to be hurt,” Elise murmured, both hands holding solid to her weapon as the shaking stopped.

A stream of tears flowed though stopped as her eyes opened up fierce, Light Energy flowing out of her. Azala tossed his weapons up and caught them with an exchange of hands, now held out, “Come!”

Elise broke stance and shot forward with her katana at her left, all energy disappearing from her as the glow of light around her weapon intensified. Azala stood ready, his sword up and swinging. Elise jumped as the ax flew up with darkness wrapping around it. Together they clashed one more time, both energies flying out wildly.

“Mother fucking- gyahhh, that dickhead just chipped me!” Sephiroth’s voice could be heard wailing, “Oh that’s it, kill this clown now!”

“I will, hrraaa!” she yelled.

Azala’s eyes widened as cracks appeared in his sword, then another set. Quickly Elise’s weapon plunged through the sword, the blade splitting apart as her sword flew down and clipped through Azala’s hand.

“Ahhhh, crap dammit hell-” he yelled out stumbling back, cut off by the wail of the dragon body.

Blood flew from his left hand now split open, his ax flying down slamming into Elise’s right shoulder. Her right hand went up with energy glowing, the ax slamming down in as her hand caught it, a bit of blood flowing

from it and then a fair stream from the shoulder. Azala quickly jumped back with blood flowing from his halved hand, Elise with a leap back with blood from her right palm and then her right shoulder.

Azala swung his ax aside, holding it at the ready as Elise did the same with her sword. The dragon's roar echoed as unseen to Elise its left paw split open up past the wrist, blood raining down towards the battle field. The two looked to each other with quivering eyes, scowls formed on their faces, and at once took charge.

Along the back of the dragon they ran, their weapons out at the ready as they ran. A little over a meter away their feet stamped down, their weapons up and swinging. Elise looked into Azala's eyes as he looked into hers, her own quivering with many a tear shedding. "{For Vulfax, Vulper and the elite, my friends, Holly, the Tribe, the world... and for Thomas, Destiny, and Sacho, for Elen, I can't afford to lose!}" she screamed in her head as their blades clashed with energy blowing out and away from them.

Their arms quivered, their weapons quaking against each other as Light and Dark Energies roared outwards. With a yell Elise pressed down, a chip appearing in Azala's ax. His eyes grew big as the chip turned into a series of cracks, then splits.

KAKLANG

The sound of glass shattering filled the air. Azala roared out, the dragon howling out in agony at the same time. Its wings stretched wide as did its legs, the head raising up.

Many eyes on the battlefield looked up, Holly staring as Basilisx ceased his movements to follow her gaze. Beyond Chino, surrounded by some of her Undead and the Tribe Elite, looked up. Toby's head moved up as his former squad mates looked on in awe. Vulper glanced ahead mid-fight, gulping.

A line could be seen now, underbelly splitting with a torrent of blood flooding out from it, a splash of it roaring out quickly turning black and bursting into black steam. All around several Undead and many Wulfn began to howl as black mist began to exit their mouths and noses, even their eyes. It was only temporary however; as they quickly resumed their placements.

The two squared off, drawing apart from one another yet again. Azala's remaining bits of ax flew from his hand while Elise flipped back holding onto her own weapon still. He yelled out, black aura racing around him for a second. Elise stood tall once more, holding Sephiroth out.

Blood dripped from Azala's gut. A wide cut lay there, shallow; but still a cut. His eyes shifted downward, "Hrgh- worthless armor. Fine then, I'll shed this!"

It took no time at all, a compression of black aura around his wound and face. All that lied a layer under the armor was surrounded for two seconds at most before blowing outwards. The armor exploded, pieces flying off everywhere. Shoulder pads remained, while underneath there was only the Hive uniform.

His, complete with the cut at the gut, and then the chest portion also missing. Straps held together in the middle of his torso, attached to a red object.

No neckband; though the coat was beyond that much like a normal Hive Elite's. His eyes returned forward.

As his eyes returned forward, darkness began to creep around the man, streams of it across his chest and his body. An aura, almost like black fire, surged around him. Once more he stepped forward, snarling, as Elise remained stationary.

"Not bad," he chuckled.

