

Chapter XIII

With that, Zedd shot up and came diving down yelling out, a single wood sword coming down atop in front of Ellie, swinging blindly and at near unimaginable speeds. Left left left right left right right left, all in two seconds, leaving Shawn to stumble back kicking his wood swords back into his hands to then try to block, much to Zedd's delight as his rapid swings would continue, blocking both with a side thrust and then a lone punch to Shawn's throat, a kick sending him flying back into a bar, head hitting it, and then rushing forward to swing the weapon into the side of Shawn's head, breaking it with the impact.

Shawn groaning and yowling would collapse, leaving Zedd to laugh, foot atop Shawn's back, "What great advice eh!?" Reaching down grabbing him by the throat, hauling him up, pinning him to the pole by the throat, sneering in his face, "I should just end this right now, what do you say!?" he'd laugh, pointing the broken wood sword against Shawn's throat, "Eh, eh!? Ready to die?!?"

"Enough of that Zedd!" came the shout of Jehkal from the sideline, arms crossed, looking forward, "Leave him!"

"Grr... fine... but the next time you fuck with us, you die."

Pulling him back and slamming him back into the pole, Zedd would then turn, walking away towards Ellie who held herself up by her arms, only to then receive a kick to the face sending her over before going up the steps, disappearing into the hallway.

Struggling to stand, Shawn stumbled over, looking down at Ellie, “H-hey... you... you ok?”

She’d look up, standing and then shove Shawn, “Just leave me alone you creep!” she’d shout, turning and bolting away, also disappearing up the stairs, leaving Shawn alone to just watch... and once more... to just sigh.

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A month had now passed since then... and yet again, another report of a city off the grid, the fourth one in that time. Suspecting now the potential for sabotage, he and Ellie were dispatched with John, Tim, and Emile who were half a day ahead, this time on foot with a portable light generator to keep Darkling away, though only capable for three people.

Dawn, Francis, and Steven dealing with the wrap up interviews of the incident. The decision to send them both, unknown, other than the fact that they were the only two available. Walking, Ellie ahead and Shawn hanging back, she’d be looking to the side and Shawn looking down, sighing.

“So... do anything for fun?”

“Are you talking to get a look at my ass when I turn back?”

“What? Hell no... just... trying to make small talk.”

“Look, don’t bother with me, I don’t want to befriend you, I don’t even want to know you.”

“What is it about me that you detest?”

“It isn’t just you, it’s most people. The human race is a cursed plague that should die out.”

“Hey... that’s a little extreme. I’ll agree that I don’t agree with everything the Church or others do but not all people are bad.”

“Heh... I’ve only seen the worse...”

“Well... you don’t even bother trying to get to know us so how would you know the better?”

“Hmph...”

“Look, we’re going to be comrades for the next four days... you could at least pretend to get along with me till we meet up with the others.”

“Oh whatever...”

The sound of running nearby, rapid running.

Ellie would look left, then right, “What’s that sound?”

“Huh?” Shawn murmured looking around, “What sound?”

“That... it sounds like running?”

Snarling could be heard, Shawn’s expression becoming serious looking forward, five wolves leaping up in front of Ellie from the sides and charging, surprising her quick as she grabbed a Light Staff, swinging forward only for the wolves to dodge.

“Wha-?”

One rushing forward to tackle as she swung, missing as it barreled right into her, shouting out as she fell back, hitting the ground, coughing. Standing, swinging again,

the wolves surrounding three on one as two went at Shawn, his expression even more serious.

“Ellie!”

Running forward, Light Sword out he’d swing, cutting into the side of one wolf then kicking the other, rushing forward only to be stalled again by more, as the three would dash at Ellie. Yelping in surprise and swinging, taking a bite, she’d swing back only to be tackled again.

One charging again leaping up would then blow back, a wolf sent flying into the wolf, Shawn standing beside Ellie quick, “Hey, you alright?!”

“Hmph... I’m fine,” she’d mutter standing, “I... I’ve never dealt with these things before.”

“Heh... now who is the weak one,” Shawn then chuckled seeing her eyes light up, swinging the Light Sword as the other wolves in turn began to back away, snarling, then breaking off running.

“Wolves don’t like hard prey. If you look tough, they’ll leave you, you don’t have to fight them... now come on, we have a lot of walking to do if you’re alright yet.”

A lite smirk back and then walking forward, Ellie would look at him startled then grunt, walking forward.

“Ya know, you could say thank you.”

