

Elise vs Leon

Gun fire continued on the premise, soldiers advancing on the grounds passed the gates. Cover taken, explosives thrown. Blasts went sending many a body flying- returned swiftly by a counter of the defenders. Undead flowed from the warehouse armed and firing with leads of transformed Zaherian Warriors around them. Three attackers swiftly shot around behind an extinguished blown car, their weapons quickly reloaded with new magazines.

“Bloody bastards!”

A thump, followed by a roll. All glanced down, their eyes moving into the backs of their faces.

BAM

Two flew from one another, blood spattering the ground with bits of rock and ground, their guns flying into pieces. The third crashed, skin scalded, burst like a smashed raspberry. Several Undead flew forth with spears in hand, the soldier taking aim with a shout. Twin spheres of white flew forth, setting off yet another set of blasts which in turn vaporized the Undead.

The soldier quickly turned their head round, grunting as they dead so with a wail following. Behind their fallen form approached Wesley with a white glow situated around his body, head shifting left to right as more spheres of white formed around.

“Bloody bastards, there’s no end to the numbers. Anna!” Wesley called out.

A golem of solid gray color stumbled over quickly, jumbo like an overinflated marshmallow completed with a smiley face. As it approached, the General paced onward closer to the warehouse itself with a scowl spread far. Twenty paces away from the soldier, now scooped up by the retreating Golem of Clay, his sights locked to more Undead marching from the warehouse, an approximation of a hundred.

“Tch- they’re nothing more than fodder on their own but those new things, they’re a pain. Not to mention the Zaherian-”

Rock flew passed Wesley's shoulders from behind, a crackle akin to thunder filling the air. Quickly he shot round, orbs of energy forming up in both palms though quickly said energy faded. A hole in the ground had opened up and from it emerged four different figures.

"Caldori, Sora!" he called out.

"General!" Sora called back, quickly crawling out of the hole with the others following suit.

As they emerged, Holly appeared with a flicker of light that faded instantaneously, "I knew I sensed them getting closer- good to see you're all alright."

"What happened?!" Wesley demanded, "Where's Bakuuva? The hell happened to set the alarms off?!"

"It was Leon sir-" Sora began.

"Leon?!" Holly spoke with a sudden inhale.

"The hell happened down there- answer me!"

"Leon and one of Arkaza's executives were down below moving Undead through a Rune Portal. Leon sensed us from the moment he arrived- Elise stayed back to give us a chance to get away sir."

"Of all the- Holly, we need to go, now," Wesley spat, lunging head first into the hole without a single movement wasted.

"But- General!" Caldori called.

"Callie, there isn't a moment to waste. If Leon is down there, we can end this now by defeating him. In the meantime, we have troops that need your healing abilities. Find Tony and allow the rest of your squads to defend you. Tell Jarrajod he's being given direct command of this mess. We're going-"

"But Lady Bell!"

With that Holly skipped up a foot and dropped feet first down into the opened hole. The group was left watching, speechless before turning as bullets continued to rain.

“Forget about it, leave Leon to them. If anyone can take him down it’ll be those two,” Britt announced.

“Alright. Lets go then-”

The lot of them charged away from the complex, heading for the boundary of safety.

A literal wave multiple meters high flew forth, a wave of darkness- black colored liquid-like substance that slammed through the rock and debris of the massive cavern. Though appearing to be black water, it behaved far from such, closely resembling liquid fire in how it moved. A wall of white light flew up before, blocking the advancing wave. Elise held behind, both hands out and positioned, casting the barrier before her as darkness spilled out around it.

Far ahead Leon remained with his right arm out and his palm outheld, a jet of darkness beginning at the center point and expanding into the wave as it moved away. Around the room the Undead and Ghouls alike howled and yowled, the darkness taking them and washing their bodies away into seeming nothingness. Large sections of ceiling rock fell from above and came crashing down, smacking through the ground leaving mighty dust clouds, while the rest was washed simply away via the wave.

She held there, the barrier maintained, teeth gritted together with eyes sharpened with focus to the abyss of black ahead of her, “{D-dammit. There’s no room for an opening. He already drowned out my barrage of Light Bombs with this tsunami of his.}”

Leon stood idle with his arm held out, his eyes aglow, “Hmph. If that’s too much for you-”

Said arm slowly retreated with his other arm brought up along side it. Both hands clasped together, angling with elbows downward and hands before his chest. A single seal was then formed, the flicker of his eyes going faster for a moment.

“What now-!?” Elise choked out.

Around her the blackness faded, or rather brightened. Swiftly it went from black to a dull navy blue, then into a full on dark blue as it continued to brighten more and more. The consistency of flame based water switched to water based fire, quickly splashing down into just plain water. It stormed forward and crashed harder. Her eyes pulsed as the barrier ripped itself apart, the blasting wave of pure water slamming into her and throwing her back.

Leon, again, maintained his position with hands put together forming a single hand seal, a smile slow to spread. Before him the wave flat lined, back splashing as just a few ten centimeters of water, the level of which continued to drop. Elise stood no more, rather not even existing in plain sight any longer.

“Hmph. I find it rather hard to believe that that did her in,” he muttered slowly turning his head to the left, then allowing a scan across the horizon, “Where o’ where did she go? Down by Arghaust perhaps?”

Far from Leon, down the slope of the caved in ground, Elise clung to the wall. Below her was the full drop, multiple meters down which now fell even deeper via the water. She huffed, slowly pulling herself back up.

“Hrgh- rockets.”

Light Energy jetted straight from her feet and all at once she flew upward. Leon’s own eyes softened and sunk back. Up she flew, several meters up into the air before splashing down back on the rather solid ground across from Leon. A few more huffs left her as she readied Sephiroth.

“Hoh? Heh, interesting,” he murmured looking upon her, “She may lack power but she’s resourceful and sturdy. Heh- I can work with that.”

He chuckled as the sign of his hands changed, simply the positions of the fingers. Water flooded around Elise, pooling. Her own eyes danced round as water began to move up off of the ground, pulled three meters off with liquid flowing up and off. Color formed, primarily black-red-

brown. The water contracted and the colors solidified, leaving behind a copy of Leon born from the water.

Elise glanced around as more and more Leons began to appear, one by one all over, “Tch- the Copy Technique.”

Fourteen of Leon stood around, in addition to the original who maintained a distance away from her. Slowly his arms lowered back to his side, his hands now apart and the sleeves flapping over. His smirk returned, lips parting with teeth visible, a slight shadowing around his visible eye as hair covered the other.

“This guy is far beyond you at this stage Elise. Your best bet would be to just go and retreat!” Sephiroth called out inside her head.

“I know I should but this isn’t someone I can just run from you know-” she growled.

“This also isn’t someone you stand a chance against, he’s far beyond Azala and that Arghaust guy! Leon is capable of turning energy he has already expended into elements through use of Magic itself without incantation. Not only that but he has also spawned several copies of himself via the water, full on Water Copies that I doubt you can just hack apart. On top of that this guy is hardly breaking a sweat, he’s playing with you!” he spat in return.

“{I know full well Sephiroth, I know that this guy is leagues beyond me- unlike that Vampire guy he isn’t leaving himself open intentionally, there are zero blind spots. At the same time, his power doesn’t feel as vast. He’s not underestimating me at all though, he really is just toying with me! And there isn’t a damn thing I can do about it-}” she thought to herself while looking around, “Only one option left...”

“Hmm?” the original hummed as all of the copies readied up.

Elise dropped to the ground, her weapon hovering in the air as both hands were placed on the ground, “Light Flare!”

A blinding white light immediately filled the room, instantaneously around Elise and quickly spreading out. The light ceased only at the dark corners and the pit behind. All of the Leon's threw their arms up with their sleeves hanging down in an attempt to block it out, the original doing the very same.

"Geh- this is- this is bad!"

Elise looked forward, her eyes aglow. Before her there was no bright white light as the Leon's all threw their arms up. Her left hand quickly shot out to take ahold of Sephiroth, while her feet quickly began to take pace in a dash ahead.

"{Light Flare, a technique that blinds everyone around me. A virus of my own energy spreads into the particles around me and intensifies the brightness for everyone but the caster. Under these circumstances, I am the only one that can see, leaving him wide open!}"

Light Energy roared around Sephiroth as she took the blade back, more and more and more being pooled in by the second as she moved closer and closer. It trailed behind, the size growing faster and faster as she ran. Finally at five meters out with a jet of white flowing nearly a quarter of a meter from the edge of the blade to the edge of the light itself, she swung up. The light carved clear through the ground and launched forward, a blinding energy slash sent straight to Leon's core.

Quickly his hands clasped together, the ground around him burst. The crackle of rock tumbling, of heft slamming into a wall. As soon as the Earth Wall had appeared it immediately was shattered by her attack. Leon stumbled right as Elise shot right forward, Sephiroth in turn swung down right into Leon's front with a glow of white.

