

A New Era (Part 1)

‘And so it went, through and through, the eruption of conflict. While not quite a war you could still call it the second war of the Sillithians now that they had returned. The Hive, masters of darkness, returned with vengeance. The fall of Nospheross, our so-called Supernatural Prison, one which housed many war criminals of both the Hive and the Hisan Army, countless of others even... that was the turning point, their return.

With that one swift loss, we of the Tribe had to take the call to arms again, to stop the evil before it could spread again as it once did in years long passed. Simultaneously the Hive had begun multiple operations scattered across the Earth. Their most major of them was the raid of the Yukon to take information from one of our temples, one which I was assigned to closely guard. Playing the local supernaturals there, particularly the Drachen Clan of Vulfax, they had prepared everything to take the Earth from us- an army and all.

But with the efforts of one brave soul I planted within that clan just a decade and a half over ago, those plans backfired and their army fell apart. The Dragon Lord of Vulfax, drowned by the power of the Hive, had risen to take on the world and fallen by his false daughter. In that battle, Elise Bakuuva defeated the mighty Azala Bakuuva, crushing the enemy’s plans for a conquest of Earth. At the same time, young Elise had also helped expose something beyond just our old adversaries- new forces had arisen and reawakened others.

Subordinate to the former Vampire King, Arkaza the Demon was revealed to be working in tandem with many others who had made the Nospheross fall possible. In the past, the Vampire King known as Hisan had caused many a problem for both sides of the war, marking his followers a concern always. And then, of course, that one with the mask in the white, and the doppelgangers following it.

Under the command of Leon Sycamore, the Hive and its allies began to go on the move. Their objective, the Shards to the Mirror of Sealing. Divided, they would hold shut the space-time anomaly back to Sillith, keeping the Dharkanian’s main army at bay in our home system. After all,

they've had about twenty thousand plus years to ready for us. Together, they would unseal that anomaly and unleash hell upon the universe.

A task though that is not so easy, as the thirteen are scattered across the universe via other anomalies. Still, as the weeks pass by, it poses greater risk. Already there are several worlds turning against the Tribe's alliances, flocking to join the Hive for the promise of power. Some worlds have even been plunged into a state of civil war, a divide in culture for different needs and wants. At the same time though, it isn't just societies flocking to join our enemy, as many a brave soul also joins up with our own faction to oppose the coming darkness.

That one child in particular... she would become the key to many things...

A brisk coolness, hooting of owls, the casual rustling of branches and the surrounding brush. Floral and fauna, alive as always on a nice calm evening in the middle of a forest. A couple stay clouds outlined by the glow of the moon light upon their surface, the vast circle drifting high in the sky smiling down upon the land. The environment of this forest was not to itself though, as other disturbances went on the quick move.

Birds flopped, flapping wings as they flew spooked from their nests. Owls, hanging aback, their heads spinning with each and every hoot. The subtle crouching of the deer seeking to be hidden. Then came more humanoid forms, hidden well within the branches of the trees, eyes glowing practically off of the flickering moonlight that came with each breath of the forest.

Gently flowing hair, a gorgeous dark blonde that bordered on the line of a brilliant auburn copper, an intoxicifying set of glowing emerald eyes, a near flawless smooth face with remnants of scarring now devoid. A figure dressed in baggy darkish blue tactical pants, a well fit purple shirt showing some fluff with short sleeves turning into dark arm bands, an over jacket of a darker aqua that also flapped minorly within the gust just as the hair did. So her side, sheathed, a katana of significant length to her own height, a tsuba of blue, a tsuka of white and orange ito, closed with a kashira of purple. Of course, sat like a crouching ninja in wait in a tree, was none

other than Elise Bakuuva herself, her katana Sephiroth at her side, her sharp eyes like hawk eyes scanning the forest floor.

Ears, mostly hidden by a flowing river of hair, did protrude one singular object, an ear piece. A simple piece, much like a law enforcement piece, with a wire running down the side of her head straight into the side of her collar and within the jacket. A mouth piece to her right, angled just so, yet not a word was as of yet said. She simply crouched within that branch, mostly out of the view of any who would move below, yet well within an accord to view all below as a glimmer of moonlight cast itself across her face before receding.

Her eyes, far brighter than before, still could not be simply seen. In all much change had come. Her figure had filled slightly, her color had improved, her hair strengthened and darker, her eyes brighter and filled with life. Her face, shown with confidence, her breath held a steady.

“Krzz- hey Bakuuva, you got anything in your sight line yet? Over,” came a voice over the ear piece, calm, collected, male sounding.

With so little of movement, wasting nothing, her right arm bent with her hand stretching towards her ear piece, her fingers running along a side button, “Negative Agent Omocha, I haven’t seen a shred of movement yet.”

“Krzz- yeah south side is clear too. These loonies might just be too scared to make a move. I don’t blame them. They don’t want to be blown away by the Wicked Witch of the Step,” came a new voice, this one mid-tone, clearly jokingly stating his report.

Elise smirked wide, eyes rolling as her fingers pressed upon the button once more, her lips parting to send forth a response, “I’ve told you already Vern, I am not adopting that as my code name so forget it.”

“What? Ah come on Bakuuva. Fine, how about- the Evil Wicked Step Sister, eh? You see, it’s clever because you’re our sister here, you’re wicked in battle, you’ve got a step that could put a pianist to bed, and you’re just evil with how you fight.”

“Ok so one, that wasn’t that clever. Second, really? A pianist doesn’t throw down or dance. Third I am not that evil, I just try to end things quickly so our losses are minimized.”

“Yeah well your friggen Hemlock Bombs are terrifying. I still remember when Ruddy tripped into them. Our medics were going frantic. I still don’t even get how you use, uh- constipated Hem-”

“Concentrated.”

“Whatever, concentrated hemlock. Isn’t that stuff toxic and fatal?”

“Well you see, it’s really simple with a mixture of other compounds to suppress certain-”

“Alright alright, that’s enough you two,” came the voice of Omocha once more, far more commanding this time around.

“Sorry about that Agent,” Elise said with a sigh, her smirk having now become a smile.

“Yeah if you guys are quite done, we’ve got movement from the West,” came a fourth voice, this one female.

“What do you see Cirice?” Elise questioned at once, her smile fading, left hand resting upon the end of her blade.

“Well-”

Not too far from Elise’s position, close within one to two kilometers, up in another tree was another individual. This one cloaked in a red dress with black leggings and black arm bands, long flowing black hair, eyes orange as copper. She stood in the tree, hand to her ear where her piece sat. Far below on the forest floor, moving from a far off area of the forest, there came a lot of movement and the sound of marching.

Marching feet, left right left right left right, all in perfect sync for the most part other than what moved at the head. Just under two dozen moved irregularly. The hundred or so moving in sync moved all the same, were dressed mostly the same, and carried a similar appearance. Lifeless

eyes, graying flesh which contained many stitches upon many, dressed in standard dark tactical gear. Many with rifles, some with only pistols.

At the head moved several dressed in a variety from tactical gear to rags to civilian clothes. One at the head marched dressed well, like a count out on the town. Cowl, vest, dress pants, slicked hair. The entire unit weaved in and out of the trees, sticking mostly together heading East into the forest.

“We’ve got about a hundred undead inbound, fronted by Wulf’n and I’m assuming and one Vampiric,” came the response via the ear piece, “Heading your way Bakuuva. This is definitely the group that took out Commodore Outpost.”

“How many armed this time?”

“The whole unit. Most of the undead are armed. None of them appear to be Dires however.”

“Normal zombies with guns? Hell, I’ll give Arkaza that one,” Elise mumbled, her fingers off the ear piece as she said it; though soon said fingers would return to the button and press it, “The zombies are not a problem if we take out the commander. The Wulf’n won’t be able to give them orders. Can you tell which one is the Vampire?”

“Oh, very easily. The question is though, is there a Ghoul or two mixed in with the Wulf’n?”

“I can neither confirm or deny. You better get ready. Armageddon is heading your way Bakuuva.”

“Oh please Cirice,” Elise said with the slightest of chuckles.

Her emerald eyes would dance, glancing from the bottom ground of the forest floor off to neighboring trees in the area. To most, perhaps hidden figures, to her they stood out so very easily. Various outlines lay hidden in the trees, standing and crouching mixed, some very well noted by the warmth of her eyes. A few trees to the East where there stood upwards of four, then a few to the North where there was a mix of three. To the South, there were two.

“Tell Domino Squad to stay on standby to cleanup the leftovers, and- my regards to Tony for being a good janitor,” Elise concluded.

“I heard that *krrrz-*” came another voice over the channel.

“Give us a break Elise,” went another, “You don’t want to get burned by the Captain again do you?”

“No Dryden I’m good, heh heh. Alright. Either way, Vulfax Squadron will handle this. We’ve faced far worse. Right guys?”

“Ten-four boss,” came a laugh.