“I... oh fine... thank you, even though I could’ve handled it.”

“Ha... unexpected. Thank you for the thanks Ellie.”

A small smirk as she chuckled, “You’re such an odd ball.”

“Why thank you, I take delight in the compliment.”

“Compliment? Yeah, definitely weird.”

“Haha!”

The two would then continued walking, the mood... better.

Chapter XIV

Night drawn over the horizon, the stars shining above with a crescent lit moon.

Wisps of wind high out of the valleys, yet for some reason nothing drifting below to the floor of it. Drifting smoke across from the floor to the high points, a dim glow lighting the area, a cleared area with a fire and dome of light, a tent also set and present, two shadows of people cast upon it by the fire's glow, shadows cast despite the dome of light.

Sitting at the edge of the site, Ellie, staring off into the distance with arms wrapped around her curled in legs. Beside the fire on a half log, Shawn, his hands forward in an attempt to keep warm, looking down at the flames in their dance with a somber feeling spread across his face, clearly visible.

Howling in the distance, the sound of the wolves.

"Ellie-, I know you don't like me but you shouldn't be so far away. If they decide to nip you up, I might not be able to react and get to you in time."

A pause, multiple seconds in length, his head turning back just as the response came, "I'll be fine."

"Heck... based off earlier I mildly doubt that, just sayin-"

"Why don't you shut up and leave me alone!?!"

"What did I ever do to you to make you be this way? What did anyone do?!"

“Not a damn thing but that isn’t the point. I don’t need to like you people, I don’t even need to know you! My duty is my own and I won’t allow you or anyone else to interfere with it.”

“Duty isn’t everything. Without a team- I mean look at earlier you nearly got your face chewed off by a dog so tell me, how the devil does that work in your mind!?”

“Then it would have been what is would have been, how dare you make such-”

“Hmm? Such what, such claims!?”

“Why do you even care Shawn. Oh, I get it. It’s the typical man wants in a girl’s pants so he acts like he gives a fuck.”

“Is that why you’re such a cranky bitch? Truly now.”

“What did you just call me!?”

“You act as if you want the Darkling to win, as if you hate humanity. I don’t know what shit town suburb you came from before coming to our city but we don’t do that, none of us do, especially my family. We’ve experienced a lot of loss. It’s helped us learn to be nice to one another, even total strangers.”

“I do hate humanity because of everything!”

A pause, long as the wind finally swooped in, blowing the fire embers away, a small grass fire starting though of little consequence, neither paying attention.

“Elaborate.”

“This is going to be your oh so *typical* sob story ok?! The Church took my parents from me, then my friends, then relocated the rest of us for labor camps. We were forced

to work, we were treated sub-human. Every single bastard I ever met either looked down on us or simply ordered us around, the same church that dominates your pitiful little mud spec.”

He’d turn, looking right at her, her face red hot with rage, “I was indoctrinated into a Black Ops unit later to put down those whom the church did not agree with, later faking my death and adopting a new life. I now am forced to be a soldier for the people I hate just to survive, putting down assholes and bastards alike. I have not yet met a decent human being. So tell me cowboy, how does that make you feel about me now?!”

Another pause, his eyes locking with hers, “Pathetic... you let the terms of one part of society dominate your views. It’s pitiful honestly.”

“That’s it, I’ve had enough of you, raaaaaa!!!”

Leaping forward through the air and a slam.

CRASH!!!

Flailing back, Shawn pinned to the ground with Ellie’s hands on his chest, nails digging into his skin as she then delivered a punch.

“Gah, dammit!”

His hands forward, shoving her off, her back hitting the tent which fell upon her as Shawn took then a stance, ready for oncoming. The fabric flopping away and crashing with the variety of poles used to keep it up, Ellie sitting there scowling, eyes locked on Shawn, the tapping of her feet, skidding forward in a launch. Their fists colliding, knees

colliding, right fists, left fists, right knee, grabbing each other and another shot of the right knee, Ellie moving her hand down and a whoosh following.

Shawn's shirt hooked and away he went behind with a toss, while a thud was audible with Ellie on the ground once again, right side of her face red with a shoe mark. Both scrounging back up, angry to the bone with a glance upon one another.

"Is that all you've got!?"

"Don't underestimate me, I've seen countless fights while you've laid a soft slumber in your precious wall of a city!"

"Oh ho ho! Bring it on Ellie, I'll clean your clock!"