A jet of Light Energy flew around Leon where the impact had been, from his right shoulder and his left leg back. A low choke and a cough emerged from him as he stumbled backwards. Elise dropped down, the tip of her katana held forth as she thrust onward.

CLANG

A jet black hand gripped the blade's edge and the top with a firm hold. An exhale quickly left Elise as she stood there, Leon looking right at her. Blood dripped from the torn gash in his cloak, slightly adrift off of him and onto the rocky ground below like falling rain drops. A huff left him next as his golden eye locked with one of her emerald beauties.

"Heh- hoof, that wasn't half bad," he huffed.

"How-" she growled.

"Aura Guard, same as yours. I'll admit, it was a good strategy. If you had been able to hit me instantaneously after taking my sight, I definitely would've been dead; but I had time to recover luckily, and my Earth Wall assisted in buying time to focus my Aura Guard back up. Would've been something, you who can maybe fight off ten Zaherian Warriors taking out me when I could probably fend off an army of thousands, if not tens of thousands. And that's why I like you kid, you're beyond resourceful, you're extraordinarily cunning."

"Heh, well thanks for that," Elise murmured back.

"Now it is at this point though where I think I should bid you farewell, young Bakuuva," he chuckled as his other arm rose.

A single finger, his pointer finger, extended itself straight to her face with a small black bb of energy formed. His eyes stretched not more than a second later and quickly he launched back through the air, the bb firing as he did. It blew apart into a concentrated stream of Dark Energy that shot right passed Elise, while he flew back via a small sphere of Light Energy. His flight made itself short as the sphere quickly faded, leading to him skidding across the ground on his feet.

His face dropped, eyes onto his gut and then back up to Elise, "You can form spheres around you without a focus point like a hand or foot? Heh, you really are something; although your efforts are wasted again. Allow me to show you just how much darkness I hold."

A wave of black spread out from the edges of his body immediately, a shadow amassing behind said edges that quickly radiated outwards. All light behind and around Leon faded as the

tendrils of eternity crept along the ground. Her own eyes quivered and she stumbled back a pace. While the size of the darkness did not increase, more and more of it appeared to pool out.

“I have enough dark power within me to consume even light if I release enough of it. Impressive, no? Hmm?”

All at once she dropped to her knees, Sephiroth clanging aside as both hands hit the ground. Leon’s eyes perked as she shook, a paling white washing over her face, her breath quickening.

“Elise what happened?” Sephiroth called out in her head.

“Th-this, this weight- this can’t be real, there’s so much!”

“What?” Leon grumbled with sharpening eyes.

Through her own eyes, blackness surrounded everything, waves and waves splashing through an endless void. Her own body was struck wave after wave. Her limbs shook as her body floated along. A distortion appeared beneath as she gazed down, wave after wave immediately slamming into her own back as a frosty breath flowed from her lips and nostrils. Around her, before Leon’s eyes, not a thing had changed as the light still radiated.

“Th-this darkness, this cold, this weight! There’s no way!” she spat, eyes drifting ahead.

Wave after wave of fiery black drove itself out of Leon and into the air, again- in her eyes. Winds twirled round and the energy rocketed upwards with flares of dark purple, red, and blue. It violently twisted before her; but again before Leon’s eyes and even Sephiroth’s own vision, nothing but the small shadow of darkness that had protruded itself, which now lay shrinking.

“She’s so affected by my power when I’m not even casting it directly over her. Is she just that weak? No- even powerless Earthlings wouldn’t grovel like this... a sensory type? No, that’s not it. Is she just sensitive to my power? Could that mean that-”

Chips of rock dropped from above, crumbling onto Leon’s left shoulder. His head shifted slightly and his eyes followed, glancing up a moment later in slow.

“Huh?”

Cracks spread immediately as he looked up, followed by the entire ceiling shattering apart. Large chunks of rock flew out while a figure of blackness came flying right down at Leon.

“What?!”

CRACKLE

A black boot connected directly to Leon’s right face, the force behind it instantaneously throwing Leon back through his own shadow and straight into the rock wall behind. Hairline fractures spread as rock crumbled off and onto Leon. A single figure stepped down in place as Leon dropped onto the ground on one knee, both hands down.

“Hrrh- what the hell?”

Standing right where he had stood, a single figure of black cloak, black hair, and black boots with blue pants. No shirt, green eyes, and darker skin.

“V-Vulper,” Elise murmured, eyes growing wider.

“Sorry I’m late... but better late than never.”

Vulper's Wrath

"Vulper!" Elise called out, "The hell are you doing here?"

A mix of hair and shards of what appeared to be rock fell from Vulper's torso and from his sleeves, blowing across the ground. His attention immediately moved from Leon to the two masked figures still in observation some distance away, then with a swift glance and head turn backwards to Elise.

"{She's been fighting hard now hasn't she?}" he swiftly thought to himself, "Well if anything, I'm here to bail out my former subordinate."

The two masked forms stood as they were, though fully taking Vulper into their considerations as they faced him down. The first to speak was none other than Xander who took a step forward, a mild one however, "I'm surprised to see him down here."

"Here to save the girl no doubt. Interesting. But what a pity, it won't amount to much with the boss here," Chromwell chuckled.

Rock collapsed as Leon dropped from the wall, landing with rocks tumbling with crashes behind him. Onto one knee, then up on both feet as he balanced himself out. Golden eyes stared back at both Vulper and Elise, sharp and fierce with a burning inferno hidden behind. Sweat dripped slowly from Elise's forehead as she looked back into the abyss of darkness, "{He hasn't changed. If anything that just pissed him off more.}"

"So... this is the one causing you so much trouble. Honestly Bakuuva, I expected more out of you. Heh, I'll handle this from here on I suppose," Vulper called back, now slowly walking forward with his steps echoing.

"Are you mad? That's Leon, the Hive's defacto leader! You're far from a match for him Vulper!" she yelled back.

"We'll see," he chuckled in response once more, still moving forward as Elise watched from behind.

Leon's gaze tightened as Vulper came near, his head slightly leaning ahead with a slighter tilt to it, "This one is..."

"I am Vulper, Vulper Arloo Gornetraof, leader of Clan Vulfax- the true masters of this entire valley region, and now your eternal enemy. I'd advise you to get on your feet and ready up as I will not go as easy on you as Elise has," Vulper replied back while still casually walking ahead step by step.

"Hmph, you're that one that Arkaza reported on awhile back, Azala's former second in command or some nonsense. One of his tops at the very least. I fail to see what you can hope to accomplish here as a lowly Drachen," Leon replied.

"You fucked with MY clan, you and your damn Hive. You messed with a lot of lives in the valley and took countless either directly or indirectly. A bunch of cowards set to rely on the true power of Drachen for world domination; but we are not slaves, we are not slave to anyone besides ourselves, making ourselves our own masters! And right now every fiber of my being is telling me to destroy you for what you've done!"

Pitch black lines immediately began to spread from the back of Vulper's neck, cruising along in swirls and straights. The lines quickly ran up and down his entire torso, moving swiftly around and up his face, even through his eyes to some extent. Leon's own gaze intensified while any sign of amusement swiftly faded away. Still on the move, Vulper continued to approach.

"You're one of the ones responsible for Azala's death in the grand scheme of things as I recall from Shadow's report. You're the one that turned Vulfax against Azala. So be it. For causing us problems of our own, I think it fair that I should eliminate you Vulper Arloo Gornetraof."

"That's if you can," Vulper replied.

His body immediately doubled in size, the slack of his garments disappearing to sudden stretching. Leon's eyes widened. Before him moved Vulper, scales like that of a lizard now spanning around from his neck- up and down his face, across his torso. Claws stretched from where finger nails had ended, fur puffing out in various patches across his visible body.

His teeth pointed out as a breath of smoke drifted from his mouth as his transformation continued. Finally Vulper came to a halt, a good portion of his body now changed. Fur covered the sides of his face and his chin; though stopped short of the core of his face. His chest out of all of his torso remained with marks rather than scales or fur; but that was minor compared to what had changed.

Leon's gaze softened into a mild scowl, a bit of humor seeping through as black lines began to spread across his body as well. The lines burned their way up and down his face as his grin returned, his pupils slitting slightly while his own teeth bore fangs now, "Heh heh- so be it *Drachen*. If you insist on defying me, then I will eliminate you."

The air around both burst as if twin jets had jumped from zero to mach one in an instant. A follow up blast of air flew, followed by a nasty blast of pure pressure. Rocks shattered and winds erupted around the chamber. Both Xander and Chromwell threw their arms in front of their masks as rocks pelted them, their robes flapping uncontrollably with their sleeves even blowing back to reveal their arms.

Elise stood with a Light Barrier before her though force still seeped through. An arm stood between her own face and the force. She squinted as the forces flew, looking ahead to what had just occurred. Leon's right knee had collided midair with Vulper's, a slight static radiating around the impact which was the epicenter of the pressure. Both glared into each others glare as their hair violently flapped.