“Will you guys shut up?!” barked a disgruntled man, “They’re near!”

Indeed, the marching had come, the sound of twigs snapping and the grass being ruffled. The marching of boots upon the ground, however soft, came very noticeable. All those in the trees sunk back in, hiding. The marching continued, echoing throughout the forest. Step, step step, step. Coming like thundering applause, it now was right behind Elise, coming straight behind her.

In no time at all the marching was beneath, her eyes still staring down. Right into the clearing the army marched. Dressed as they were, forces on the move. At the head there moved the one, the count, the apparent leader of the forces below. Behind this leader sat out in front were the many in differing uniforms, some combat ready, some in rags, some civilian, all gauged to be the Wulf’n Zaherian. Behind that group, the march of a hundred or more Undead.

It was the sound of the uniform walkers, their boots stomping upon the ground as they moved, enough to silence anything in that forest. Her eyes glanced from below to up ahead again, to the North- to the South- to the East. Heads nodded back, weapons drawn, figures so slightly moving-

“WAIT!”

Those gorgeous emerald eyes blinked, blinked for but a moment as a report came in at once. Her fingers immediately pressed the button, “What is it?!” she whispered with a hint of venom.

“We’ve got more unfriendlies inbound!”

“What?!” came a choke over the channel.

The marching of hundreds of boots upon the ground, that is what came behind. The girl from before, still in her tree, stared with eyes like saucers. On the floor beneath her, the floor of this forest, there moved a solid sea of bodies. A line had come forward, with a range of soldiers behind it. Dozens and dozens marching, dragging back behind the first unit, hundreds upon hundreds of undead had recently entered the region.

“I’m telling you, we’ve got hundreds more coming up behind! It’s like a sea of zombies down there!” Cirice replied.

“Son of a-” Omocha could be heard before he was cut off.

“Lieutenant Bakuuva, your orders?” came the voice of none other than Britt Bakuuva, her former older brother.

“Bakuuva,” Omocha began, “You’re only going to get one damn shot at figuring this out. We do NOT have the resources to take out this entire army. You need to take out the commander before he can give the zombies an order, stat!”

She looked down, watching the first wave move perfectly into view. The emerald gaze moved, first to the Vampiric at the head, cocky and strutting his power. They stood there, studying for but a moment... then they drifted, drifted to the warriors. All of them moving irregularly, some bold and confident, others subtle and focused. Then they shifted again, cast right upon the undead ocean below her that was about to more than triple in size from the wave coming up behind. Finally, those precious eyes of hers shut.

“Well? Bakuuva??” Omocha repeated.

“You guys wait up here, I’ll be back,” came her response, her right hand moved away, her right arm lowering.

“Hey- wait, Bakuuva!”

Her knees bent and stretched tall. Up she stood, no longer crouching, and in a simple move she simply stepped forward and right off the branch. Her hair flew up, her coat flapped, and down she went as the zombies passed her by, hands in her pants pockets. Eyes open and looking straight down at the ground as the air flew around her.

Step

With grace, she landed upon the ground, her left foot first, then her right from her slightly bent knee. Standing straight, her hair flopped back down as did the coat tail of her jacket, her head tilted up, eyes to the back of her enemy. A grin formed as her eyes narrowed.

“Hi.”

A New Era (Part 2)

The forest all at once was still, so little movement. Not a creature flickered, not even a breeze of wind or rustle from the flora. The zombies stationed before Elise stayed in place after their last march, as the ones far behind did much of the same. Marching before her ceased, marching far behind as well. Then those to the front came to a halt, the leader holding his hand up.

Not more than five seconds following the peace, the middle row of zombies turned, turned to face each other, then stepped backwards at attention with their weapons. Far up front the warriors had also turned round, as did the vampire who appeared as smug as the rest. A light snicker came from him as he stepped forward, passing by the warriors, shoving one. A slow walk forward right between the lines of zombies.

“Heeheeheeheeheeheeee, hoo ha ha, hmm,” the man chuckled, walking forward with hands in his pockets, eyes aglow, “Ah, well well, what have we here? A kid lost in the woods?”

“No, not exactly.”

The man continued until but a few mere meters away, ceasing with the others filing in between the zombies right behind, eyes all dead set upon Elise. Many an enemy before her, many waiting not far behind, yet there she stood still as can be, calm as can be, a slight smile. The man, eyes red, removed both hands from his pockets. His arms held out, welcoming embrace or praise, a slight chuckle before he continued on.

“Ah come now, come now. Tell me dear, are you uh, are you retarded or something? Do you uh, ya know, not see the hundred armed zombies and the fucking warriors I have behind me, eh? Can you not tell by my eyes and fangs that I am a Vampire?”

“I can tell a lot of things actually, that’s just not what this is about.”

“Oh? And uh, what exactly IS the goal here, huh? To come offer yourself for the glory of the Hisan Vampires?” he chuckled on, hands placed back to his pockets, a wide grin forming.

Her eyes locked to his, eyes of red, dull as can be. Said eyes then wandered among the ranks, viewing the Wulf’n, eyes human as can be. To the left, then back to the man before scanning

to the right. Rows and rows of dead cold eyes, mostly, nothing glowing, nothing ou. Finally she looked ahead to him once more, chuckling herself, removing both hands from her pants pockets to place within her coat pockets.

“Hmm? Come to realize your fate lass?” the man laughed once more, arms to his side now.

“Oh no, that’s not it. It’s just that uh, you’re not the leader, and I know who is and why.”

“Huh? And how’s that?”

“For one, the zombies stopped marching in sync before you ever did, both in front and back. No one behind could’ve seen me. No one in front could’ve either. It all came down to what I said. Second, you’d know you were being hunted. That’s likely why you split your line, so any attack up front would result in minor success until the rest overwhelmed us. Three, I can tell a fake set of eyes and fake fangs when I see them. And four, almost all of the zombies have dead eyes. Not a set of glowing eyes among them.”

“Uh- er,” the man began, arms lowered, eyes shifting around quickly, soon shifting back up to lock with Elise’s, “Your point? Yeah, dead eyes because they’re undead, duh.”

“No no,” Elise said with a smile, continuing to speak, “I said almost. Second to back row, third to the right. It’s the only one wearing goggles. I can’t see its eyes.”

Her eyes turned to the right, locked right to the one she called out. Almost immediately the figure stepped back, arms raised defensively, one out front, the other behind as if ready to turn and run. Immediately Elise’s right arm jerked, her hand flying from her pocket. It extended, held out, hand held towards said individual and in it a gun-looking object, yet not quite a gun.

The trigger was pulled and forward there flew a white bolt of energy, plasma practically in appearance. It flew through the ranks and slammed straight into the target. A yell was heard as they flew back and crashed, their howl practically inhuman, a super sonic screech. Right away, all of the non-zombies turned, count included. They all looked upon the struck figure, goggles flung off.

A slight glow of orange eyes, fading in and out. All eyes turned their attention right back to Elise, the count now with his mouth hanging. From the fallen, to the gun, and back to them- her eyes simply drifted.

“Holy Burst Pistol, good for stunning Vampires for a couple of hours. At least one Vampire or Ghoul is needed to command Undead. Like I said, far too obvious. You know you’re hunted, either you’re a total idiot strutting around like you own the forest, or you’re just a diversion. Then like I said, the zombies stopped well before you did, so someone back here heard me and was clearly the guy. And uh, yeah, only one without visible Undead eyes. Finally it’s at this point where my comrades and I are going to swiftly beat the few Zaherian and whatever else you might have here in front of me, followed by processing you after for intell. We good?”

“Oh fuck me,” the count grumbled out, stepping back a pace among the others.

“Sorry bud, you’re not my type. Now!”

Flora rustled and crashed immediately, out popped nine others who had been waiting up in the tree tops. All came flying down right above, weapons drawn, combat ready. They all looked up wide eyed right as many were then tackled to the ground, some run through by a variety of weapons. A blend of color all came down at once near the heart of the warriors, quick to fan out and begin beating away at many of the Zaherian.

Elise herself flew forward with an upper cut straight to the count, sending him crashing back into two other individuals. In no time flat the group of Zaherian were completely surrounded, those that remained held at blade point.

“How’s that?” she plainly stated, looking down upon the count who now lay upon his back, atop two of his followers.

He gazed back into her eyes, his own dazed, one eye now brown while the other remained red. He simply looked back upon her breathing heavily with nothing but shock filling him.

“Krrz- Bakuuva, come in!” came the voice of Omocha.

“Yes Agent, what is it?”

“Did you seriously just launch your ass in front of the enemy and pull off some crazy shit again?”

“Possibly, very possible. I’ll have to get back to you on that one,” came her response, followed by laughter over the channel.

“How in the living Hell does Lady Bell put up with you? Good lord I- wait, perimeter team just picked something up- impossible! Get out of- *krzzzzzzzzz*!”