"Damn. Well, now that you don't have armor, I can try and nail you with- huh, oh, crap I don't-"

"Out of tricks eh? Yes I thought as much," Azala chuckled stepping forward, "This power, I am not yet fully accustomed to it. Once I am though, you're all going to die."

"Not happening," Elise retorted.

"You say that like you have the power to do anything about it," he chuckled approaching.

Azala stopped in place, grinning as Elise slumped ahead a step. His head tilted, then straightened, "Game over for you brat!"

His chest puffed out as he all at once took a breath in. Upon expelling the breath, there came a burst of blazing fire which punched it to the ground towards Elise. Her eyes widened, the inferno reflecting off each. It crashed against her body, bursting apart upon impact.

"MWAHAHAHAHAA, I WIN!" Azala laughed as the fire ceased launching.

The blaze burned, sitting atop the spot on the dragon's back. Smoke drifted, burning flesh smell filled the air along with char. Azala grinned, his

eyes gleaming as the fire's light reflected off, "Got her, I cooked her, I killed her!"

The fire fluffed out, bulking. It quickly began to thin out as it swelled, the flames dulling out with a dark figure standing beyond them. Azala's jaw dropped, "KAH?!"

Elise stood at the epicenter with her arms at her sides, raising themselves outwards. Her eyes shut, her breathing controlled. White light, very visible, filtered around out of the fire and drifted around her body.

"Elise, remember, fire is light, fire is energy!" Sephiroth's voice called.

"I've got it Sephiroth, thank you," she murmured in response as the fire broke way, exposing only the burnt back of the dragon.

"Gah dammit, I forgot, she did that earlier with the torches I think," Azala growled.

The katana was raised up, right over her head. Both hands grabbed hold, all of the white aura drifting up in streams right into the blade. It began to turn white, a silver static jetting out of it. Energy was collecting into the blade from both fire, Elise, and the sky around them. Azala changed stances from not one to a more defensive, his right side out and his arms slightly raised, bent at the elbow.

"Now, hit him hard!"

"Oh yeah," Elise mumbled, her eyes flying open.

Azala's stance tightened, his arms being raised, his hands clenching into fists. In that moment Elise brought her weapon down. A slice of Light

Energy shot forth from the katana, cutting up the dragon's back as it went. Blood pooled out though not a lot as the cut was minimal. Azala tensed, taking a step back as the strike blew right passed him. His head began to turn, "What?"

CRUNCH

Azala turned just as the beam shot clear off to the right around Azala, slamming into and straight through the wing. He immediately howled out in agony, dropping to his left knee with his left hand moving to his right shoulder. His head thrown back, his eyes shut, his roar set off into the sky. As he roared the dragon did too, the wing being sent flying straight off of Dragon Azala's body.

"Yeah I got him!" Elise burst out.

Chapter LXXI

Holly glanced up, right eye wide and left half shut. Basilisx's head and attention followed. Others looked up as the Dragon Azala let out a mighty roar, one that filled the entire area below on the battle field. Holly grinned at the sight, moving left as Basilisx swung his sword down at her.

Vulper glanced up while Zoey and Mark shot around him. Drake and Scott stood before him. Samantha stood ahead of them, huffing with twin sword. Many dead Dark Wulfn lay around them, along with many Undead. The wing crashed not far off, slamming into the forest as it had begun breaking apart into streams of black mist.

"You got him!" Sephiroth called.

"Yeah but now he's on guard," she replied.

Azala stood back up in front of her, still holding onto his shoulder. The dragon body itself did not falter, staying in the air on course atop streams of darkness itself. The wounds atop the body's back had begun to close, steam exiting them as they closed up bit by bit. Azala's teeth gritted as the fire in his eyes erupted.

Threads of darkness had begun to move out of the broken off wing's place, slowly but surely weaving together with a coating of darkness following behind. The wing was beginning to reconstruct itself via Dark Energy. All the while Azala's body quivered.

"That hit definitely did damage. His two bodies are definitely connected. If it's how I think it is, he can only focus on one body at a time, not

the other. If he's kept dancing and unsure of our attack plan, we'll have this won!"

"Gyah- god damn you Elise!" Azala growled as he stood firm, his arm leaving his shoulder.