Quickly Leon threw a punch via his right fist, while Vulper's left hand simply flew up. Another, albeit weaker, shock wave broke as Vulper completely blocked the punch by Leon.

"What?!" Leon growled.

His left arm swung out at Vulper's face, to which the Drachen Warrior ducked in evasion as their knees parted. Next came another kick from Vulper, this time upward aimed at Leon's jaw; though the dark warrior took a single step back in evasion of that. Both flew straight at one another again, this time beginning an exchange of punches and blocks. Several of Leon's blows became blocked by Vulper's arms, while several of Vulper's were blocked by Leon's hands.

Their elbows slammed together in the next bout, followed by another explosion of pressure which sent both away from one another. Leon growled as he drifted back, right arm up with hand flexed. Dark Energy rods immediately formed up and launched forward with a wave of that arm for Vulper. Vulper looked ahead with a grin, Leon's eyes widening once again.

The lines expanded at Vulper's center, releasing more and more scales. His bulk bulked up further while he took a breath. With a literal flash of his eyes, now amber, he exhaled a massive cloud of fire straight into the path of the rods and Leon himself. The rods of energy shattered, exploding within the blaze which swept right into Leon. The latter's hands clasped together as he then exhaled, a vibrant jet of water leaving his mouth.

Indeed a stream of water flew from Leon's mouth as if it were a hose, quickly exploding outwards into a wall as it touched the ground. Both water and fire collided, steam rocketing outward to fill the room. In another brief instance, a shadowy form appeared on the water before Leon. He blinked as the figure swung a fist- clear through the water wall flew Vulper's own fist which slammed straight into Leon, throwing him back.

Another crash, the wall of water collapsing, the fire ceasing. Leon skid down the rock wall behind him, landing firmly on his bottom with one leg down, the other arched and pulled in. A cough left him while his own hair flopped in front of his eyes.

"How's that Hive Scum?! Do you want to continue with this?" Vulper yelled out.

From behind, Elise stared in disbelief simply, all quivering having left her body by that point, "{Since when did Vulper get so strong? This is unreal!}"

His head flew back, his left eye with a pulse. A sphere of Dark Energy formed up and immediately fired from before Leon's pupil, swelling in size as it traveled. Elise looked ahead, quivering again, "He's powering his attack up after he fired it?"

"HYAAAA!" Vulper yelled out, swinging his right fist forward straight into the sphere.

"What?!" Leon spat.

The sphere came to a halt and smashed itself in before firing straight off to the left of Leon, crashing into the wall with a blast. More rock tumbled off and crashed onto the floor kicking up even more dust that drifted out into the room. Leon looked to that left, then back ahead to Vulper who stood at a distance away.

“This is impossible- when we surveyed Vulfax all those years ago, there was no one stronger than Azala. Azala was nothing compared to this in his prime short of his new powers. You’re far beyond that- how?!” Leon blurted.

“Your intel wasn’t wrong. At that time, there probably was no one stronger than Azala. The reason is because long ago before you ever approached us, Azala had sealed my power away.”

“What?” Leon growled.

Elise blinked once more as she looked on. Vulper gave a nod to Leon and resumed, “My power easily surpassed Azala’s before that time, in fact if I had my full ability during that final battle, I could have handled Azala myself instead of letting Elise do it. He had my true potential sealed when I approached him to join Vulfax, a move to make sure I would never betray him or the clan. Thing is, once he died, that seal degraded.”

Vulper’s arms lowed and as they did so, the coat he wore began to slide from his shoulders off. The coat flapped as it fell from his body, revealing a muscular yet slim-ish frame covered in scales with some fur along the arms and sides. Spikes immediately began to protrude from Vulper’s upper back, heading back towards Elise, stopping at a few meters out. The spikes opened up, a membrane with more *spikes* folding outwards- eventually taking the shape of large bat-like wings covered in scales.

Fur drifted along his back and fell from his sides, a bit of fur forming at the top joints of the wings as genuine spikes protruded from the bend. They flapped out, full length easily double that of a normal human’s length. Next came a tail that protruded from above his waist band, flying around and slowly wrapping slightly around his legs as more fur protruded. His own boots shredded clear off revealing lizard-like feet near black in color.

His claws increased in length and size, the sharp tips becoming greater. Finally horns had begun to protrude, one to the left arched up and another to the right arched down without the tip. His pupils slit, appearing much like a Dragon's. The whites of his eyes shifted to a dark green while the cornea became bright yellow. A slight fire of red and orange grew around the pupils, crackles of the colors dancing in his eyes.

Elise stepped back two paces quickly, then a third, her mouth hung open. Leon's eyes even had begun to shake slightly, wide in disbelief. The arms of both Xander and Chromwell swung away, the former wide eyed and the latter's not at all visible. At the center of the room there stood Vulper, fully transformed at last with hair and fur flowing, his tail whipping around and his wings stretching.

He gazed forward upon Leon, snarling ever so slightly with sharpened fang-like teeth visible, "You and your cohorts destroyed Vulfax. You reduced it from a once proud clan to a mindless array of chaos and destruction. You all drove my subordinates, nay, my people- to their deaths! For that I will not forgive you. Now I will show you the true might of a TRUE Drachen of entirely PURE BLOOD!"

Transformation

Rock blew apart from beneath Vulper's feet, his form carried forward with an explosion transpiring moments after his launch. Leon's only visible eye pulsed, thrown back momentarily after as Vulper's right fist connected square with Leon's gut. Another shock wave of pressure filtered way while Leon's form rocketed from Vulper straight back into the rock wall with a mighty crash. Cracks spread quickly throughout the wall as he landed, both arms and both legs slamming into it after his back.

Another crash transpired as right away, Vulper stood before Leon with another fist flying. The entire wall shattered with debris flying, dust rolling, cracks spreading rapidly. Dust and dirt flew clear into Vulper, though not into Leon. Vulper's eyes flared as before him there was only his fist and the crater delivered to the wall via his attack. Behind him in a blur of movement, the dark warrior appeared with a bit of dirt planted on his face.

His teeth gritted, his expression more of a serious one now as opposed to earlier, he looked upon Vulper's back, "{His blows are heavier, and his speed is not insignificant.} So this is the power of a Drachen of Pure Blood... heh, outstanding!"

His serious expression faded way, the grit of his teeth returning to that of a wide grin, while again his eye fired up. Vulper slowly turned his head, casting his gaze back upon Leon who now danced behind, "Alright I'm game! If you want to fight then lets play!"

The seals upon Leon's face had begun to glow red at the edges while the blackness of the seals themselves had begun to swell. In time said blackness also turned orange, quick to coat Leon's entire face. His body immediately bulked up with a twenty percent increase, much as Vulper's had. The glow of Vulper's eyes increased as his glare became more apparent.

Horns, much like a demon's, ripped from Leon's scalp as the glowing of the seals subsided revealing dark faded red skin. His jaw became more pronounced, curved back teeth becoming quickly visible while the whites of his eyes turned red themselves. Finishing off his own change, his jaw line quickly emerged, becoming far more pronounced. A deafening roar left Leon as the transformation concluded, pressure rocketing out of him in the next moment.

Elise's legs gave beneath her and once more she dropped to the ground, this time vomiting in the process.

"Elise! What's wrong now?!" Sephiroth's voice echoed.

"{H-his power, it just jumped exponentially. What did he do?!}"

Vulper turned around a quarter step, gazing passed Leon to Elise. A scowl quickly emerged as he looked upon her crumpling over on the ground.

"What have you done to her you bastard?" he growled.

"Me? Why I haven't done anything at all, heh heh. Seems she is particularly susceptible to my Dark Energy's pressure. You're not an energy user and with that level of power, you doubtfully would feel the shift that just transpired."

"You transformed to boost your fighting capabilities as well. How interesting, I didn't think Dharkanians were like us Drachen."

"Heh heh, well you're half right," Leon chuckled.

"Hmm?"

"Dharkanians do not naturally transform. The truth of the matter is that this isn't even a transformation to boost my power, simply... it is a release to unlock more of it."

"What's that?" Vulper growled.

"There's no point in explaining it as you won't see beyond this state. You should feel proud though, not even Wesley the Earth Dragon managed to get me this amped up, hahaha! The fool, always so vigilant, yet he allowed peace time to weaken him so significantly."

Vulper turned fully to face Leon, both now face too face with only a short distance between one another. The former's wings flapped once while the latter quickly became coated in an overcoat of Dark Energy, both only staring each other down. Far behind Leon, Elise slowly rose back up with a few huffs, looking straight ahead at both. A single nod was given, from which she

began to stumble away. Where he stood, Vulper gave another nod back, breathing out slowly before taking a breath in.

“Hmm?” Leon murmured inquisitively.