"I think we should split up and move on tomorrow separately-"

"Great idea!!"

"Fine!"

"FINE!!!"

Their backs turned with swift turns, walking away, each with a glowing yellow orb in hand from their pockets, Ellie disappearing over the horizon beyond a mound and then, disappearing. Shawn's gaze turning from her back to the fire and tent, looking down, sighing and then a grunt, "Damn her... the journey is too long for this sort of crap."

Sleeping bag pulled from the fallen tent, swiftly with a slide inside and the sound of a zipper, it would not be long before Shawn would drift off...

And so it would be, for the next days of the journey, neither together. Shawn a few hundred paces ahead, Ellie following gloomy behind. From the rising golden sun of morning, the the cloudy afternoon, through the evening rains, to the night time cloudy sky settling in once again... repeated once more.

The journey ahead, neither stopping to talk. Shawn on the hunt, returning to camp with captured prey only to find a posted Ellie not far behind. The two, not spoken, continuing until that next day, the day when hell would break loose once more.

Chapter XV

A bright glow, radiating into the dawning sky of new day. Buildings ablaze, the glow of burns spreading with collapsing rubble, not a single intact as far as the eye could see. The dome, shattered to the South and West sides, the glass shot through multiple buildings in of itself, many in half if not burned to a very thin skeleton of their former glory.

Hospitals and public builds collapsed, their fires spreading through the streets of blood. Blood, splattered dry in places along sidewalks, yet to be burned spots on buildings, liquid blood still pooling in the streets along with floodwaters rushing alongside. In those waters, dirtied with mud and blood, severed heads, mutilated arms and legs, fingers, intestines, hearts, lungs, and so many other parts.

Up and down, through windows and walls, in trees and crashed into ground, corpses lay, all mutilated and torn asunder. Flesh, hanging from poles and branches of trees, slabs of it and human muscle splattered across grounds. Schools no different though the scene far worse.

Bodies, stretched out and crucified against school walls, headless. On the iron spiked fence, heads plastered down covered in blood with expressions beyond human, some of such fear, some of such surprise, all of pure rotting death. The central Church building, half collapsed with power lines down all around, lights flickering as visible guards were also torn apart, weapons coated in blood though not blood of the enemy.

Children bodies, also hung, each one hanged by the neck suspended off the ground next to the elderly, next to the women, next to the men, their torsos carved out with guts hanging out bloodied sprawned partway along the ground, only the intestines remaining partially inside with the ribs showing.

All this and cooked corpses splattered around in pieces around the city, the entire domain obliterated.

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Atop a hill, on his knees looking out, Shawn's eyes wide and shaking, one teary while the other in utter shock, his jaw hung, his weapon dropped beside with his arms as the smoke ventured up into the sky, the devastation and death quite visible below him in the actual city... behind standing Ellie, looking left, down, and away.

"H-h-...how... how could this happen?"

A pause, fear turned quick to rage, fists formed, "How could this happen!?!?"

Ellie's eyes popped, her gaze turned back before a half gaze rested to him. Ellie, looking down, walked forward to then look up, "Come on Shawn."

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Down in the belly of the city, both walking along the roads, stepping over corpse after corpse, looking around calling quickly out, "Hello!?!?"

"Is there anyone alive out there!?"

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"Can anyone hear me!?"

“This is a waste of time.”

“What was that!?”

“Everyone is clearly dead,” she in turn muttered walking away.

“How can you just say that?!”

“I can because it’s true, maybe for the better.”

“How dare you- these people-... Ellie!!!”

Slowly as she turned, rubble above giving way, a concrete slab dropping quick, Shawn’s eyes widening with her turn, blissfully unaware.

CRASH!!!

THUD!!

Her eyes shut though with a quick blink open, Shawn’s face right in hers, a glance back a slab down right where she was, then back to Shawn, her face slightly red, “Why would you-”

“Because... I’m not your typical human you’ve met Ellie. You may be a bitch but you’re still my friend. I don’t know what happened to change you into this... but I swear, I will make it up to you and prove to you we are not all trash!” A rustling to the left, a man rushing out with a weapon though stopping there.

“Survivors... wait, Shawn!?”

His glance back, wide eyed with fear, then horror, “Timothy? Wait, sir!!”

“Shawn, it’s good to see you alive and here at last.”

Getting up off Ellie, his hand out to which, hesitantly, she then accepted being pulled up. Rustling behind as from there approached yet another though this time in pairs, several along including Emile and Jonathan.