Black aura erupted forth from his body like a flame, his hair turning pitch black and lengthening. His teeth sharpened, his bulk increasing by a small percentage. His eyes bled pink, eyes which rotated a whole three-sixty. He stomped forward, power amassing at his right hand.

Darkness spread forth into a lengthened shape. As it did so, the ax handle sent flying from his hand prior flew on back straight into the darkness. It, too, turned black with the handle lengthening. The top flashed silver as a blade began to protrude.

Elise stepped back, Sephiroth raised. Before her the broken ax handle had lengthened by fifty percent, and the blade emerging had shot outwards with a curve. Thick, a mix of reds and golds and silvers with streams of darkness surging around it. She gulped on air, eyes sharpened, expression tainted, face dead shot forward.

Azala slammed the butt of the weapon down, darkness exploding away from it to reveal it reborn as a massive scythe. The blade shattered, another form swelling in place. The weapon's head became a cross of a scythe and an ax, rather long and sharp yet thick. She took a step back, her leg a tad shaken, "Oh, that's not good."

Azala raised the weapon and launched ahead, weapon raised up ready to swing.

"Dodge it!" Sephiroth barked.

Her head tilted right, her legs giving out, her torso flying aside as just above the blade of Azala's weapon flew. A complete swing and a missed slash which left Elise at Azala's feet with Sephiroth swinging up.

CLANG

The handle of Azala's weapon blocked the thrust, Sephiroth's blade stuck in yet not going through. Her eyes widened.

THWACK

"Gyuh-!?"

Elise flew back and crashed, Sephiroth clanging to her right. The blade flew, skidding down the side of the dragon and right off. Her head turned, eyes big, "No!"

Azala lowered his left foot, grinning.

Wesley and Holly shot back to back, black wolves and beasts all around them. The form growled and the latter huffed. Her black hair shifted, her eyes dancing behind, "How many?"

"Seventy-eight."

"Ha, I'm at eighty-five."

"This isn't a game, these things keep getting back up no matter how many times we put them down!"

Basilix slammed down in front of Holly, his bulky armor glowing with darkness. He stood a good half meter. His bulk raised up with twin swords, both which were then sent slamming down. Holly shot backwards while Wesley shot off to the right. The latter slammed both hands into the ground as Dark Wolves reared up on him.

Stone Columns broke from the ground and impacted the wolves in their jaws, enough force behind the blows to send them flying off tumbling away. They oozed black, limbs and head contracting into the torso slowly like pooling mud. Only when they pooled entirely did they reemerge, paws to the ground and head forward. Wesley growled, looking as they all switched from being on their sides to standing by simply morphing.

As Wesley reacted to the wolves, Holly continued to dance with Basilix. Streams of white light left her hands and fired off at the bulky warrior, striking the armor only to do nothing. Her slight smile turned to a frown, "Damn, his armor is-"

"Alchemy reinforced. Your simple energy blasts won't be enough to rip this off me," he laughed with an echoing voice.

Clanking forward with swords raising once more, his eyes began to glow crimson red as dark mists steamed out of the armor.

"Nyahahahahaha!" came laughter from beyond their fight.

Far off, Alice stood before Chino, the former of whom held Dark Energy around her while the latter stood wild. Chino's eyes danced, purples in place of whites, corneas of dirty yellow, and pupils of silver. Young as she did appear, her power unseen, it clashed against that of Alice with winds scattering.

Alice huffed, "Dammit."

Alongside them ran Dustin with Milly and David following close behind in their transformed states. Dustin smirked as he ran along, the trio passing by another showdown. Winston's group faced off against the likes of Vulper, Zoey, and the rest of their crew. Dark Wolves moved around them, along with many Undead infused with the darkness of Azala.

Vulper glanced up to the dragon form of Azala which continued to hover. His mouth flapped, "Come on now Elise, you have to defeat him or we're all going to die."

Azala's weapon slammed down, the end portion of his weapon against the back of his Dragon Body. Elise took a step back, her arms raised as Azala began to approach. His head tilted off to the side as his grinning teeth parted, "I must say you've come far my false daughter. And yet, like all things, you will fold when faced against a force you can not possibly hope to defeat."

"If all things fold then what does that mean for you?" she retorted.