“Wait, Omocha, Agent Omocha, do you copy?!” Elise called out.

Upon a sudden there came the thundering march. All bodies turned round, eyes bulging from a couple of the squad, the rest gritted with teeth and narrow. Elise herself turned to see nothing but the source of the rumbling as the second division came marching in. The Undead in sync all came marching again, a lone warrior leading the charge in front of them.

A warrior, cloaked with a black cape dotted with red stars. He bore armor, medieval in appearance, clanking as he marched forward with his army behind him. The armor stood out as dark gray and black, a helmet of horns resting upon his head. Tall, bulky due to the armor, eyes fierce and raging amber, hair a blend of brown and black and white. This lone individual headed the entire marching force of the Undead.

Behind them, the units they had stopped prior had also begun to move. The gap opened by the parting of Undead was now being refilled as said ones who parted before returned to formation. Though the target of Elise’s shot had gone down, it had not yet stopped the enemy.

Immediately as she gazed forward upon the enemy, her eyes met with those of her foe, her rage in turn sparking, “You damned-”

“Ah, Lieutenant Bakuuva. I should have expected you to be here,” the man spoke in a deeper voice, authoritative in a way.

“General Mallic Hawthorne,” came a murmur from one of Elise’s nearby comrades, Milly’s voice.

David stood beside her, shaken, his own eyes turning fierce and beginning to show the inner beast, his Wulf’n blood clearly boiling. Rusty and Britt backed away a pace, collecting themselves, while the rest all began to take on more defensive positions. Scott and Drake flipped round, Mark doing the same with twin swords. Samantha soon followed suit, while Zoey hung close to Elise.

“Did you truly think I would make it that easy for you to disable **my** army?” Hawthorne went on to question, looking at Elise with a slight laugh.

“Anything is possible I suppose, you haven’t exactly been the most thrilling of battle tacticians in the last few months.”

“Hehaha, **clearly** I am incapable of doing my job, wretched brat,” he growled in return.

“But what if this was also part of my plan General? I’m not exactly the most orthodox when it comes to battle strategies. Maybe my plan was to find the fake within your ranks, do a fake victory celebration, and have us lower our guard just to draw you out?”

“HA ha ha! No one is that clever, that would just be ridiculous!”

“Your bluffs never work out dammit to fuck, now we’re screwed!” Rusty quickly spat, grabbing his sword with both hands, quick to hold it out towards the enemy with gritted teeth and a sharpened gaze.

“Shut UP Rusty, I’ve got this!” came her spat response.

“Eh- Elise, I don’t know about this one,” came the response of David who had begun to eyeball every soldier around Hawthorne, sizing up the whole lot of fire power.

“This is why we shouldn’t have just jumped in. This stupid bitch is going to get us killed!”

“Shut up Rusty, everything is just fine!” Elise spat back once more.

“Just fine? HA! Your whole squad is now under MY power, and soon the rest of your forces will be as well. A fail to see this as secured. Holly Bell’s prize, and the famous rebels of Vulfax. This must be my lucky day, haha!” Hawthorne laughed.

“I have to ask myself this though,” came a chirp from beside Elise.

Hawthorne looked to Zoey, while Elise moved a few faces away, a slight grin still present on her face as Zoey then stepped forward. Her silver eyes skated around her foes a few times, then rested back upon Hawthorne, “Why would a General like Hawthorne be out here in the middle of nowhere commanding a who-knows-what battalion of Undead, when Elise without a doubt nailed the actual Vampire commanding this nonsense?”

“Huh?” came the confused response of Hawthorne.

“Zoey, you have five seconds to explain yourself before I-”

“Rusty just shut up and learn to listen to women for once, you might learn a thing or two. Britt and Elise probably picked up on it easily before I even could. Think about it, why would a Dharkanian be in control of the Undead? He isn’t a Vampire. And of all Dharkanians, why the famous General? So what if he isn’t a Phantom, he’s still noteworthy, there’s absolutely no reason for him to be here.”

Her silvery gaze rested upon Hawthorne, a smug shit-eating grin making itself apparent while Elise simply stood beside her friend with a smirk of her own. Rusty and the rest looked to one another, then back out to Hawthorne. The latter looked around, frantically, stammering, “Th-that’s because uh, no- shit!”

Shatter

With the sound of broken glass, the army behind Hawthorne vanished entirely. The first wave had returned to how it was before, the middle parted and all standing at attention waiting. Where Hawthorne stood, there now was someone new. A scawny dark haired male stood in place, robed simply, a face practically expelling the feeling of nervousness.

“An illusionist with a pretty bad bluff, called it,” Britt stated behind the group.

“How?! That was perfect! No- better question, how the fucking shit fuck did you fuckers take out Yaunro!? No way are you stupid rookies that damn good!” the male yelled out, rage flooding from him.

“Because half the people in this group have an above average IQ, probably,” David replied with a shrug, “Two of them have kicked my ass in the past with significant ease.”

“Bullshit! GAH!”

Several wolves immediately sprung out from behind the man, followed quickly by several werewolves. Many snarled, some growled, all appeared so very much pissed off just like the Illusionist. Those already taken out or held at point by Elise’s squadron stood ready themselves, flexing a bit, cracking their bones, eyes changing as hair began to go wild along their skin.

“How’s this for impact, eh?! I dare you to beat all these brutes! If I can take you out, Arkaza will promote me for sure!” the Illusionist laughed.

“Looks like you were right Rusty, they are just Arkaza followers. No Hive here,” Scott said aloud.

“Christ bro, that’ll go to his head now,” Drake laughed.

“Everyone shut up and focus on what’s going on around us! You can kiss my ass later!” Rusty spat.

“Time to get this show on the road. I’ve been dying of boredom honestly. Time to finally cut loose,” David concluded.

Elise’s left hand rested upon the end of her weapon as she looked forward at the foes present on ahead, “Alright. Lets go!”

A New Era (Part 3)

With a snarl and a howl, the first of the Wulf'n shot itself forward through the air. From the left side of the Illusionist, it took a drive straight for Elise, she who remained as calm as a cucumber. Unmoving, blank expression, eyes drawn back at half mass, pupils following. Her coat flapped ever so slightly as the snarling beast came in, mere inches from her.

SLAM

Zoey hovered in the air just before Elise's face, her backside no more than a meter up front. However to the front was the Wulf'n, head bent far back, its body twisting. The count of bones crackling, then the thwunk and the crash upon the ground, skidding away as Zoey dropped back down on both feet. She looked on with a smug grin while Elise behind did much of the same.

A slight tapping, the tapping of Zoey's right foot on the ground, lightly with a patter almost like rain drops dripping, "Might've over done it with that."

"Nah. He's still breathing, you're good," Elise replied.

"Son of a- all of you- all of you!" the Illusionist yelled out, throwing his right arm out with pointer finger stretched to the brim, "The first of you to bring me that dumb blonde's head will be promoted and receive more money than you know what to do with!"

Zoey turned her head, eyes drifting back, "Dumb blonde? Does he mean you? Or me since I kicked the wolf?"

"Dunno. Neither of us are blondes so."

"Focus!" Rusty spat.

"Pft, the hell is the point Rusty?" David laughed, all as fur began to ruffle itself around his arms and legs, dying back ever so slightly before his hair became normal once more, "I don't even feel the need to transform to deal with this."

"They definitely don't appear to be worth the effort," Drake chuckled.

"Get them!" the Illusionist roared.

At once the wolves all began their charge, followed closely by the werewolves. Twelve wolves- now eleven, ten beasts, one humanoid. On the flipside, ten armed with various weapons and their own bodies. Several incapacitated remained below, scattered on the ground around the ten, who now readied themselves as more foes came barreling in.

CRASH

It had begun. Two wolves had been sent flying, three beasts having locked grips with the likes of Rusty-Zoe-Mark. Drake and Scott had quickly begun to swing their four daggers through the air to clip one wolf and run through another. David slammed his right hand straight into the throat of one beast and quickly hoisted them up into the air, bringing them back before angling their arm to the ground.

BAM

Down the beast flew, David's hand still attached to its throat. Catching it off balance with his own strength and maneuverability, it slammed hard, saliva flying high up into the air with a deathly cough. Following the Zaherian jumped away from his slammed target, quick to begin kicking away another two wolves. Said wolves flew, kicked repeatedly next by Milly and Samantha.

Britt weaved in and out of the swings of a few beasts, countering with his own sword whilst mixing in a few simple kicks and punches. As if it were a dance he went on with so little wasted movement. Then on the flipside was Elise weaving in and out of pouncing wolves and beasts with swinging claws. Her sword not yet drawn, her hands out and moving.

Those hands would avoid the claws of an enemy and take rest upon the side of the closest arm. With but a slight nudge, those arms and strikes were offset and sent flying. A few twirls mixed in and then a full shove from both hands to send a launching wolf crashing off to the side. As the last wolf was parted, a massive thud came just to her left.