An immediate fire storm left Vulper’s mouth as he exhaled, all of it flying straight into Leon head on, flooding much of the entire cavern. As the flames moved back towards Elise, she stood firmly up, breathing out herself with Sephiroth stabbed into the ground. Both of her hands flew up and out immediately as the fire reached her, a small sphere of Light Energy forming before her. As the fire reached, it swiftly began to spiral down and around Elise, quickly being absorbed straight into the sphere that now pulsed as it grew and grew.

Vulper maintained his breath, eyes locked forward as he continued to jet out the flame, a bright white core now forming at the center. Still the shadow of Leon remained standing right in the brunt of the blast. Slowly the form grew bigger and bigger, his legs moving bit by bit forward towards Vulper.

“What?!” Vulper choked out without moving his lips.

The moment after, Leon emerged from the fire with his right hand drawn back and flying forward. His fist connected straight to Vulper’s jaw, cutting the flow of the flames immediately and leaving the Drachen stumbling. Forward he then went with his left to deliver another punch straight onto Vulper.

CLAP

Vulper’s right had flown up and grabbed hold of the fist, while his left flew and was quickly caught by Leon’s right. The two stood there pressing against one another, their knees slamming right into one another in the next interval unleashing another shock wave. Both growled, pushing back and forth in an attempt to overpower the other, the floor cracking beneath their force and weights.

Vulper’s snarl soon turned to a grin, his eyes shining with amusement, “Right where I want you. NOW ELISE!”

Leon's head shot round, taking view of Elise who stood with a massive sphere of Light Energy enough to nearly fill the entire cavern's diameter. His eyes went big, "WHAT?! {When did she- no it was the fire, she absorbed the fire so I wouldn't sense anything being off. They planned this without even conversing, damn you Vulper!}"

The massive Sphere of Light, now about the size of a two story house, rapidly began to contract. The sphere shrunk by no more than a foot per every three seconds, contracting more and more. The ground beneath Elise began to crack and chip away as the power contracted further and further, both of her hands still out and now around it. Leon looked back upon her, shaken, then perplexed.

Beside Elise stood another figure, an older figure. 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. His right arm was held out, and in the left he held the Star Blade.

Quickly Leon shot his attention back around to Vulper, bringing his own head back and swinging forward. Their heads collided, Vulper sent back a bit with a jerk, both of his hands releasing but that was not all. Leon went to pull away, ceasing as something wrapped quickly around his left leg. The warrior looked, seeing none other than Vulper's tail.

Quickly two arms and both legs wrapped around Leon, locking him in place, "You're not going anywhere!"

The sphere in front of Elise contracted once more before ceasing for several seconds, decreasing by half shortly then after until it was now the size of a truck. She huffed and huffed, appearing visibly strained as the truck sized sphere of light contracted by half again, then again, and again. Now it hovered at the size of a tire. A groan of agony left Elise, turning into more of a wailing cry, echoing throughout the cavern as the sphere quivered again.

Her wailing cry turned then into a full on yell with the veins of her arms and hands popping out, as well as across her face. Once more the sphere contracted, this time from tire size to basketball size. Her wail ceased and in that moment she collapsed over onto her side, leaving the

figure of Sephiroth standing with the orb. He grinned, looking from it to Elise, then forward to Leon, “Oi, Dharkanian. Catch!”

His foot flew forward and he at once kicked the sphere, his form shattering the moment he made contact with a burst of light. Forward it flew, crackling in the air.

“Happy trails!” Vulper yelled, his teeth sinking immediately straight into Leon’s neck.

“Gyah!”

With the sphere now ten meters away, Vulper removed his teeth and limbs from Leon, kneeling him right in the back. What was left behind was none other than a forming rune of darkness, lines spreading across Leon’s neck and into his robes. Vulper flew up and forward, flying straight above the sphere. Both passed one another, a boom leaving Vulper’s feet as he carried on straight for Elise.

Leon flew forward, right into the path of the sphere with widened eyes, “{A Paralysis Seal? He knows magic and curses as well?! No!}”

“Checkmate Sycamore!” Vulper called out as he dropped to the ground right over Elise, his wings quickly folding around the both of them.

The sphere, now three meters away, moved deadset on Leon’s gut. His eyes widened big, his pupils contracting as a bright glow had begun to emit from the sphere.

“ALMIGHTY REFLECT!” a voice called out.

A figure swiftly appeared before Leon, followed by something glowing forming up immediately before said figure. The sphere ceased movement instantaneously mid-air, ceasing for a second- then two, then three. At the fourth second the sphere blew away from both the figure, the glowing form before, and from Leon, rocketing straight out and up towards the ceiling.

Gun fire continued on the surface, rockets sent flying. The forest overlooking the mines was ablaze, multiple figures running around aimlessly. Many retreated from the warehouse lines,

heading back for the cliffside and the burning trees. Stationed near the divide between fortress and the wilds stood Tony with Domino Squad fighting on and on around him.

“Callie, there isn’t a moment to waste. If Leon is down there, we can end this now by defeating him. In the meantime, we have troops that need your healing abilities. Find Tony and allow the rest of your squads to defend you. Tell Jarrajod he’s being given direct command of this mess. We’re going-”

“But Lady Bell!”

With that Holly skipped up a foot and dropped feet first down into the opened hole. The group was left watching, speechless before turning as bullets continued to rain.

“Forget about it, leave Leon to them. If anyone can take him down it’ll be those two,” Britt announced.

“Alright. Lets go then-”

All at once, the warehouse went up. A tremendous cloud of fire blew through the ceiling, through the windows, through the wall. An instantaneous flash of an explosion sent rocketing high up into the sky. Flames threw themselves outwards, ensnaring a variety of Undead and Zaherian. Caldori and those beside her looked on with mouths hung.

“Incoming!” Tony yelled out, dashing out to the front with both hands flung out.

The flames warped round Tony and those behind him, soldiers and his team alike, while the flames continued to roar out to the edge of the cliff side. Cracks rippled out away from the epicenter, ground immediately caving in and cratering before their very eyes. Domino Squadron flew back, collapsing onto the then collapsing ground, falling down with it along with other soldiers and zombies not caught in the blast.

The flames and smoke rocketed high into the sky, easily eclipsing the height of the trees from the cliff. Not far from the edge, Jarrajod looked on with soldiers running all around near him.

“W-what the hell was that?!” one soldier yelled out.

“What the ever living FUCK just happened?!”

“Judging from the fire ball and the collapse... something just triggered a collapse and some form of explosion underground. Likely a fuel depot or a methane buildup. You, get me an update on our forces near the epicenter of that!”

“Nothing doing sir, communications are offline.”

Trees roared and waved as the pressure of the blast swept through, blowing multiple soldiers, tents, and even trucks clear over. Trees uprooted themselves and flew, many of which had already been on fire. Jarrajod stood in the middle of what had been the operations camp, the wind roaring around him as he watched on.

“It would seem as though things are getting interesting now, aren’t they?” he murmured, looking up witnessing literal fire balls flying and raining down, crashing and sweeping through the trees.

Power

Smoke rolled off into the high sky, the mushroom cloud plume of smoke and fire now faded. Rows and rows of trees lay scattered, scorched black and in piles both atop the cliff and at the bottom. Below, where mine and warehouse had stood, there now was a massive crater going a multitude of meters below the surface. Plenty of smoke still rolled clear off and out of the crater left behind by the blast.

Bodies lay visible, some atop and some buried. Among those on the edge of the crater were the likes of Domino Squadron and soldiers kept round them. Plenty of dead lay around however, strung about and half emerged from the entire ordeal. Not far ahead though a fair pace down, Holly and Wesley both stood with a barrier of light gradually in fade around them both.

Both looked down and then around, Holly stepping out from Wesley first. Wesley himself looked left to right, then turned and looked up, seeing Tony stationary.

“What in the hell is this...” Wesley murmured.

“Krrrz- can you hear me?” came the voice of Jarrajod over com.

“Yeah, I read you. What the hell just happened Jarrajod?” Wesley growled.

“An explosion from underground is the best we can tell of. We are not sure of the cause but considering the size of the blast, it would be suffice to guess that a pocket of methane was detonated from below the ground. There’s no trace of the enemy left whatsoever.”

“Well that isn’t exactly true... look down there,” Holly called, pointing out the center of the crater.

Far below in the center, a bubble of darkness had begun to erode, revealing three occupants within. Holly’s gaze narrowed fiercely as she scanned the area.

At the epicenter, Leon stood now back in his base state with little battle damage signs. Around him stood Chromwell and Xander, Xander to the front. Sparkling glitter-like substance blew from Xander, drifting around the two.

“Heh. Good work, Xander,” Leon called, the seal left on him by Vulper now gone.

“Of course boss, that was troublesome,” Xander replied, his single eye looking from his master to up above, “Looks like that cleared the entire place out.”

“Leave it to the girl to come up with something so unique, and then leave it to Vulper to coordinate that with her,” Chromwell replied.