Azala's weapon rose, turning so that the blade became horizontal, "You know what? That's fair. Unfortunately you will not live to see the day! Now, die with the rest of your pathetic trash comrades!"

He shot high into the air and immediately rose the weapon. He swung forward just over Elise's head, the latter of whom looked up with fierce eyes.

CLANG

"W-what?!" Azala croaked.

Elise stood with both arms up glowing white, hands coated white and clasped together on the sides of the weapon's blade. Her legs bent, her face curled, rage flooding her expression as her body quivered. Azala swapped from one handed to two handed without a moment's hesitation. His legs bent as well with a bulk of force raining down on Elise.

"Geh- how is it that you can resist me, for so damn long!?" he roared.

"Because it is my mission to stop you fa- Azala. You think life is just something just granted without a purpose, you think lives are something you

can just throw around and use," she began as in her head images began to flood.

Holly, Britt, Mark, Zoey.

"You think life is something you can discard without a second thought, that people are disposable," she growled.

David, Milly, Vulper

"Life is something precious, something people only get once. You think the lives of others are worthless until they sacrifice themselves furthering you and your own self-interest agendas."

Sacho, Elen, Thomas, Destiny.

Her teeth gritted as Light Energy exploded around her, streaming out as white lightning. Azala's eyes inflated, his hardened expression of fire curving back into a subdued one. Elise's hold on Azala's weapon intensified, the entire weapon shaking.

"Someone like you has no right, no right to abuse the life given to others. Someone like you has no right to judge others when you yourself can not string together an act of compassion or understanding. Something like you, so evil and vile, has no right to take the freedoms of those who've given their all for the sake of others. Something like you, has absolutely no damn power over the rest of us!"

CRACKLE

SHATTER

Azala stumbled back with his eyes fully open as the blade snapped with a twist of Elise's arms. A huge portion the size of his head lay in her

palms. Her feet spun, twisting right around Azala's. He fell backwards, his mouth open, "Gyuh-?!"

"So just stop-"

She stood straight back up and threw both arms forward, a huge blast of Light Energy sent off leaving her hands and arms sending that blade piece forward.

"HRGHYUAH-!!!"

"Stop trying to take what should never be taken- **OUR SPIRITS!**"

His eyes shook as he looked ahead, eyes set on Elise's own face. Her fierce eyes, her twisted mouth, her streaming tears, her raging words. The blade slammed straight through Azala's torso and straight out of his back, ripping right through everything in his chest. Blood flew out, quickly engulfed by the Light Energy that followed behind the blade.

The energy ripped through Azala's chest wound straight out the opening in his back, blowing out insides which quickly vaporized in the intense burst of energy. Blood flew from his mouth and nose, his eyes blood shot. His weapon flew from his hands and clanged along the side of the dragon.

The dragon howled out with its head curling back, its body shattering around its chest. A mighty hole opened up as an explosion ripped its way through, likewise right straight up through the back.

Below on the battle field many eyes shifted as all movements came to a halt. Dark Wolves howled out along with the howl of the dragon, their bodies bubbling. The Undead continued to move though their movements slowed considerably as their own darkness began to bubble. Soon the wolves

fell, liquifying one by one, drenching the battlefield in black waters. The same darkness pooled out of the Undead.

Chino and Basilix both looked up with eyes visibly widened and shaken. Dustin shot a look of disgust upwards. Holly and Wesley both looked up in confusion. David and Milly glanced up with calm expressions. Zoey and her entire crew looked up calm at first before unleashing smiles and laughs.

Sora and Caldori stood alongside Belama, all looking up as the hole opened up in the dragon. Vulper stood a few meters away with shaken eyes and a smile, "She did it-"

The Light Energy faded from Elise's body, all of it having been spent. Azala flew back with some blood flying from the burnt hole in his chest, much still flying from his mouth and nose. His arms, limp as can be, flopped in front of him as he fell back. The warrior crashed, his back to the back of the dragon with a mighty thud.

With but a bounce up and down, he was done.

Chapter LXXII

Elise stumbled backwards, huffing. Azala lay just a few meters away on his back with a hole in his chest, his body as limp as can be with blood coating the lower half of his face. He attempted a gasp for breath, breath which would not come for he had no lungs to take it in. She fell backwards, then onto her side with eyes shut for a brief moment.