A turn of the head and there before her was a three meter beast, claws out and ready, drool dripping. A roar left its opening mouth as its arms flew out. The battle charge had begun as

its feet carried it forward right to her. Just another smirk as her left hand quickly grabbed hold of the handle of her katana.

Swing

Slash

Blood sprayed the air though only a little bit. Elise now stood behind the beast, back to back. The blood had come right from the torso of the beast. A yowl of rage left the warrior as it unleashed a swift turn. Claws flew as did the blade, claws slamming against steel, steel to claws and fur. A lock of both sets against the katana, heavy force with ground crunching beneath the paws of the beast- yet she did not fold, a hand upon the handle and one to the back of the blade as support, keeping the beast at bay.

“AROOOOOO- HACK- HIC- Hrrrkszzzz-”

Without warning the fur began to fall loose from the beast, his form beginning to submit and shrink. His features from ears and snout to bulk and height had begun to reverse, shrinking drastically. The fur fell and the wrinkly skin of a dog had begun to turn back into the rough skin of a human. Blood continued to drip from the chest wound as the Zaherian stumbled back, reverted to human form.

Elise simply delivered a quick kick to the gut- a kick that then toppled the man to the ground. His dreadlocks flopped, covering his face as he landed, while she continued onward. The Illusionist backed up, back to a tree, eyes shaken. His arms held at half, hands wide open, sweat dripping down his face.

The sword slammed straight into his side and right through to the tree. A yowl of pain left him, his head thrown back and arms thrown out, “Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

“Oh chill, I didn’t hit anything vital, it’s just a scratch.”

“You stabbed me you crazy bitch!” he choked.

“I mean you are the enemy. Relax, it’ll just get the knockout drug into your system quicker. See, usually I coat my weapon in poison but today, I just used Wolfsbane and a powerful incapacitating agent derived from a- oh it doesn’t matter.”

“You psycho bitch, you’re just playing with us! GAH- hrrreeeeh, hreeeeeh-”

“What? You’re playing too, right? You’re not just an illusionist. Your name is Raika Delvonte. You’re an illusionist- but you also have command over some forms of elemental magic. Your nickname is the Golem Master, isn’t that right? A cautious snake that never shows his real body.”

“GAHHHH!!!” he roared.

All at once the color of his body faded, turning to a sludgy dull brown. The features of his clothes and body faded away, then the entire form had begun to melt. Sephiroth was quickly pulled out as the mud body stopped and melted to the ground, while Elise turned around quickly, “A mud replacement, as I thought.”

“But did you think of this?!” came the yell of Raika.

The ground beneath Elise shook and cracked, rocks sent tumbling. A blast of dust and rock, one that entirely engulfed her in not more than a second. Up flew a giant face of rock, simple glowing eyes and chiseled features, blocky. The face was split in half, a wide gaping hole positioned right beneath Elise with teeth of stone at the edges. Down she fell, gulped by the mouth which then slammed shut as a massive figure launched out. A large blocky head, a muscular stone body, thick arms and stubby legs.

It truly stood as a stereotypical golem in terms of design at ten and a half meters tall. Standing atop the right shoulder of this golem was another form of Raika, this one seemingly real. His arms crossed, his hair flowing, he gave out a laugh as the golem crashed its way to the surface, standing over the forces against him.

“How’s that little girl?! You’re now a snack for my golem, hahaha!” he cackled.

All eyes turned, attentions cast upon Raika and his golem as he continued to gloat. His eyes big with life, fire, determination, practically glowing. They scanned the area as his arms flew out, “Surrender to me Lightonian Slaves or DIE!”

Silence.

Silence...

“Is he done?” came the voice of Scott.

“Dunno but he’s sure as hell annoying,” Rusty grumbled in response.

Raika blinked, his arms lowering, then another blink, “Heh you- eh, what?”

With the question posed, it began. White light streamed from the cracks of the golem, its eyes looking down as did its head, a low groan coming right from it. More and more light raced out of each crack in the torso, then soon from the mouth and eyes itself. The intensity increased, twice as bright, then four times as bright right after. Cracks began to spread along the torso of the golem allowing more light to rip its way out while the entire structure itself began to rumble.

The shaking quickly reached Raika as it went from mild shaking to a full on quake. Finally a blur of white light pooled out of dozens of appearing cracks in the torso, then a blast. White light ripped its way out and tore the rocky body to pieces, debris flying everywhere while a loud roar left the creature. Arms and legs collapsed to the ground, the head went on a roll, Raika himself toppled over and collapsed with the arm he stationed himself near.

At the epicenter of the light was Elise with her sword still in hand, the light dancing right around her. This was the simple release of her own Light Energy, that which had such force as to destroy the rocky body of the golem. Down she dropped now without a thing to stand on with light fading. Atop a rock she landed as Raika’s head slammed into one as well.

He crashed over, unmoving, while Elise then hopped off the rock and onto the ground. Silence filled the area as small rocks continued to roll and bounce off of the newly created pile. Left arm out away from her, her hand flickered. Sephiroth twirled and was quickly reverse gripped, the tip of the blade being stuck back into the sheathe as she sheathed it entirely.

Arm returned to her side, she looked around. Many Wulf'n lay out of commission with only a few still standing, the zombies remained unmoved without orders, the two leaders lay out cold, and all her comrades remained standing.

"And now if you guys don't mind, we'll take your immediate surrender," Elise concluded, confident, a hand resting now back upon the end of her weapon.

Before her arms went up, half mast, all the way, even just hands up with arms lowered almost entirely. The enemy had begun to revert back to human, fur and claw falling as features became more humanoid.

"Krrrz- Omocha to Lieutenant Bakuuva, come in Bakuuva! What is your status?!" came the chatter of the com.

All she did in response was simply glance towards the area behind with a slight turn of the head. Given a moment of waste, her right hand moved up and again connected with her ear piece, "Enemy captured. The zombies are all in standby mode. We have Raika the Golem Master, and we have the vampire that commanded this group. The mission is a success."

Relief washed over those present as the warriors dropped to their knees, hands crossed behind their heads. All moved around taking cuffs and applying them to said warriors' wrists, officially ending this battle. Elise stood by watching as everyone moved, giving a nod towards Britt who looked upon her with a smirk, eyes flickering with joy. All seemed well... for the most part.

At a distance away, perhaps three kilometers, two figures stood atop a tree with the glow of the moon around them. One dressed entirely in black with crossed arms and hanging sleeves, purple eyes glimmering as a wave of red hair passed over with the flow of the breeze. The second stood in mostly white, draped in shadows, masked with a single darkened blue eye showing, mask features covered by darkness.

In the hands of the masked figure was an orb, held out ever so, glowing a dark green glow. The orb itself held a face of its own, the face of none other than Leon Sycamore himself;

though soon the orb changed to another face, another of the Hive forces, then another, as if it were a television going from face to face during an interview. Eyes so clearly watching via that orb, staring out just as the two figures were doing, studying what had just transpired out before them.

With flickering light, both red and white vanished, the orb taken along with them with so little trace evidence of their existence left behind. Forces on the move, forces of the unknown, forces standing with the darkness...

‘And so there you have it, one of the latest of battles at that time, the beginning of what was to come in what we would call The Second Sillithian War... though really, it wasn’t just the Sillithians at that point. As I had said earlier, many other forces were at work- allying themselves to one, both, or neither side. Still, we were ready. Elise and her team from Vulfax were not the only ones we had raised up, certainly not.

It had been six months since the Vulfax Valley incident and with our losses over the years, recruiting new blood was certainly our priority to combat the coming darkness. As demonstrated with that battle, it was paying off and one hundred percent worth the effort. Certainly some lines had to be crossed but in the long run, it would stem to give us only benefits... for now, of course, as can really be said of all things.

Isn’t that how it works though? You look for a solution in the short term without thought to the long run, leaving that fix to the next generations to solve. Truly one might say that is how we mortals handle life. We solve and invent new problems to pass on to those who will be there after us... and for right now, this system is certainly fine.

Elise Bakuuva, an ordinary girl by every means, smart and strong sure- but so very normal at the same time unlike some of the rest of us. She was the first success of Project Stingray... and it is with new soldiers like her that we shall win this war. Human weapons might sound barbaric but it’s all in how you treat and use such a weapon. And at the point of the conflict

escalating thanks to the likes of Arkaza joining hands with the Hive, it's all hands on deck with a need for every advantage in the book to save the world.

The next chapter of this story without a doubt starts at this singular point... and how it ends, well... you'll just have to see for yourselves.'

The Return to Emerton

The forest floor had grown littered, littered with moving bodies. Many in army uniform, camou and all, guns to their sides, guns to their hands, guns to their backs. They moved in and out with simple shoves given to others in rags, the former warriors. Zombies stood in line, shot in the back of the head and put down by several in black clothing.