“We’ve been here for half a day already and investigated the perimeter. We chose to wait for you so we could begin this.”

“This madness... is just horrid!”

“Yeah... it’s horrible but it’s war Shawn.”

“A war for what cause!? This is the biggest city yet ruined by this, how is it happening!?”

“Shawn!”

His eyes locked with Jonathan’s, then a glance down, despair evident on his face, Ellie walking forward to his left, looking to Timothy, “So what do you think happened?”

“It’s likely another failure caused by some form of glitch from what we can tell. Five days ago the city, possibly five, lost power and Darkling began to raid it. We’re not sure when the battle concluded, likely a day and a half ago, maybe two. We’re not yet sure.”

“Jon and I already had a small look inside and began searching for survivors on the outskirts to no luck so we requested assistance. The troops got here twenty minutes or so ago while Tim chose to wait for your arrival.”

“At this point, all we can do is send our messenger hawks. Tim and Emile, what’s the plan?”

“Well Jon, I think you and Emile should team up with me while we scatter in groups of two or three. I want Ellie and Shawn together as well for this one. We’ll use the Emergency Whistles for if we find anything or run into trouble. There could be survivors down there or details to how the system failed, if we’re lucky. I want every inch of this city explored.”

“... are you sure it has to be us two? We don’t exactly see eye to eye-”

“Then you’ll have to on this one Shawn. You two have worked together and right now we have to move as fast as we can. If there are any survivors down there, we need to find them. At noon, move your way towards the main Church building to meet up and discuss what to do. I want you men to explore the East, South, and West wings. Ellie and Shawn, the North. We’ll take the central and explore the shield. Make your way in. Dismissed.”

“Sir!” everyone then shouted out, rushing along, all but Timothy, Ellie, and Shawn, Timothy looking back at the two then sighing with a nod, eyes shut, “I’m sorry to rush you kids in there but we need to move fast.”

Turning and rushing himself, Timothy then left them. His glance now to Ellie, a sigh, “Sorry you’re stuck with me agai-”

“No, Shawn... it’s... it’s alright. You just saved my life for the second time and I... oh never mind, let’s just get to work.”

Chapter XVI

With a river of blood running down the streets, due to approaching rain, Shawn taking a step to the sidewalk gagging though the outcome not much better with a variety of guts and flesh strewn about on the sidewalk. A surge through his gut, hand atop his mouth and nose with a rag, continuing to gag. The smell of rot; decomposing human remains lying scattered around, some actually turning green, some a purple-blue tone, mostly those left in open area and moist areas.

Ellie looking down the entire way, not saying a word. A head, severed, rolling right by, an eyeball torn out with blood splattered around the socket, half the face chewed off with teeth marks visible, tongue half torn. Taking a step back, losing it, turning right and the sound of liquidy chunks splattering the ground, Shawn letting out a loud repulsive gag as up came his last meal.

The smell of the area, penetrating with flesh the smell of rotten eggs mixed with skunk anus that has also rotted. Flies swarming around and birds pecking at the dead, the smell intensifying as they went, more bodies lying scattered, some with their torsos pried open, blackened guts half flopped out dry and rotting alike, both in and out of the body.

Some victims, burned black and near mummified, some just scorched, others in completely unrecognizable shape, dried blood around fallen pillars and debris, evident that people had been crushed beneath. Various rats and mice, scurrying around with

other larger insects, a few coyotes circling off in the distance, and birds flocking everywhere.

The two, walking along forward, searching the streets, debris crumbling down around them from the roof tops. Ellie's attention turned to the top, curiously, then forward again, heading to the central Church.

"This... is disgusting. Damn those bastards!"

Looking to him, Ellie would then look down, eyes closed again, and sigh, both continuing.

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Walking along a trail towards the power plant, Tim, Emile, and Jon looking around at the devastation, the rotting corpses, the blood, the fires, the damage. Ahead, the power plant, dirty but with little damage to it nor the lines around it.

"This is horrendous."

"This is the result of war Emile. The Darkling are nothing more than savage beasts."

"Emile, Jon, focus on what is in front of you... do you see what I see?"

All sets of eyes forward, studying, then Jon's going wide, "There's... there's no damage to the plant-"

"No way, the dome though!"

"Hmm. Come on."

Their steps echoing forward,towards it, serious looks spread across the group, hands on their light-tech weapons.