Slowly she picked herself half up, looking at him.

“Gyuah,” he gurgled, “Defeated by a child, such as this... what even is my life right now?”

“That,” she muttered getting on one knee, slowly trying to hoist herself up, “Was a blow for everyone you’ve ever wronged.”

“It is inconceivable. You, who were a nothing, defeating the likes of me?” he groaned as darkness began to drift out of his wounds in the form of black mist.

“It’s as I said, you’ve no right to our freedom, to our lives, to our spirits. They are something that should never, no, something that can never be taken. Especially not by the likes of you.”

“H-heh heh, well played,” he groaned, his voice drifting.

Elise glanced from him to the right, “What even happened to you old man? I’ve heard stories of your greatness, a greatness I never saw. What changed you? What lead you to become this?”

“Urk, guh- power corrupts, as they say,” he grunted, the color slowly reverting back to normal in his eyes, “I... I was once a proud warrior, this is true.”

He wheezed, several times, "I-I-I, I had to get that power, had to take it. My people- urk."

"Is it true? Did the Priests actually kill off your crew hundreds of years ago? Is that why you worked with Dustin and Shadow?"

He said nothing, simply laid there with a barren expression and dulling eyes.

"Heh, ask that to someone who cares," he grumbled in a low tone.

His eyes glanced up, locked to the sky as they dulled further and further, "It- looks like this is it for me. Heh... Elise, beware child. What you have done here today, what you will face ahead is beyond what you have seen thus far. That overwhelming dark power, to destroy- mountains, subjugate cities. You don't know it yet but, they will win."

"It didn't have to be this way you know Azala," Elise murmured, her eyes shutting and her head lowering, "You could've done something different, something so much more for your people."

His eyes very slowly moved across back to Elise, "H-head up p-proud warrior."

Her head lifted, eyes opening as Azala continued speaking, "Elise. I-I leave, I leave Vulfax in your capable hands- you and Vulper both. Take good care, of your people. It seems that I- won't be able to... much... longer- gyuh."

His body ceased movement as his eyes rolled back, the glow and shine in them departing completely. The dragon let out one more howl of pain, darkness now exploding out of its sides. Its eyes burst with darkness jetting out, beams of it ripping out all around.

All eyes looked up, all watching as Dark Energy ruptured out of the dragon. It howled one last time until its head blew clean off and burst into energy, the rest of the body then exploding. Vulper stepped forward, "Elise!" he wailed.

"There, I see her," Holly stated.

Through the clouds dropped a form, Elise, heading towards the ground. Callie quickly shot forward with water rushing around, "I've got her-"

She skidded to a stop, the water flying high. Elise fell faster and faster. Callie shook as Elise after nearly thirty seconds crashed into the water, her descent ceasing. Down the water drifted, a quick green glow emitting from it. Callie quickly sighed as the water lowered itself.

"I caught her with my Soft Healing Water. She'll be as good as new soon, hopefully," Callie called back.

"Way to go Callie," Sora laughed joyfully.

Toby appeared with a flicker right behind Callie, a sword held up and thrusting forward. Her heart skipped as slowly her head turned. Sora's eyes filled with horror, "Callie!"

Toby flew back, caught in a burst of light. Holly stood now beside Callie with her sword flung up having deflected Toby's strike.

"That's enough of that traitor!"

Another burst of movement now from behind Holly, the skidding of rock. Shadow stood behind with a gun near identical to the one Holly had given Elise, only instead of gold rings there were silver rings.

"Miss Holly!" Sora shouted out.

"You're mine," Shadow muttered, his finger squeezing.

BANG

Shadow flipped back and crashed a distance away on his back, an explosion having gone off in his face as Holly flew off to the side. Callie looked in shock backwards, Maxwell standing with smoke drifting from his back. A hole straight through his torso. Blood sputtered out, "Gah!"

"Father!" Holly shouted.

"Guh, I-I can't feel my power. What is this?"

"Oh no, that's-"

"A refined version of the drug that was used on you Holly," came Shadow's voice.