Several in white cloaks baring light sky blue stars scattered around in random pattern, all of different variety though. Some long like trench coats, others more akin to kimonos, some in simple shirts and pants. Then there stood Elise near the outskirts of it all in her own gear, sword sheathed, eyes and head turning in observance of it all. Truly there was a considerable amount of movement all around, some of which was now approaching.

“Not bad- *Lieutenant*,” came none other than the voice of Caldori.

Her form rotated to the left as eight came towards with a backdrop of soldiers as well as Elise’s own team from prior. Domino Squadron, that is who moved before her with their leader Tony at the head.

“Well well, my old friends,” she said with an exasperated tone.

The lot came closer until present only a few meters apart, silence drifting for not more than a hair’s length.

“Come with us,” Tony stated, the group moving onward right away once more.

As the eight pulled away heading off behind Elise, her own attention turned to follow with her feet soon carrying her across the forest’s surface. Sora and Caldori hung close with the rest falling in right around her.

“You have the devil’s own luck on your side, that or God is feeling very generous,” came the comment of one member.

“Yeah like, so you just jumped down behind them and said hi? What kind of crazy does that?!” barked another, though not angrily.

“I mean, it got me the answers that I wanted didn’t it?” she replied.

“Fair enough but still, as a Lieutenant and future squad leader, you can’t just play games youngling,” Tony called back with a slight turn of his head.

“I knew what I was doing, alright? Every step worked out rather nicely, even with that surprise arrival,” Elise called ahead.

“Keep telling yourself that,” he grumbled back.

“You wanna go then?”

Around another set of trees and brush there sat a new clearing that had been partially filled. Tents set up all along the perimeter, soldiers on the move, guards stationed along the edges of the make-shift base. The group fronted by Tony went ahead through the area beyond several soldiers as trucks pulled out, all heading for a tent, a large staging tent to be exact. With flaps drawn open and soldiers standing armed ready for conflict, they simply strolled on by and walked right in.

On the inside sat a large projection table, holograms of multiple individuals stationed around the table. Computers and other equipment lined the sides of the tents.

“-and that draws us to Sector M-1. The patrols in that area have been fighting a mix of zombies and undead at random for weeks. It’s always the same setup, marching like soldiers with a commanding unit mixed in so snipers can’t easily pick them out,” one spoke, one dressed as a captain of some military operation, not dressed as that of a Canadian Officer.

“Hmm...”

“Lady Bell?” a third spoke.

“Oh, sorry. I’m just thinking. We keep thinking these are potential attacks in the Yukon but realistically, there haven’t been any attacks here. Every time we find a battalion they reroute their forces to avoid us purposely, versus standing and fighting.”

“What are you getting at exactly?” the third questioned.

“What I’m getting at is that maybe we’re overthinking this. There have been countless attacks across the globe but so very few are in Canada itself. If you think about it a lot of the ones to the south, in America, are right along the border. I’m beginning to suspect that they are originating from here, not simply marching into position.”

“You’re proposing that Arkaza has his operation here in Canada then? But where exactly?” Wesley Ezdorth asked, his holographic arm extending out, pointer finger pointing at a map displayed on the table, “We’ve found units all across the different provinces.

“I think that obvious,” spoke yet another individual whose head turned to look at Wesley.

“Oh? Then do tell Drachen, do tell.”

“The Yukon is the most obvious point of origin if you think about it, or the Northwest Territories. I’d say the Yukon mostly because that’s where Azala and Arkaza had their central operation. It would make sense to keep things close to home, would it not? Easier to control, easier to keep an eye on.”

“So you’re proposing that they are manufacturing zombies in Northwest Canada, specifically the Yukon- and perhaps more specifically, around Emerton and the Vulfax Valley, correct Vulper?” Holly questioned.

“That is exactly it Miss Bell. I know the Hive and Arkaza seemingly hate one another but don’t forget they were working hand in hand, concentrating a lot of focus on this area so they could raid the Lightonian Temple of that area,” Vulper replied with a swift nod before turning back to the table.

“The Dharkanians and Arkaza wouldn’t be working together, they are enemies, you fool,” one of the others growled.

“It’d make the most sense though-”

“No, they are not working together. This Arkaza incident is totally separate. This has nothing to do with-”

“Vulper isn’t wrong,” came the voice of Elise, now approaching the table.

All eyes turned to meet her while the Domino Squadron behind her froze at attention. Elise continued forward, stopping at the edge, staring down at a zoomed in section of Vulfax Valley. Her eyes scanned it, then came a nod. Vulper simply turned his head and smirked slightly looking upon her.

“Elise?” Holly called.

“Ah, Lady Bakuuva,” another individual commented.

“Alright kid,” Wesley began, “What are you thinking?”

“You’re looking at it wrong. It might not be related to either, it could be related to one or the other, or both. If it’s centered around Vulfax Valley then you need to look to Azala’s actions.”

“Azala?”

“Mhmm. Azala was the bridge between Arkaza and the Hive, along with Shadow and the masked guy. We learned that much following that incident. Wouldn’t it make sense if they were still using him even in death?”

“How do you figure though?”

“Vulper and I would know this better than you guys but my fa- er, Azala, he in the last years of his life restricted access to several areas around the valley. There was so little reason for it but when you think about it, from the old saw mill to the old coal mines, it’d be easy to hide an operation like this one. Then they simply move the zombies from the area out to secret sites to ship them out across the planet.”

“Vulper, what say you?” Holly questioned.

“I have to agree with that suspicion honestly, it makes the most sense. He did close areas off gradually around the time the Pack that Arkaza took over started changing.”

“And there are some mines out that way, I know that from the old maps when I was told to plan that mission to destroy Vulfax- eh, sorry Elise and Vulper.”

“It’s all good Alice,” Vulper concluded.

“As I recall, he told us to quarantine the area due to a gnome infestation. He told us to avoid a lot of areas because of infestations but that one in particular was the worst,” Elise added.

Wesley’s hologram moved forward, his eyes dancing back and forth rapidly along with the simplest turns of his head, “Mmm... yes yes, that is exactly it. That is totally the sort of area that would attract Vampiric interest. Run down, hidden. That’s it.”

“Then I think we know what we must do General Ezdorth,” Holly replied, her attention turning back towards Elise and those behind her, “Domino Squadron and Team Vulfax will return to that area immediately with a large assault force. You will coordinate with General Ezdorth and secure that location.”

“Understood- Lady Bell,” Tony stated with a bow, followed by salutes from his team.

“Good. Then off you lot go.”

“I will await their arrival in Emerton,” Vulper chimed in just as his hologram began to fade away, the light cut.

One by one several others also began to dim away, the meeting now concluding seemingly. Elise and the rest of Domino Squad turned about, heading back out of the tent as only a few officers remained pointing at the map on the table, conversing with the rest. Passed the soldiers and off towards arriving trucks, soldiers on standby waving them over. Her eyes flickered, Elise’s face stiffened for but a moment and went at ease. After months, Emerton would be before her again at last.

Flickering Past

Down the winding road they went, over tar and over dirt, through forests and plains. Up mountains and down mountains, through the sunrises and through the sunsets. A journey of nearly three days in which the convoy had been going nearly non-stop across the landscape of Canada from East to West. Along that long and multi-day long journey so few stops had been made short of fuel and normal break stops.

Several military trucks and buses moved across the roads, lit up, jeeps also in formation behind. A vast collection of soldiers, vehicles, and artillery all heading for one singular spot- Emerton. On one of the buses sat Elise in a seat to herself, lying against the window, eyes settled to the sight of Sephiroth before her in hand. Around her, the rest of Vulfax Squadron, Domino Squadron, and many others.

Zoey walked down the line in the middle, turning to take a seat just to Elise's left across the aisle, "So *Lieutenant*, how does it feel to finally be heading home?"

She looked up from Sephiroth with a plain stare given in return, "Not sure actually."

"Ah come on now, surely it ain't that bad," came the laugh of Mark.

"Eh- I'm uneasy alright? Bad memories."

"She's not wrong," Samantha murmured.

"We lost a lot working for Vulfax. Vulper might have turned things around but it still is painful."

"You're thinking about the lot of them who died because of Azala, aren't you Elise?"

"Yeah- I just wish I could've done more at the time."

"Well instead of thinking about what you could've done, shape up and be ready for our arrival," Tony called out, sitting a few seats back, "This conflict is shaping up to be a lot more difficult. Undead are going to be the main currency used by the enemy for cheap soldiers. We're going to be outnumbered at some point, they with unlimited force and us with so few."

“Undead as the currency of war. Heh, that’s a new one. I like it,” Rusty chuckled from his seat.

“You would brother,” Britt replied.

“Smart when you think about it actually. Unlike the zombies people think of these days, these guys can easily be salvaged and repaired with proper dark magic. Most are just spliced together concoctions of different bodies anyway. So cheap and easy to produce.”