“Admittedly that would’ve been enough to destroy this body, and that would’ve hurt like hell. Quite intriguing I must say.”

“In what regard?”

“Vulper being a Pure Blood and capable of such power. And then that girl being able to turn all of that fire into energy, and to then compress it into a bomb. No- it wasn’t just that now was it. That Star Blade of hers, she managed to manifest it.”

“Rather ridiculous. You have the power to annihilate armies yet one little girl and some washed up warrior were enough to nearly kill you,” Xander chuckled.

“Hold your tongue Xander,” Chromwell replied, “The odds are that even our best warrior would have been dealt a fatal blow by all of that.”

“Ah please,” Leon chuckled, “You both underestimate Cortez’s abilities far too much if you think something like that would’ve stopped him. Now the whole mine detonating like it did, that could certainly do some damage.”

“Well forgive me boss but it looked like you were in some shit there had that actually hit you,” Xander replied.

“As I said, it would have been enough to destroy this body and it would’ve hurt like hell. But as it so happens, that didn’t happen because you chose to step in. Rest assured, I had my means of dealing with that, heh heh.”

“Leave it to you to have a backup plan. Alright now if we’re done with that, shall we be on our way before more of those assholes come down here and-”

“-Hold it,” Chromwell murmured.

“What?” Leon growled.

“Look to your left, up there.”

Leon and Xander both cast their gaze ahead, both growing shock eyed. Laying on the ground was Elise, her sword right beside her, while a distance away leaning against a wall was none other than Vulper completely intact.

“How are they even alive, let alone unharmed?!” Xander choked.

“This whole situation is strange,” Chromwell murmured.

Leon glanced over, looking at his side, “How do you mean?”

“There are too many variables that simply do not add up. Vulper, even as a Pure Drachen, should not be so capable. Then for her Star Blade to manifest and to help her form that blast, when she certainly shouldn’t be that far along with training. And finally, both of them still being alive with no clear signs as to how or why. Doesn’t that just seem odd?”

“I quite agree,” Leon replied, “At any rate, we should-”

Air exploded where Vulper had been position and forth he shot at Leon again. Another wave of air soon followed as hand and fist connected yet again. Leon had turned full on towards Vulper, runes and symbols having spread across his body once more. A scowl was returned by the Drachen Warrior who now looked down upon the Dark Warrior.

“KRAAAA!”

A blast of fire flew point blank straight into Leon while his two guards immediately launched to either the left or right in evasion. Xander skidded away, looking back on Vulper, “How is he even still moving!?”

Leon stood straight in the middle of the blast, his form unmoving even as it let up. Vulper’s tail swung and crashed against Leon’s side, blocked immediately by his left arm held up. Then came the kick as Vulper spun round, back kicking right into him. Leon flew back, flipping through the air whilst throwing his hands together.

“Tch- one should know when it is wiser to just give up!” Leon spat, his marks spreading out and immediately reforming his transformed state.

Water blasted its way straight out of the ground beneath Vulper and slammed into his underside, throwing him clear off as Leon landed, “Trident Of Poseidon!”

Another burst of water flew high, this time a three pronged shot, quickly condensing into the form of a trident. Said trident ripped right through Vulper’s left wing and flew off high into the air as the warrior spun round, unleashing another fire blast at Leon. Dark Energy swiftly coated around Leon as he launched up with a kick off of the ground, barreling clean through the flames.

“Gah!” Vulper choked out as Leon then rammed into him, horned head and all, both of which ripped right into Vulper’s torso.

“Fang of Light!” came Elise’s voice.

The Hive Warrior looked down, observing as a blinding crescent slash of Light Energy flew high at him. Darkness pooled around his eyes, a scowl forming, “{Here we go.}”

His right arm flung out, a jet blast of Dark Energy quickly flew out and slammed into the crescent, resulting in a tremendous blast midair. Elise’s emerald eyes went aglow, peering into the blast and smoke, “Sephiroth!”

“I know!”

“Still trying to coordinate? How futile, haha-”

A single figure flew clear through the smoke, almost gliding along the smoke. A breath of air escaped Elise as she gazed forth. Rocketing through the smoke was none other than an arm and hand, strings of Dark Energy springing around behind the launched limb. The smoke cleared just enough, revealing strings leading from the arm back up to Leon's right sleeve, his grin growing.

Eight meters from Elise in the air, the hand opened up and from it launched a jetting blast of Dark Energy close to point blank. It was a dense concentration, flying at about the width of a football and widening after only slightly. Light Energy rocketed from beneath her feet and quickly she launched backwards, narrowly evading as the beam crashed into the ground, triggering yet another colossal blast that rocketed up into the sky.

Upon completion of firing, the arm flew back, retracting right back into Leon's sleeve at double the speed as his left hand was then placed upon Vulper's stomach, "Next time, don't come back, hyrrrraaah!"

A blast of Dark Energy ripped clear through Vulper's lower back, through the gut. Bits of spine and flesh flew, plenty of blood as the energy raced up to the sky.

"Kyaaah-" Vulper grunted.

"Vulper!" Elise called out.

Leon's horns pulled free of Vulper's chest, Dark Energy racing around his arms while blood flowed freely from the three wounds on Vulper's body. His torn wing had begun to droop as he hovered away from Leon, eyes shaken. His right hand moved quickly over the hole in his gut, blood dripping from his lips. A minor cough later and a large splotch of red left Vulper's mouth, falling towards the ground below.

Leon's smirk faded as his eyes locked straight onto Vulper's, "Who do you think you're dealing with? I am not some kindergartner looking to take candy from some stranger in an alleyway, I am the Master of the Hive!"

Swiftly he shot in front of Vulper once more, bringing his right leg around. The back of his leg connected as he swung down, launching Vulper with tremendous strength. A blast of dust flew high into the air following, Vulper's impact displacing it. Quickly the darkened red skin and horns chipped off, blowing away as pieces in the wind as Leon hovered there looking down over both Vulper and Elise.

His grin returned, blades of Dark Energy launching from his sleeves forming gauntlet blades, the edge of said blades then drifting back along the sleeves and up the forearm. Once formed, the blades increased in size many times over, becoming practically as big as his own arms as they stuck out of and around his arm. Down he shot, launching like an arrow with arms trailing behind him as he nose dove, heading straight for Vulper.

"Bloody bastard," Vulper growled slowly standing as steam emitted from all of his wounds, now slowly closing up.

Vulper's hands flew forth as did Leon's blades, the two slamming into one another. Dust once more flew high around both as they impacted, a scowl resonating from Vulper while a pleased grin lifted from Leon, both looking into the eyes of the other. Leon dropped, feet to the ground as both pressed hard against the other.

"{Gyeh- what's with this guy?!}" Vulper growled in his own head, quivering with teeth gritted as he stared into Leon's face, "{He's back in his base form and he's still fighting as if he was in that demon form of his. Is it all an act to just screw with me?}"

"Heh-" Leon chuckled.

"Hmm?"

"You appear to be strained, Drachen Warrior. Have your reserves run low already? Or are you still trying to come up with some clever way to defeat me at this stage of the fight?"

"What in the hell are you," Vulper growled, "I've seen many a Dharkanian in my day from millennia long ago. Even Azala didn't have power this great!"

“Heh, you underestimate our kind you impudent brat. I’ll give you credit for recognizing that I’m far from being serious, even now after that little trickery of the girl’s. There’s simply no reason to be serious at this point. The power of the Thirteen is something mere mortals can never grasp properly.”

“Mere mortals? Hate to break it to you bud but you’re just as mortal as the rest of us. Vampires die, Lightonians die, and Dharkanians die!”

“Heh, from a certain point of view that is granted. The truth of the universe however is that those with power can never fall. Age does not plague us as it does the normal humanoids of this world. If we can not truly be defeated in battle, we can never be silenced. If we do not submit to disease and other trivial shortcomings such as hunger and thirst, we can not die of natural cause. You see, we do not falter for these factors for we are strong. The Thirteen Phantoms of the Hive are among the most elite entities in the entire cosmos.”

“Tch-”

“While the Lightonians grew weaker in power from peace time, we have been sharpening our prowess, mastering new abilities and new skills. We Phantoms are now the new Gods, the new immortals! Although... where is the fun in simply never dying? Where is the fun in not using this power of ours? Where lies the point in which we should rule alone? I’ll tell you something, Drachen. There is no point in isolation, just as there is no point in allowing our enemies the chance to grow stronger. For our allies though- that is a different story. Think of it Vulper, a warrior of your capabilities would be of great use to us. As the new Gods, we could offer you power beyond your wildest dreams to forever protect your clan, to protect your people. You would never be challenged again, to be granted the beauty of eternal life. What say you?”