All eyes turned as slowly Shadow sat up, all eyes filling with shock though as he did. Once up all looked upon his face where the blast had hit. His left eye shot wide open and fierce, a pale white complexion around the eye with cracks spread. What appeared to be chipped paint lay around the eye, though in reality that was his skin.

"Wha-his face is," Callie stuttered.

"That was intended for you Holly Bell, though I suppose Maxwell can be considered the greater threat. His connection to the Celestial River is now gone for forever," Shadow muttered slowly standing.

"Hrk- bastard," Maxwell mumbled standing straight now.

Another figure dropped down. Dustin stood though as with Shadow something was off. His uniform lay burned off. Dustin's face sat split, half being what it was before, the other being paler. Amber eyes with snake slits, long flowing silver hair.

"Arkaza!" both Chino and Basilix spat out at the same time.

"Arkaza?" Callie murmured.

"Second in command to the King of Vampires, Hisan," Holly muttered, "He's a foe that Tribe and Hive both had to fight for several years. I never-"

"Would have imagined that I survived? No of course you didn't," came the chuckle of Dustin, or rather Arkaza.

Shadow looked to him with a smirk as Arkaza backed away, "I must say, the fight with Elise was most illuminating. I need to work on my game plan a bit. Though now that I'm exposed, I won't need to restrain myself next time. Thank you, Dharkanians, Lightonians, for such a great performance. And above all thank you, Vulfax. I enjoyed my time masquerading as Dustin Abbott of Stark Pack, as a lowly Wulfn. It was, shall we say, fun to experience it all."

Pink flower petals quickly began to swirl around Arkaza with a brisk swirling wind, his body slowly beginning to phase out, "I do look forward to our next encounter-"

The petals scattered as did the wind, Arkaza now gone.

"I can't believe this, Arkaza was right under our nose the whole time? How did we not notice!" Chino spat out.

"It hardly matters now, what's done is done. Now we have two fish to fry," Basilisx growled.

"Hmph. Toby, Basilisx, Chino, we're done here," Shadow muttered.

"What?" Chino growled, "But-"

"No, we're done. We're leaving while your zombies are playing with the Special Forces. We've accomplished our mission."

“Oh alright, ugh, killjoy. Come on Basilisx,” Chino muttered as black flames engulfed her.

At once black flames engulfed Basilisx and then Toby, their bodies fading out as Wes and others started to close in. Shadow turned to them as their bodies disappeared, then to Holly and Maxwell, “Know that this is not over Bell family. Know that this is only the beginning. We will have this planet. There is not a thing you can do to stop that now.”

With that Shadow burst into black flames as well, his eyes narrowing fierce, quick to vanish as Wesley arrived.

“Tch, that dastard,” Holly growled.

Chapter LXXIII

"We can confirm that the barrier was destroyed, we can confirm that Hive Forces infiltrated, and we can confirm that the alter was disturbed. In all likelihood they now have a copy of the map," came the voice of Wesley.

"I told you that thing was a curse to have, we should have just destroyed it," came the muttering voice of another.

"We needed that map for future generations or in the event that anything happened. Can you truly blame us?" Holly muttered.

"We never planned on another Lightonian selling us out. That barrier should have stopped any Dharkanian from finding it," Maxwell growled, "Toby did not have the power so this isn't just his doing."

"Which brings the question, who did it?" Wesley questioned.

"Is it possible that Stark is-"

"No, he is still trapped on Sillith. I am positive of that," Maxwell replied, "I know well enough how to feel the presence of my own son."

"Then who?"

"No one working with the agency at the moment. We already used truth serums on everyone we could," came the voice of the other individual.

"Omocha that's crude," Holly muttered.

"It was necessary. From what we can tell the person messing with us is Lightonian and pretty powerful. Rain, or rather Toby, could not have downed security the way that was done back at Nospheross and he sure as hell could not have found the temple."

“So essentially another Lightonian is out there somewhere, scheming in the shadows, plotting our downfall.”

“So it would seem Wesley, so it would seem,” Holly murmured, “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have one final bit of business to do here before we leave.”

Elise stood among the ruins of the mountain, scanning over scraps of wood and tumbled rock, a few torches scattered round. Several moved passed her into the rubble, several digging through the rock. Vulper stepped up beside her, “Don’t worry, they’re tough.”