“Think of these days? What, people actually think about zombies Tony?”

“Eh? I thought you were supposed to be book smart. Yeah don’t you know, zombie movies and such these days are all about viruses causing some exponentially spreading apocalypse. Used to be about voodoo but the concept of zombie changed decades ago in the seventies and eighties. Of course the possibility of zombies made by virus is real, just- no one can easily control them and world governments already have measures in place for such a thing.”

“Oh. Well sorry, I’ve never seen a movie before.”

“Wait what? What?!” Sora choked, “Never seen- what the devil? Have you lived under a rock your entire life?!”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Jeez Elise, there is a lot for you to learn about. Next thing you know you’ll say you’ve never played a video game before.”

“...”

“Oh come on!”

“Hey Sora, enough alright? Cut her some slack.”

“Sorry Callie, heh.”

“Anyways,” Tony cut in, “The point is that you need to be made ready, all of you. If this new innovation for undead succeeds, we’ll be looking at a lot of fighting.”

“Pipe down back there!” came a shout from the front, “We’ve arrived!”

All turned their heads, some out the window, some straight ahead. The convoy made another turn right up a hill for some distance to the peak, then right down where there was a town. An empty deserted place, soldiers and equipment everywhere, boarded up buildings. Dirt all around and cars left in the streets. Buildings lay in several pieces while some remained totally intact.

Elise shot up immediately, both hands on the back of the seat before her, eyes launched forward. A quiver, a shiver of skin, a slight gap between her lips with the shaking of her emerald gaze, “Wh-what?”

More buildings lie in ruin, piles of rubble, buildings with entire sides gone barely standing. Some lacked boards to their windows and others held few that simply hung to the ground. Doors clung by a single bent hitch. A large lot of fallen trees and craters mixed itself in a variation of bent and shattered playground equipment. Her head turned slowly with view out the side windows as the convoy moved through the town now looking more and more ransacked.

Streets caved in, piles of burnt ash and blackened wood, bricks tossed to piles of remains. Where there once stood the library now stood nothing at all, also in burnt pieces of materials. More than half of the fire station had caved in, taking out a diner nearby. Her figure slumped back into the seat behind, hands still on the seat in front.

“What-what happened here?” Milly murmured, pitch high and waving.

Rusty himself now stood in the aisle, head zipping around, “This place looks like a war zone.”

“Taking out Azala didn’t fix things here you lot,” came a response from up ahead by a single soldier staring back at the group, “With Arkaza gone and Azala dead, a power vacuum opened up that drug every clan, pack, and tribe in the area into a frenzy. Emerton was one of several towns in the area that got hit. Casualties here were... high, to say the least.”

The convoy drew to a halt near the center, collapsed and ruined buildings all around. The doors to the bus opened and quickly soldiers to the front streamed out. Domino Squad and Vulfax Squad pooled out, Elise slowly mixing her way in and filing out once at the front. Pavement below her and but a few carried steps away, she stood at the center of it all. The ruin, the smell of smoke, the slightest stench of burnt meat, of death.

“Why weren’t we told about this?” Scott questioned as he moved passed Elise.

“Because they didn’t want us to know, to be distracted,” her reply came shaken.

“This is the result of war I’m afraid,” spoke a voice from not far off, deeper, yet not heavy.

The group turned, Elise included, seeing the approach of a man of dark hair and skin, clad in a black coat showing wear and tear. His boots clomped upon the ground as he strode close. He held a variety of weapons around him from daggers to guns, all sheathed for that time, and then an ax upon his back.

“Vulper.”

“Vulper!”

“Long time no see you mangy cur, haha.”

He stopped short of the group with a smile of sorts that soon faded, “I’m- sorry we have to meet like this as it is. I’m none the happier about what happened here but-”

“What exactly did happen?”

“Well Zoey- it was several things. Fighting began in the valley with Azala and Dustin gone, many trying to determine who would rule this region of the Yukon. The fighting turned sour and engulfed the humans before long. I don’t particularly know how many groups went in for it. We allied with the Government to try and halt it, even picked up a few other allies on the way but- it wasn’t enough.”

“Pft- and here Elise put you in charge thinking you’d handle everything. Just goes to show her lack of foresight.”

“Shut up Rusty,” she grumbled back.

“At any rate, we need to get a move on. Everyone head North to the outskirts where our little coalition has set up the main base for the area.”

Both groups began to move away casually, those of the area looking around however. Elise in particular was looking around most of all, a gaze from broken glass to a half burnt doll lying in a pile of rubble. Another cafe lay to the left of her in pieces, one which she looked over and stopped in place for momentarily.

The sides of the streets were bustling near the cafe, people moving in and out. A bell would ring each time the door opened and closed with floods of townsfolk moving on. Laughter, conversing. An officer moved by and then an older gentleman dressed with a green apron.

“Oh- good morning Elise,” the officer spoke.

“Goodmorning Forest Girl, heh heh,” the older man greeted.

“Hi Officer Hansel, Mr. Vilmur,” she replied.

“Say, the cafe here has some new crazy crispy chicken sandwich. Have you had it yet? The town is going nuts about it right now.”

“Oh uh, I haven’t. I don’t really have any money right now, heh-”

“Nonsense, here, I’ll buy you one for the road.”

“Nonsense Bill, I’ll take care of it.”

“Stevens, please-”

Her attention turned back to the street before her, away from the cafe. A sigh left her before moving on.

“Memories?”

Her eyes shifted to her right where there now stood Vulper.

“Thought so. I can always tell the gist of what’s up with you kid,” he spoke as he began walking alongside her.

“I just can’t believe it. No matter what happened, Emerton always seemed like it wouldn’t be touched,” she murmured, sighing with eyes closed for but a moment, “I thought taking out Azala and driving out the others would restore peace. Instead it just brought chaos. It makes me wonder why I even got these powers if this is just what’s going to happen after I’m gone.”

“That’s just part of the cycle unfortunately. Life is evil in concept, sin will always overtake societies. But hey, that’s why it’s up to us as individuals to help clean it all up right? These towns might’ve been ruined, the different groups in the valley area might’ve gone to war; but at the same time it has also freed a lot of people. You may not know it but plenty of people fled their clans and such after the Government came in to help, and plenty of people from the towns were evacuated safely. Sure, a good few didn’t make it out- but many did.”

“Meanwhile our enemies are growing stronger and stronger; though I suppose that just means we need to get more powerful to oppose them.”

“Power isn’t everything, you know that. You might’ve gained some rad new abilities but your mind is still your best weapon kid, remember that.”

“Trust me, I do remember. It’s the best advice I’ve ever gotten.”

Another building, formerly a storage facility, now decked out with multiple computers, holotables, and a variety of other equipment. Around one table was a hologram of Holly and then on the other side was Wesley. Several stood with them pointing out a valley between two hill tops, a forest ahead. Overall it sat rather simple like many others in use by this outfit- by the Tribe and their allies, one that could be easily broken down and moved.

“A bombardment would be the best approach sirs.”

“No captain, that would wipe out everything. You people need remember we need intel and just destroying everything that moves isn’t the way to go about that,” Wesley grumbled.

“An attack team could swarm in from the front and maybe we send soldiers down the hillsides to infiltrate?” Holly proposed, pointing at the two hills that the warehouse stood between.

“I’m sorry milady but the thing has been fortified into a fortress. There are sentries all around, guards, snipers, mounted guns. Any force we would send at it would be mowed down. There are also a ton of Zaherian present.”

“Have you confirmed their actions?”

“Yes. A large number of trucks from semis with trailers to box vans have been moving in and out. Of course to maintain secrecy we have yet to intercept any of them but it more or less confirms things. They’ve also got something new going on in there. As stated the last time, there are new undead that are stronger, faster, and seemingly smarter than the rest of them.”

“Dires, right. Arkaza is stepping up his game. One can only imagine what they’ll create soon enough. The place is probably crawling with Ghouls and one or more of Arkaza’s direct subordinates, making this a tricky operation.”

“So just sneak in?” came Elise’s voice.

All eyes and heads turned as she walked in, a few soldiers in turn giving their salutes to her as she moved by. Wesley’s arms crossed, a bit of steam exiting his nose for a moment with a faint glow appearing and leaving his eyes, “Bakuuva, you have a nasty habit of interrupting our meetings.”

“And yet you let it slide because I sometimes see things others miss,” she replied moving forward, “But I already know the solution.”

“Which is?”

“Stealth. If you want your information, sneak some of us in. There are many options from the vents to moving in the trucks. These off to the side for example, this looks to be an intake versus an output. Throw some of us into the vents and we’ll move like mice into the warehouse. Then when the time comes we can always hit them from behind.”

“Hmph. Once more you impress me, you’re not wrong,” Wesley grumbled.

“Could always have snipers take out the sentries to give them a clear path,” the captain murmured.