“Nyeh!” Vulper grunted, gaze fiercely opening, “I get it now- this entire time, this entire fight you-”

“I’ve been playing you the entire time. As you should gather by now, my power is far beyond normal understanding, just as it can be said for any of my comrades. If at any point I truly desired to, I could have put an end to this without any difficulty... but I like to learn about those I

fight. Heh- I can certainly see why some within my ranks are so interested in the girl, her perception of events is staggering. And then you, a relic of the past so bold in power and flavor. It is stunning Vulper, and I do mean that. What I said earlier to the girl, I will now offer you in full. Ally with the Hive, and Vulfax will never suffer again. I can assure you that the Tribe will make use of you until you expire, then discard your very lives as if they were never anything at all. We Dharkanians, however, do not play by such games. We seek strength, we desire value!”

“And why should I believe you? You’re looking to start a war, we’d just be sacrificial pawns in your schemes either way, forced to survive or perish!” Vulper spat out.

“HA! You’re dead either way genius but have it your way. If that is your answer then I will be happy to accommodate you!”

A cloud of darkness roared out of Leon, spreading quickly through the air like a fine mist. His hands immediately released the dark blades, darkness streaming out and around his arms, sleeves blowing fiercely. Vulper stepped away, dropping the twin Dark Energy blades to the ground with a clang, looking dead onto Leon as the darkness surged around him. His head lurched back, eyes wide as can be.

“SHIT!” he barked.

“Vulper!” Elise called, dashing from her position straight towards the confrontation, Sephiroth in hand.

“Die, you filth. Dharkanian Art Number Five O One. Fallen D- hrgh!”

His gaze shot left, his body carrying right swiftly with a single leap as a blast of white blew right beside his position. Elise skidded to a halt, Vulper simply blinked. The blast of Light Energy dissipated quickly as Leon landed fully turned towards the blast, skidding back on the ground with rocks kicked away by his boots. A simple blink as the darkness faded away, then his gaze opened wider.

A pot hole was left where the blast had struck. Further up the crater, beyond that blast, facing front and center towards Leon himself, was none other than Holly and Wesley. Holly with

her right arm out and a bit of smoke drifting from her outfaced palm, Wesley with large rock gauntlets formed into fists.

“Tch- you,” Leon growled.

“It’s been a long time, hasn’t it,” Holly murmured as a glow of white swiftly surrounded her, her coat tails flapping as she looked down on Leon, eyes full of glare and death casting, “Leon Sycamore.”

The Earth Dragon's Revenge

A gust of wind blew across the crater's depths, through the form of Elise and around the bulk of Vulper. Leon's coat tail and sleeves flapped, just as Holly's lengthy hair and robes did. Wesley stood tall, unmoved even by the wind which seemed to have absolutely no affect on him in any sort of way. Snake-like eyes aglow with fire burned their way through to both Tribe leaders who stared shakily back.

Elise stepped way, looking back and forth with subtle motions, tensing. The wind ceased immediately, the air all around her growing still. Her right hand moved to her mouth, fingers pressed to her lips that now had begun to chap. A glance down as she pulled her hand from, then back to the appearance of the three.

A sudden chill shot through her spine, her whole body sent shaking for the briefest of moments as she took one more step back, "{This... this is bad-}"

Leon turned aful, his attention to Vulper now lost. The latter of the two launched himself with a single leap, flying clear backwards through the air like an arrow until he came down, landing down right near Elise with hefty puffs escaping him soon after.

"Vulper," she murmured, "Are you-"

"I'm fine, ugh... these old bones can take a lot more than what he dished me out, trust me. This though- geh, I don't like this. This feeling though," he replied.

"I know."

"So," Leon began with half closed eyes, a coldness emanating from his voice, "You've finally come. I'm surprised to see you up so suddenly, Earth Dragon. Have you learned nothing from before?"

A low growl left Wesley swiftly, "Grr, I remember you son of a bitch, I remember damn well!"

The collapse of rock, the explosion of a reactor. An arm and a leg gone, a hole through his body with missing organs. A stretcher to which Wesley lay, tubes and wires running through his strapped down body. Screams leapt from his mouth, body thrashing around.

“Heh,” Leon chuckled once, “After that beat down, I’m surprised to see you eagerly approaching me so soon. It’s been what, six months? Seven? Though the doctors appear to have patched you up significantly well. Perhaps I should have vaporized your limbs when I ripped them off.”

“Mother f-”

“That’s enough, Wesley,” Holly replied as she glanced to her comrade, “Don’t let him get to you.”

“I know.”

“Mmm, Holly Bell. Heir to the Tribe’s throne, daughter of Maxwell. It’s been what, twenty-five, twenty-six?” Leon began.

“Twenty-seven thousand, eight hundred and seventeen; but hey, who’s keeping track right?”

“Heh heh, so true. The last time I saw you on the battle field, I was still apprenticed to Cortez. Well, the fact that both of you are here means one of three things. You’re either putting on a show for your troops, you’re arrogant as can be thinking you have the power to face me... or could it be that you’ve rekindled your inner power to actually oppose the Phantoms? Which is it?”

“Why don’t you come over here and find out, you dastard?” Holly chuckled.

“Perhaps I will.”

Rock crackled, sands drifted away despite a lack of breeze. Dirt crumbled from the crevices inside of the crater. Vulper and Elise both stood in place, a distance from the trio. Vulper’s head shifted around to the left slightly, then the right, his teeth gritted. Elise glanced to him at once, an eye slightly raised before the other joined.

“What is it?”

“The air... can you feel it? It isn't just still, it's rife pressure and energy.”

“Tch,” she stuttered, looking back to the three, “Looks like they're about to start. We should move, quickly.”

“Right!”

Neither moved. Both of the Tribe stood side by side, Holly a little over Wesley in height. Below them near the bottom of the crater stood Leon who stared back. A pure white glow erupted around both Light Warriors, while an abyss of emptiness rose around Leon. Still, all was still, the glow and the abyss soon fading after only a moment's breath.

Far up above, Jarrajod looked over the edge, down below. Many soldier stood round him, Tribe and Canadian alike. Domino Squad drew close, as did many others including Vulfax.

“Good luck to you both,” Jarrajod murmured.

Rock shattered like broken tile. Wesley shot forth first, Leon right then after, Holly hanging back only momentarily. His hands crashed together as he moved towards the darkness, voice booming, “Machine Gun Blows!”

The ground around Wesley erupted, dozens to hundreds of spikes of rock sent spewing forth into Leon's path. Slabs of earth caught in the path shattered as the needles struck, single needles punching large holes straight into the ground as they struck. A smirk spread, his feet skidding to a halt as the needles came near. A dome of darkness washed quickly around Leon's body, acting in defense as the earth needles struck and turned to dust.

“Tch-”

“Too easy! Abyssal Serpents!”

The dome broke way, revealing Leon standing with his upper arms drawn back, the forearms parallel to the ground. Twin dragon heads forged of dark energy stemmed from both

forearms, or rather his hands, black electricity surging around. His arms flung forward, launching the heads.

They flew from Leon's fists towards Wesley with twin monstrous howls, serpent bodies of dark energy forming behind to which the electricity surged around.

"Earth Wall!"

A large wall of rock shot up before Wesley, one two-thirds of a meter thick. With roars the two attacks struck, exploding immediately. The wall shattered, pieces of rock flying everywhere as a cloud from the blast climbed the air, electricity dancing inside of said cloud.

"Not bad. You almost blocked the attack... almost," Leon murmured.

The sparks of electricity surged, turning from black to yellow surrounding a bit of white. Swiftly the electricity surged back down to the ground and flew straight into Wesley's body. An aura of electricity raged around Wesley, who in turn let out a howl of agony. A smirk spread across Leon's face yet again as he gazed upon Wesley's situation.

"Heh. And that's what peace time will do to you when you allow yourself to grow soft, Lighntonian fool."

All color immediately faded away from Wesley, leaving a body of brown that had begun to melt like wax. Leon's eyes puckered as all features left the form, the electricity breaking off moments later.

"A Mud Replacement, he did it again," Leon growled.

"Erupt!" Wesley's voice called out, echoing.

Leon's focus shifted downward as the ground cracked, splits spreading out from beneath. Flames spewed out straight up into Leon followed by the burst of lava to the surface. It went up like a geyser right beneath him, rocketing dozens of meters into the sky. Far behind the geyser the ground split again, from which Wesley jumped out to land upon the surface.

"How's that you cocky son of a bitch!?"

No sooner than it had erupted out did the lava begin to lose its glow. Wesley's eyes popped from his skull as the molten rock returned to harden rock right above in the center of the pillar. The rock split, a large black blade the size of a truck ripping its way out sending rock and debris flying, water pouring clear out of the cut along the sides. The pillar collapsed to reveal Leon with an aura of blackness around, tire sized spheres of water and darkness surrounding him.

The blade itself extended from a massive skeleton-like arm connected to one of the spheres now orbiting Leon. The blade, the hand, and the arm all contracted, pulling itself back into the sphere in seconds while another moved out in front between both warriors. A grin widened and his sight showered with pride.