“I know they’re not dead Vulper, don’t worry.”

“You have just been a wild child ever since I met you. Different, always walking your own path. Honestly I can’t help but feel jealous a bit.”

“Heh. Don’t get too ahead of yourself Vulper.”

Both turned around and stepped as Holly approached, “I trust that all is well here?”

“So far so good,” Vulper replied, “Our people are digging through everything while the clouds still cover the sky.”

“What will we do now that the mountain is destroyed?” came the voice of Belama.

“Holly here has already offered to help us relocate due to what we did during the battle that just went on.”

“Oh that’s great, no more crap caves?”

“Heh, I’m providing you with an underground facility with the best accommodations. Courtesy of the Canadian Government, though mostly

because they don't want a bunch of Drachen running around. Plus they owed us a favor for something that went down back in the eighties."

"Oh lord."

"Heh heh, hahaha," Elise laughed, "I feel like a huge burden is off my shoulders right now. It feels weird to me."

Holly looked to Elise with a nod, "Then allow me to replace that weight with another so you don't feel so off."

"Hmm?"

"I've spoken to my father. He and many others want me to extend an official invitation to you to join us going forward."

Elise blinked, looking at Holly hard now, "Wait what?"

"Yes. We want to bring you in as a Commander in fact. You'd be given a decent position as a result and a three promotions. You'd be able to head out with us and stick it to The Hive on the front lines. You'd be able to help a great many people. What do you say?"

"Oh man I uh, I mean, th-thank you. I'd love to!" Elise chirped.

"Then that settles it. Then if you would we need to--"

"Oh uh, hold on, I have one last thing to do," she murmured turning to Vulper.

"Oh?" Holly replied raising an eyebrow.

Vulper looked to her and she looked to him. A smile spread as she then nodded, "Clan of Vulfax, gather around please!"

Many heads popped up, all looking to Elise, many stepping out of the rocky rubble. Slowly but surely many of the clan had gathered round, all silent in wait. Zoey at the front with Mark beside her, Scott and Drake close by with

Samantha in the middle of them. Even Belama stood near. She looked around, waiting as the last of the group gathered.

“Not everyone but I suppose it'll do. As you all know Azala was a turncoat, corrupted by the Hive. Before he died he asked Vulfax be taken care of, and I intend to do just that. I, Elise Bak... no, just Elise. I, prior heir to Vulfax, now grant title of Lord to none other than Vulper.”

At once people began to applaud and cheer, a lot of shouts in fact as Vulper's eyes drew big.

“Heck yeah Vulper!”

“Oh man, that's awesome bruh-”

Vulper turned around, looking upon the clan and then to Elise, “I-I don't know what to say.”

“No need to say anything Lord Vulper. You helped me out a considerable number of times as you had for all of the clan. Now it's time to give Vulfax the leader they deserve.”

A smile spread over Vulper's face as he slowly nodded and gave a bow, as did everyone behind him, “Then as my first act as Lord of Vulfax, I thank you on behalf of the entire clan. I thank you, for everything Elise.”

“Come Elise,” Holly murmured turning around beginning to walk away with a smile.

Elise nodded ahead and then turned, following Holly. Step by step she moved. Her left arm then went up and her hand flew out as well, in a way waving off to Vulper as she moved on. Vulper nodded as everyone looked away, watching as slowly Elise disappeared off among the crowd of people in front of him. A final smile came over him, a final nod, “I will never forget you,

Elise.”

[And there you have it, the beginning of Elise's adventure alongside the Tribe. Told you it wouldn't bite, well, not bite you anyways. Ever since I met her I have been proud whenever I looked upon her, for the longest of times. To see her even inherit our power so efficiently, that just told me that she was a truly capable warrior.

She had accepted herself. She had known herself. She came to terms with who she was and by doing such she overcame the challenge in front of her. Heck, Elise even made things better along the way after all that happened. Truly a glorious moment.

But this is known only as the beginning of her journey, the first real marker on the path now set out before her as a Warrior for the Powerless. What lies before her, to this day, is still far greater. What lies before her will simply continue to challenge her even further. Elise's destiny has many more ditches to jump and cliffs to avoid driving off of. Fortunately, she's a fantastic driver with things like that.

Until next time...]