“And they could plant explosives to collapse everything down into the mines when done so that we don’t have to storm anything,” Holly added with a smile.

“Eh, as usual she’s talked me into it,” Wesley concluded, “Alright Bakuuva. We’ll ready things for you to sneak in. Your objective will be as follows. Sneak in, we’ll take out anyone in the way and hide the bodies. Find out any information you can get, report on who is in command of that place, see if the Hive is in on it, plant the bombs, get out- and then we’ll detonate the whole works. Considering it’s a coal mine formerly, it should be a grand enough blast to take out even that Vampiric bastard if he’s inside. Do you accept this mission?”

“Certainly, I do General Ezdorth.”

“Alright then Lieutenant, get your shit together and figure it out. We’ll send Domino Squadron in with you and your Vulfax allies since you’ve all been working together so often lately. Don’t fuck this one up. Now go!”

Infiltrating the Stronghold

Darkness filled the skies with the dance of branch and leaf. Hooting owls and scurrying creatures of the night, small and quick creatures on the move. Stalking slow, large bulk and power, large predators in hunt of their next meal. Cliffs rose and valleys dropped, trees thinning out along those areas to small shrubs and grass. It was at this edge of reality, where forest meets the open, that operatives of the Tribe stood in shadows.

To the open there was area not so open. A large old warehouse stood attached to a large wooden building. Stacks towered high into the sky to the level of the trees on the cliff side nearly, outfitted now as watch towers at the top with ladders down the sides. Standing in each make-shift tower, spotlights on and turning casting their light across the ground. Figures stood in each with guns attached to them via strap and in their own hands.

Along the warehouse there were more spotlights surveying the grounds, armed guards littering the rooftop. Sentry posts with rapid fire guns stood anchored along the edges. Beneath on compound ground both stood and walked more guards, many of which were the undead themselves- zombies.

Fences boarded up the outsides of the land, separating the open area from the compound grounds themselves. Certain sections did remain open, roads leading from the warehouse to trucks backed up to doors, to the greater roads through the valley. Again, figures stood in observation of all.

Elise's emerald gaze moved gradually from tower to tower, kneeling upon the grounds as she did so in a minor attempt to stay low. Beside her approached Vulper hanging tall, motioning for her rise. Then there came Wesley, approaching as if he owned the land itself, stutting confidently... proudly.

"Alright. The area is confirmed to be secure only within the compound gates, which themselves are in tatters. Lots of zombies and Zaherian guards. Security beyond the premise is weak though and damn near non-existent."

"I would assume it is because they are overconfident," Alice chimed in as she also walked forth.

"Maybe it's because they want to keep a low profile to avoid discovery?" Vulper questioned, inquisitively.

"Who knows. It isn't the most voidance of attention. The trucks are in and out of here on the regular judging by the road's condition. They're likely shipping zombies and weapons out of there," Elise concluded.

"Irrelevant. The Canadians and Americans are ready to storm the place on our word," another individual commented, moving on forward behind the group with a tablet in hand, "We've got the air ducts calculated and snipers are getting ready to get your teams in there. After careful analysis- we've confirmed a two minute window between ground sweeps."

"Thank you Jarrajod. We have warriors on standby from the different factions of the region. Vulfax is ready to lead the charge. I put Belama on standby," Vulper commented.

"Just try to not march us into a death trap," Rusty growled from behind.

"Lets get this done then," Britt finished while moving passed Rusty.

"Right. All of you get into position down under. When we give the signal, snipers will take out the guards and you'll make your way over. Tony will cut the cage to the vents and you'll all head in. Use the Echo-Translator to map out the vents and go from there. Try not to fuck this up."

"Rest assured boss, we've got this under control," Elise replied, eyes at a glance to her right with the slightest of head turns, narrowed as she looked upon Wesley.

Wesley returned a glance, a bit of rage in his own, fire burning within his pupils, "Move."

Quickly several individuals shot around the group, all of Domino Squadron and much of Vulfax Squadron short of the brothers and Elise. Two other groups also went on their way, dressed

in black with guns attached to their backs with clips and holders. Elise herself began to approach the ledge as everyone slid down, then hopped down herself after some casual motions. Both Britt and Rusty followed right after leaving Wesley, Vulper, Alice, and Jarrajod behind watching.

“Snipers ready up,” Wesley muttered into his mouth piece, “Pick your targets.”

“Yes sir.”

Movement on the branches up above, people crouched down with long rifles in hand, scopes attached. Quickly they were risen up and aimed out.

At the bottom Elise slid down the slope, meeting up behind the brush with around a dozen and a half others. The brothers slid down right behind, all taking up positions as Elise stood at the head with Tony and the other squad leaders.

“Think we can pull this off?” one squad leader asked.

“Easily,” Tony replied, “So long as we all keep it together.”

“Two of you are going to be taking the perimeter. Tony and I are heading in with our teams. Remember, secure whatever the hell they shoot so there isn’t much suspicion.”

“We’ve got that one Lieutenant. I won’t let any of my guys get shot,” the last leader replied.

“Alright, I’m signaling,” Tony murmured, pressing a hand to his ear piece, “We’re green.”

“Copy that. Alright, the rest of you, take your targets and set ready. Start with the fucker up top smoking, then his friend. Then that one at the light by the ladder.”

“Locked and loaded. On your command.”

In their scopes, several stood on roof tops in random garb. All looked rugged, unkempt hair on the smoker- long and fluffed into a rats nest, a stone like face. Another stood near with an assault rifle, short hair though very clearly greased.

“You are a go.”

Above Wes, three shots, pops really. The smoker flew back, one shot to the head. The individual beside him flopped over to the side with one right in their throat. The third by the light then took one to the head as well, head thrown back as they flew back and landed on the roof.

“We are clear. They’ve got a minute and a half until the next rotation.”

“Alright. Infiltration Team, you are all clear!”

“Copy that,” Tony replied, “Squads, move!”

Immediately the twenty-one individuals from the brush shot ahead, scooting across the ground in a mad dash. More barely audible pops, to them at the very least, went. More lights jerked and went off course. Staring up it was clear, seeing those in the smoke stacks go down and flop back.

“Squads two and four, take your positions!” Tony hissed.

“Copy!”

Immediately fourteen broke from the group, an exact half. Across the lot they went as some went for ladders and others for crates. Both Vulfax and Domino shot for the cage which held the accesses to the ventilation systems. It took no time at all to close up on.

Tony quickly shot to the head of the group, fire erupting in his palms. Forward they were thrust, flames slamming one of the locks.

“Hurry now Tony, we don’t have all day,” Jimmy muttered.

“I know, I’m on it-”

“Krrrz- hurry up down there, the patrol is on its way early!” came a call over the radio.

“Shit- move over a bit,” Elise growled.

Tony shifted himself and Elise immediately stepped up, both hands out with sparks of white light buzzing out and straight into the locks with the flames. In no time at all the clank of breaking locks could be heard, followed by them clapping onto the ground. Scott and Drake quickly grabbed and pulled the cage right open as both Elise and Tony stepped back.

“Move in.”

The lot rushed in, both brothers closing the gate behind them. Ahead Jimmy grabbed hold of the heads of the vents and yanked. The sound of metal being pulled from metal was quite loud, a sudden jerk though and it was done.

“Everyone into the pool,” he chuckled.

Immediately everyone flew in, Tony at the head with a few of his own, followed by Elise and a mix of the rest. Last was Jimmy who hopped in, slamming the head back on.

“They’re in.”

“Good, very good. They dodged the early patrol and should be in the home free so long as they avoid any unnecessary attention. I calculate a seventy-four percent chance at success,” Jarrajod commented.

“Lets hope that your calculations are right. Snipers keep ready. We have two teams out there right now in the danger zone if they are spotted. Captain I want more people on standby to run in in case we have to gun down more of the enemy. We’ll need more place holders to replace the enemy.”

“Copy that.”

“Hmph... best of luck to them on the inside then I guess.”

The Horde

Crumpling metal, bulging and compressing, like large tin cans being pinched and released. Mild clamoring and banging came from equipment brought along with. Guns, sheathed weapons, their own bodies. Elise moved to the head of the pack, Tony just ahead and to her right with a tablet in hand, a dark green screen displayed with different lines.

“Alright. If this is accurate, we should be right above one of the storage rooms. That or a hallway. So with that in mind, lets find an-”

“Hold on Tony, I’ve got this,” Elise murmured.

A metallic shing was heard, followed by a ploonk. Sephiroth had been quickly unsheathed and slammed into the bottom of the vent, a thin white glow around the blade.

“Wait- Elise, someone might hear and-”

RIP, REEEP, SKKRIIEESH

KAKLANG

Down the panel dropped, a large section of vent right onto the floor of a dark room below. Visible in the darkish depths below the vent were crates, barely illuminated from a light in the room further away.

“Alright, lets go,” she whispered as she dove right out of the vent, landing on both feet upon the ground.