"Not a bad attempt, allow me to return the favor with an eruption of my own. Water Prison!"

Black spheres appeared all around Wesley. A simple blink and the realization came forth, dozens and dozens simply surrounding him. Water blew out of all of them, the spheres themselves ripping apart as twisting jets crashed into Wesley, throwing him around. Gallons and gallons poured out and wrapped around, a massive bubble of liquid imprisoning the general swiftly.

The water twisted and thrashed with the general at the center of the bubble. It spun and roared inside, twisting and spiraling with powerful current force. His arms quivered, fingers twitching, eyes shut.

"I find myself already disappointed with the good general. Holly, are you really going to just stand by and wait?" Leon chuckled with a slight turn of his head.

Holly remained in place with wind coursing around her once more. Her eyes narrowed as those words crossed her, to which a jolt of white aura emerged around her form.

"Hmph. She's indecisive about how to jump me. Wesley can't focus his energy so long as I keep the currents flowing like that, nor can he make any signs to command his magic. Still, better safe than sorry. I'll drown the whole lot of them like a bunch of monkeys in the river."

Dark spheres multiplied all around him, spanning outwards across the floor of the crater. As swiftly as they had begun to appear, water began to roar out and slam upon the crater's floor. Dozens and dozens, soon turning to hundreds, all of them converting the energy into water. Waves and waves flew, crashing rapidly into the sides as they spanned outwards.

"This is-" Holly growled before leaping back, waves of water sweeping forward to where she had stood.

In no time at all the water level had begun to rise with more and more spheres forming to convert. Five centimeters, twenty-four centimeters, thirty-eight, sixty-four. In just ten seconds dozens of meters worth of water had begun to show up from the converted Dark Energy, all gradually filling the crater. Holly shot high and above, scaling from the lower area to the middle, then to the upper lengths of the crater. There she stopped, looking out as the water level continued to exponentially grow.

Higher above, soldiers looked over the edge in shock and awe. Mouths hung, eyes shook, bodies twitched. Even the likes of Tony and Jarrajod stared back at the growing abyss of water with sweat dripping down their faces. Elise stumbled away with her own teeth gritted.

"The scale of this- Leon is creating an entire lake out of the darkness of the night," Tony mumbled.

"No way can any mortal do something like this-" a soldier nearby choked out.

"He's right," Jarrajod spoke in response, "And neither can Leon."

Vulper turned his head looking straight at Jarrajod, "Then what the hell are we looking at down there?!"

"An illusion. There does not exist a spell of any sort that can create a lake like this in seconds. Even if there were, Leon did not utter a command or form any seals. Lady Bell retreated not because of the water illusion itself; but rather because of what it can hide."

Holly's eyes shifted, left to right, watching as the surface continued to climb higher. Rocks did not move, deposits of dirt did not muddy or shift. Everything remained as it was.

“Wesley... you told me you could handle him. Don’t tell me that he has you beat already.”

Far beneath the waves at the bottom of the crater, Leon remained standing. The bubble of water containing Wesley hovered just behind him as he gazed upwards at the sight of Holly. His smug grin had faded away as several more spheres formed up around him.

“I would expect no less from the heir to the throne. Holly is a clear cut above the rest of the trash gawking from up there. The fact that she’s still just keeping a distance and waiting though,” Leon mumbled.

Slowly he turned round to face the bubble and Wesley trapped in the middle, eyes narrowed. The form no longer twitched, simply it sat inside of the bubble, amidst the current.

“It’s not him,” Leon growled.

The water bubble splattered, splashing down in multiple places, drops sent flying. Wesley’s form dropped to the ground, shattering on impact. All color faded and this time a bunch of rocks stayed behind.

“A solid clone this time. So he’s still under the ground!”

Rock shattered beneath Leon once more, two hands flying out and grabbing immediate hold of his ankles. Leon’s face shot downward, sight locked to his grabbed ankles.

“You won’t escape this time!”

The ground in front of Leon shattered with yet another Wesley launching out and landing. His right arm outstretched, palm deadset to Leon’s direction, teeth gritted. A spark of white appeared, then a sphere of white that quickly swelled. As it stretched, it shattered once, then a second time, reforming with jumps in scale.

“The Liger bomb!” Leon choked out.

“Have it!” Wesley spat as it fired.

The sphere flew straight into Leon, closing the gap in no more than a second as it slammed into him. A roar left Leon, turned to a yowl as the blast went off, Light Energy completely filling the bottom level of the crater in a split second. The water illusion shattered, blinding light and pressure racing outwards. Another bubble formed, this time of pure light energy which pulsed continuously. Holly looked downward as the winds screamed around her.

Soldiers up top moved away while others such as Elise and Vulper held arms before their faces, blocking much of the light and wind. A vortex of wind raced upwards at the center of the crater, towering higher and higher, spreading. It formed like a tornado, spinning like one as well-only the entire twister had begun to suck in the light energy alone. Wesley's form launched from the side of the bubble of light, launching high above with the twister.

His hands slammed together as he once more called out, "I'm not done yet! Now contract!"

The bubble collapsed, shrinking at an exponential rate. The twister burst, a rocket of light energy flying high now in its place as the bubble contracted to the epicenter. The sky itself had begun to turn yellow, a mighty flow flooding the entire forest area for miles. In seconds the bubble had faded with only the pillar of light remaining, now flowing high into the sky.

"NOW! HAMMER!"

Down it all zipped in a mere second, compacting at the epicenter of it all. The final blast rang out, rock along the face of the crater absolutely shattering and ripping apart. The floor of the original crater then collapsed, more of the walls sinking in as the forces impacted. A bright white sphere is all that remained outside of the ripping forces of the wind. People up top were flung back, blown from the edge.

Holly looked on, still in place as the ground around her collapsed. Dust roared up and out into the air currents as they danced. The latter lasted many seconds more, subsiding after a total of twenty seconds of fierce flow. Dust scattered with the smoke, clinging to the bottom of the crater itself.

Wesley hovered in the air, huffing away, the glow of Light Energy still around him as he looked down. Sweat dripped from his face, streaming in fact. His descent had begun, slow with many meters between him and the ground.

“Huff... huff... heh, haha! That did it. What do you think of that now you son of a bitch?!” Wesley called out.

“Wesley,” Holly called out.

“What?!” he spat back, turning round to look at her as he flew down passed.

His gaze turned back round, returning to the epicenter of the blast. His face froze, jaw hung slightly, eyes bulging. Laying upon the ground sat half of Leon, his upper half. Darkness clung around the lower wound where his lower half had been, around his arms, even around parts of his face. Said darkness had begun to pool away off of the body.

“Not bad, General,” Leon murmured staring up at Wesley, “I actually felt it this time.”

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“No! That’s impossible!” Wesley yelled out.

“Is it though?” Leon questioned, his right hand slamming flat to the ground, “Eight Phantom Dragons.”

Earth ruptured all around Leon, massive holes opening up from which multiple Dark Energy Dragons raced out of, roaring as they launched for Wesley. Another blast went as they all connected, one that engulfed Wesley right away. The dark vortex created by them, rather the blast, remained for several seconds before dissipating. From it dropped Wesley in a roll, flying off to the side of the crater.

Dust was kicked up once he hit, rocks scattering. A grunt left him as his body skipped, flopping over and rolling once the bounce was complete. Both hands down, knees down, Wesley picked himself up with a push quickly, “How?!”

Below Leon remained, arms spread out with his robe torn apart, “Hmph... that wasn’t half bad.”

Darkness congregated quickly around the lower wound, moving around like sand, weaving around and around. The black seals and symbols from prior had begun to spread once more across Leon’s face and body in the next instance. As they did his lower wound had begun to twitch and squirm. The darkness shifted as at Leon’s gut something began to pool out underneath all of the energy. Two lumps appeared, splitting way from the pooling, lumps that then stretched out.

Holly looked down from her position, eyes shaken as she watched. Slowly the lumps stretched further and further, soon taking on a more leg-like shape as they went, “I can’t tell what he’s up to... one can’t just reform their limbs with energy alone. Organic components are too complex to just be printed like that. So is this regeneration?”

No sooner had her words completed themselves had the restoration completed. Leon now had been left pants-less; however with a lower half and legs made entirely of Dark Energy.

Legs totally black, feet that appeared as a cross of animal and human. From that point he sat up, legs bending round. Both Holly and Wesley watched on as Leon stood back up now on his new legs.

His shirt drifted way in shreds, revealing a torso covered in seals and markings. Holly's eyes locked to the form, scanning each symbol, each little marking as Leon took a pace forward. Her attention then returned to his face, studying his expression. The dark warrior looked from just ahead of him to straight up, returning a gaze to Holly.

"Well? It's your move, isn't it?" Leon called out.

"A rather pointless gesture isn't it? I've figured you out at this point!" Holly shouted back.

"Hmm?"