One by one the others followed, leaving just Tony with an exasperated sigh. All together they looked upon several tablets displaying the map of the facility.

“Alright. This is the map of the facility then. Fortunately we weren’t detected thanks to someone presenting a loud entrance that could’ve easily been heard.”

“Got us in didn’t it Tony?”

“Eh... whatever. Alright, we’re in Storage Closet 1-C. So out this door is-”

With the twist of a handle, two-seventy to one-eighty. It creaked open for the group of fourteen who began to pour out into the hall. Dark and empty, there was little around, not even security cameras to monitor the environment. All clustered once more around Tony and Elise, with Zoey and Caldori near.

“The plan is to plant explosives at the base of the foundation and in the warehouse section itself. Now according to the Echo-Translator, there appears to be a room nearby with a lot of electrical interference. Computers and communications. That should be near the end of this hall. The fact that they have no guards in here makes me concerned- but the echo didn’t pick up any life in these rooms so who knows. For now stick together and hopefully we find something of note. Understood?”

“Yes sir!”

“Alright, lets move-”

With twinkle toes so light like the fluff of a cloud, the proud leader lead the entire group forward down the dark halls, around a bend, passed several doors. The lot of them shuffled close behind, Elise taking his flank with Zoey, Sora, and Caldori kept close behind, followed by her brothers, then the rest in a mix. Weapons drawn from melee weaponry to long range guns and the like, some just unarmed but prepared.

Around another bend there were a final set of doors, only a short walk from the storage room in actuality. A normal wood door to the right and a set of metal doors ahead. As they pushed forward Tony stopped at the wood door, hand placed upon the nob in seconds, “Ready up.”

A twist and then a push. The door opened and they all barreled inside.

“This is-”

Another darkened room, glass to the left to the area the metal doors had gone. A large holo-table sat at the center of the room with chairs all around. Cabinets stood, filing cabinets, with some normal wood ones and counters. Another couple doors smaller than what they had just come through also lay towards the back.

“The conference room. Unguarded?”

“Why should they need security in a secret base they have armed to the teeth outside with ferocious undead soldiers,” Rusty muttered with a roll of his eyes, “Wake up you smelts.”

“Hey, fellow smelts, check out this outfit,” Dryden called from by the window.

Several approached now with wandering eyes, Elise and Tony among those that drew towards the glass. Outside was the warehouse, stacked with large crates. Several smaller trucks, along with trailers backed up to the loading docks. Undead stood everywhere, some in rags, others in uniform. Others walked around, Zaherian based on uniform, and others in lab coats with eyes similar to that of a Vampire- yet crossed with those of an Undead.

“Ghouls and Zaherian. Likely the Vampires are mixed in somewhere,” Sora murmured.

“Lab coats though? That- has to mean something, right guys?” Samantha questioned, a tad bit of Welsh in her tone.

Groups of Undead moved forward behind forklifts, after which forklifts would move behind them, all with crates. Crates were moved into the trailers, followed by lines of the Zombies, followed by more crates which were then placed behind. Constant beeping from the lifts backing up echoed throughout the warehouse section and into the conference room.

“Definitely what we anticipated then, isn’t it?” Britt retorted.

“This is definitely one of the hubs- but where are they making them?” Caldori questioned.

“There,” Zoey stated, holding her right arm and hand out, pointing out into the warehouse, “See that platform in the middle, risen over the ground of the rest? Ramps coming down- they probably come up from there. That means there are unmapped sections beneath the warehouse.”

“You’re sure that’s an elevator?”

“Without a doubt. Why else would that be there with a control panel box?”

“Or a Ghoul standing near it,” Elise murmured.

“Logic says there should be ways to get down below, right?” Chelsea asked.

“Zoey. You, Samantha, and the brothers- go down and see what you can figure out in the warehouse. Be careful when you go down there though, try not to be identified,” Tony stated, turning to look at her and those beside her.

“Is it wise to split up already in enemy territory?”

“A group like us will be hard to hide and hard to manage Callie. Speaking of, I want you and Sora to stick with Elise and her *brothers*. Domino Squadron can’t stick together on this one, and you three seem to get along with one another.”

“So we’re splitting here eh?” Elise mumbled, turning her head to look at Tony, “What’ll we do?”

“Zoey’s group will survey the warehouse and plant the explosives down there,” he replied as he placed a duffel bag down on the table, “I’ll go with the rest of my team to check out the other storage rooms, maybe break into some files. Your team will operate here and figure out what more that you can. Coordinate with the General.”

“Copy that,” Elise murmured.

“We’ll meet back in the room we entered in in approximately thirty minutes. That’s how we’ll get out of here when the time comes. Plus it honestly seems like the safest way to go. Best of luck to you all,” he concluded, breaking off with several of his group following.

Chelsea stayed near Sora and Caldori for a mere second before breaking off as well. Tony, Jimmy, Dryden, Anna, and lastly Chelsea exited the room heading down the hallway back from where they came from. This left Zoey’s team and Elise’s team, the two groups of which now began to break apart.

“Well- best of luck to you Elise, Britt,” Zoey sighed.

“Until we meet again,” Britt replied.

With exchanged nods the group of four walked, exiting the room heading towards the iron doors. This left only five in the conference room, all of whom had now begun to fan out towards the different cabinets. Elise followed suit right after, shutting the room's door, "Alright, what exactly are we going to be looking for?"

"First things first," Sora replied with a small thumb drive in hand as he approached the computer system, "We hook our little hacker drive up and transmit whatever data this thing has on it back outside."

As he plugged the thumb drive in, Caldori walked across to the table with several folders in hand filled with papers, "Then we pool through their physical records in hopes of finding something about their activities here."

"Ugh- what a lame ass job," Rusty growled.

"It might be but it is what we have to do brother. We need to do our part to get these bastards out of Vulfax and off our planet."

"Bleh- I'd rather just go out and punch the hell out of them."

A sigh left Elise's mouth as she took a few steps away, pulling out a small card-shaped device that was quickly activated. In seconds a small square near the top activated, glowing a bright blue, following which-

"Bakuuva?" the card sounded, the voice sounding much like Jorgenouf's only more techy.

"Jarrajod, we've met with no resistance so far and have infiltrated successfully. Tony divided us up into groups of three. His group is checking out the back rooms while another is moving in on the warehouse. My group is in their conference room pooling over their files. Sora should be transmitting a link to their system any minute."

"Copy that, we're receiving now. There's- no encryption. Actually there isn't much data by the look of it."

“These files are pretty useless too Elise-” Britt called out, “Some of these are so old looking, they’re probably unrelated to the activities here.”

“Some have records of shipment dates but nothing about what was shipped. Twenty-nine hauls on the... eighteenth of last July?” Caldori spoke.

“Neh- it’ll take time.”

“Can you confirm the exact number of what goes into a shipment though?”

“We just watched them load up groups of Undead and unmarked crates. Guessing weapons... maybe ninety to a hundred and fifty Undead per trailer? We’re pretty sure they’re making all this underground. There’s a newly installed lift in the center of the warehouse.”

“They’re good at hiding everything... plant the bombs and when the time comes we’ll-”

“Oi, oi oi oi! There are ghouls coming up the stairs outside- and some old guy?”

“Damn, that’s all we need. Everyone scatter!” she hissed, flipping off the sound on the transmitter card.

Calli and Sora quickly shot behind two cabinets as the brothers shot into one of the closets. Elise quickly turned and darted for a locker, shoving her way inside before closing it on herself. As she did the door opened, the Ghouls from the stairs moving in with the old man following.

The Ghouls themselves seem unremarkable but the old fellow was different. Relatively short, perhaps no more than a meter and a half. A right eye of golden amber, glowing much like a Lion’s, his left eye covered with cloth wrapped around- black bandages. His appearance was that of a plague doctor in attire, topped with a blackish purple lipstick. His hair, lengthy gray with some black left in it, a face covered in wrinklage.

One Ghoul moved over to the computer system, the thumb drive still sticking out. A cold sweat drew over Elise- passing only as the clacker of keys was heard.

“Hurry it up,” he muttered in a semi-raspy voice, “I have a schedule to keep.”

He barked this, snapping a cane down on the ground held in his right hand. The Ghoul typed only a few more things, the holo table activating. Soon a form was displayed, a figure that immediately sent Elise's eyes wide and shaken. Purple eyes displayed themselves, a slightly spiked purple hair dangling out front of the face.

"It's about time you answered my requested transmission, Vikram."

"I apologize milord, I've just been- busy. Busy with production," the old man replied, bowing his head slightly with his eye shut.

"Excuses as always."

From the closet, both brothers stared out with cold sweats of their own, viewing the figure displayed from another angle.

"Britt- isn't that guy?"

"Yeah, without a doubt."

The old man rose his head, the glow of his golden amber returning, "Forgive me for being so late, Lord Arkaza."