A simple flicker of light and in one swift motion she appeared before him, several meters away, looking to him dead center, "You're not Leon, not at all. Your M-O isn't like his at all. Leon never was that playful, nor that arrogant. And he definitely wouldn't turn to regeneration like you have. That said, your personality and methods match another of the Phantoms perfectly."

"Heh," he chuckled, "So you've figured it out."

"It wasn't that hard, Revan."

The form before Holly was no more, a completely new individual now standing right before her. Another male dressed in a much more simplistic Hive robe without the fur. His hair, long and black. His eyes, the whites totally black with sky blue pupils to the center surrounded completely by yellow.

"Revan, Revan Carolus," Holly murmured.

"Well, I've got to hand it to you, you are as smart now as you were back then, heh heh," he chuckled, the pitch of his voice a little higher now than it was prior, the tone entirely different, "What gave it away I wonder?"

“It’s as I said, Leon was never that playful, and he’d never turn to cheap tricks like illusions or regeneration of body parts, if he even has that ability. The manipulation of bodily form to match circumstances for improved ability, the aim to try and recruit someone like Vulper. Only a snake like you would even give that a shot. And lets be real, your power is nothing compared to his.”

“HA! Well shit, and here I thought my act was Oscar worthy,” Revan chuckled, “I’ll have to tell Nocturn that I need more material next time they want me to copy someone. More memories, more practice. But I suppose from the very start I should’ve known better. Even that brat of yours saw through some of my actions.”

“Heh, did she now?”

“Well at any rate, I’m a bit out of my league here. I can fight Wesley no problem, you however are a different matter.”

“You may be able to copy the form and natural abilities of someone or something; but not their knowledge or other abilities. So, how about you just come quietly then if you think you can’t beat me in battle? I’ll make it painless.”

“Tempting but I believe the need to surrender is neither here nor there because in a few short seconds, my two escorts who are far from here by now are going to use a summoning scroll to teleport me to them. We got more than enough of what we came here for.”

An explosion of silver smoke blew from Revan’s form into the air. Holly’s guard dropped immediately, glancing to the empty smoke with a sigh.

Soldiers marched all around, many trees lying down on the ground. Chainsaws could be heard followed by the crackle of more trees. Engines vroomed and shouting had begun. Stretchers moved in and out of the area, up and down the rock carved stairs from the edge of the crater to high up in the forest.

Major remodeling had begun, stairs and otherwise being primarily made in seconds with aid from those such as Wesley and his Earth Magic. Plenty of cots lay around the open terrain, some empty and most full of soldiers now saddled up. Many in medical attire flew in and out of the area from patient to patient, some heading down into the crater with other soldiers.

“Hey, hey! There’s another one over here!”

“I need a medic and a stretcher pronto!”

Chaos still reigned even as dawn drew closer on the horizon. Many in Tribe attire shot around, tents being strung up and some others being collapsed. Equipment moved around on carts, heading in and out of the various tents. Holly herself walked with several aides surrounding her, some with tablets and others without.

“-and all things considered Lady Bell, casualties were kept to a minimum,” one of them spoke.

“Loss is still loss though, and we still haven’t found everyone who fell into the crater have we?”

“Uh, no ma’am, we haven’t.”

“Then we’re not done. Our Earth Magic Users can only do so much. None of them want to risk another collapse by slinging rock all over. We need people to dig with precision.”

“Yes ma’am!”

Holly turned her attention, watching Wesley storm off through the trees yelling at two individuals who were moving away, “Move that transmitter and get it into position! I want the jet there in no more than three hours. And prepare the meeting, I want everyone to know!”

Her attention turned back to in front of her as she moved among a variety of tents strung about, “Has anyone been able to get ahold of my father yet?”

“No milady.”

“Neh, of all the- just because he lost his connection to The River doesn’t mean he can’t still lead us. His total shut down is not something we need right now. Monte, run your report to Jarrajod, then tell him to contact someone back in London who can contact Minister Ivan. I want Ivan to contact me as soon as he can, and to start getting in touch with all the other alliance members and our Generals.”

“Uh, yes ma’am.”

“The situation has evolved to a stage I am not happy with. With or without my father’s permission, this needs to happen. The Hive has become a danger to every world tied to us at this point, and above all they’re now a threat to the Shards.”

“What are we talking here milady?”

“They’re already moving on Frostosis according to the report from members of Domino Squadron. They’re messing with the civil war, meaning that the North might pull ahead. I want any world that has one of the Shards to go into lock down until further notice, tell the representatives of whatever governments on those worlds to begin martial law to contain any potential situations before they begin.”

“Yes ma’am!”

“And while you’re at it, get ahold of Lieutenants Bakuuva and Gex. I want Elise to leave with Tony’s squad for London. They have work to do to prepare for what I need of them. Where are they?”

“I assure you Miss Caldori, I am fine,” Vulper mumbled.

A large medical tent stood firm with dozens and dozens of stretchers wheeling in and out with people placed down on them. To one corner, Vulper sat upon one in human form. Caldori stood near him with hands placed on him, a reddish rose aura drifting from her hands over his left arm. Sora stood among them, as did Elise and others from Vulfax.

Caldori lifted her head, glaring into Vulper’s eyes, “I am the medic here so shut it!”

“Wha-er-yea-um, yes ma’am,” Vulper choked back.

“Ha! Vulper you push over,” Elise laughed.

“Ha, ha, ha, yeah you try getting yelled at by your doctor and tell me what you think,” he muttered back, looking to Elise.

“I don’t care IF you can regenerate,” Caldori growled again, “It still cost some of your life force to do that. This is a special healing art that’s supposed to rectify that. I swear you warrior types are all a bunch of hard heads!”

“I’ve told them that for years Callie, it never helped,” Elise replied with a shrug, hands up in the air.

“Seriously Elise? Jeez!” he then croaked.

“It’s just good to see you alive yet Vulper,” Zoey replied.

“Big time boss,” Scott laughed.

“Since when could you turn into a dragon man?” Drake questioned.

“I… have a lot to explain I suppose.”

“All in due time I’m afraid,” Tony’s voice called out.

The warrior approached the group casually, a data pad in hand that was absolutely rolling with data. He looked from Vulper to Caldori, who in turn looked to him along with the others.

“What is it Tony?”

“We’ve been recalled to go back to London.”

“What?”

“Jarrajod’s assistant just gave me this data pad with all of the info. Domino Squadron is to return to London on the next flight. Elise is supposed to accompany us.”

“Great. So when do we leave?” David asked.

“You don’t.”

“Pardon?”

“This uh, Vulfax Squadron, has been dissolved until further notice. The higher ups want all of Vulfax to stay put for now, short of Elise. Seems they have other uses for her right now.”

“Hey you guys can’t split us up. We’re a team!” Zoey spat.

“It’s not my decision, I’m just as annoyed as you are. Without you to keep her company, Elise is going to leech off of my team until she gets assigned to a team of her own. That’s going to mess up our mojo.”

“Oh Tony, don’t pretend like you won’t love it,” Elise answered back before looking to Zoey, “It’ll be fine. It won’t be for long I’m sure.”

“Are... are you sure you’re willing to just, ya know, go?”

“I am. Vulfax still needs you guys, Vulper still needs you guys. Don’t forget, part of my conditions with the Tribe were to put Vulfax in charge so they could finally rebuild. You’re all needed here.”

“She’s right,” Vulper replied, “Let Elise go for now. She’s already wanting to devote herself to stopping the Hive before they make a repeat of what happened to us. Who knows, when things become more stable-”

“It’ll all be good,” Elise concluded with a nod, her gaze turning towards Tony, “So, when do we leave?”

“Five minutes ago, probably. They want us to leave so we can catch the jet the minute it lands. Lady Bell will be coming back with us to get you set up. And I’m sure she’ll want to present you to the council for testimony about what you all saw down there. So, if you’re ready to go-”

“Yeeeah, right,” Elise murmured standing up.

Her eyes glanced over each of them. David, Milly, Mark, Scott, Drake, Samantha, Zoey, and Vulper. A slight smile perked up with a nod. Vulper smirked while the others returned their nods.

“This isn’t a goodbye, this is just a till next time.”

“Right.”

“Well Bakuuva,” Vulper began, “Get a move on. That’s an order.”

“Heh,” she replied with a growing smile.

Tony turned way and had begun to walk, Elise following just behind, followed then by Caldori and Sora. The rest turned to watch as they strolled by the other cots and stretchers. Just as she passed five away, her right arm flew up, a simple thumbs up given on her way out. With that, the rest of Vulfax was left there among only themselves, looking to one another.

“Think she’ll be alright?” Samantha asked.

“Hell, she’s the toughest brat I’ve met,” David replied, “She’ll be just fine.”

Vulper gave the slightest of nods, smiling as well, “She’s one of Vulfax. Vulfax isn’t weak. We are strong and free. That is the legacy Elise has left us for now, and we’d be fools to think she’ll falter from that now.”