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Metal doors blown off the hinges, crashing down on the floor, echoing steps rushing inside, eyes darting around, a massive control room, panels and circuits everywhere completely torn up, bodies everywhere with stab wounds and some with gun shot wounds, also in mid rot.

“No way...”

“Tim, what is all this?”

“.. something we have feared. The rest of the building is practically untouched. Only this room has any damage. It’s sabotage.”

“Sabotage!?”

Gasps filling the room from all, Ellie looking around wide eyed.

“But who would possibly have reason to do this... to cause the deaths of thousands upon thousands!?”

“I don’t know.”

“Hey, Timbo, the emergency shutoff lever, look at it.”

Looking forward, a bent rod snapped off to another panel, burn marks all around with the screens smashed in.

“Dammit. Then it’s as we feared exactly. Someone or something is doing this to these cities, getting inside the barrier control room and sabotaging the systems.”

A low pitch growling, a glance back in shock with Shawn's eyes lighting up, "GUYS!!" Stumbling back, a figure darting out him howling, then a shriek with black liquid splattering the floor, Ellie to the left with a light sword having shot it clean through the figure, both it and Shawn collapsing, a Darkling.

"Where the heck did that thing-"

"We need to get out of here, stat! With the dome off we're at risk come nightfall. Let's go and report back to the church, pronto."

"Right."

The others quickly rushing out of the room, all but Shawn with a glance to Ellie with her glance down, side eyed looking at the groaning Darkling with its sealed fate, Shawn's eyes resting on it and then back to her, "T-thank you, Ellie."

"Don't bother... it was just instinct. Nothing more," she muttered walking out, Shawn's eyes following her till she was out of sight then with a glance back down at the Darkling, "She almost seemed, distraught about killing this thing. She must know something, something that the rest of us don't, or could it be something else?"

With a sigh, shaking it off, he'd quickly rush forward.

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"Yes, I'm telling you this is Timothy Bishop and I am authorizing a direct communication to the higher ups... no I won't authorize that! Look, I have a Class-S message that needs to be delivered immediately without delay, I don't care what they're up to. Tell them that someone or something is sabotaging the Light Field Generators. I

don't know what or who but it is this that keeps on costing us cities and the lives of thousands. It needs to be addressed to them, immediately, without question, as soon as possible. We're facing a national emergency that could threaten life as we know it!"

Chapter XVII

“Are you absolutely certain Timothy Bishop?”

“Yes sirs, we can confirm it. The Power Plant was left intact due to the self containment field in the event of emergency, yet people inside were found rotting dead and the systems were damaged. It was sabotage.”

“This... is unusual and unfortunate. Could it be that some humans are working with the Darkling somehow? Or have they learned something that we don’t know.”

“Sirs?”

“Leave us Mr. Bishop. We have much to discuss. Go to the front desk to file a report, then hand out the next investigation order within the hour. We feel that by the pattern if this is in fact the work of sabotage that this particular city is at risk. When the train returns in three hours, we want a team sent out immediately.”

“Understood.”

With the door shutting, twenty-five men and women would look to one another, garbed with covers over their faces.

“This is getting out of hand.”

“If this continues it could lead to our downfall.”

“We must take action!”

“I agree.”

“Contact the Grand Church, we need our next orders.”

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“HA, HA, HYAHH!!!”

The clacking of wood and the clanking of combat puppets, glass shattering with the smashing of wood, the sound of planks of wood exploding and then a crash. Boots running across a wood surface, wood feet across the same surface, the sound of something flying through the air then another smashing crash of wood on wood followed by yet another plank exploding.

“Come on Shawn, your back is wide open!” came the shout of Dawn, a smack of wood on his back and a grunt, then a collapse as many wood feet clanked and dropped, the puppets standing at attention.

“Dammit!”

“How long are you going to keep this up for brother?”

“Until I perfect it! After the last mission, I just need to keep at it till I won’t drop!”

“You’re pushing yourself too hard. Your body will give out on you eventually. Anyways, I have to report in, don’t stay at this for much longer,” came her mutter and footsteps walking away.

“I’ll get to that when I get to that. I need to keep going, like it or not.”

A sigh heard above him, a quick turn around and his eyes filled with shock, “Ellie?! How- how long were you there for?”

“Long enough. Look, I get it but your sister has a point.”

Hopping down, she’d soon land on the floor on both feet with her long hair flowing back, a few steps taken forward as it’d settle.

“The human body can only handle so much stress before it starts hurting itself when it comes to combat you know. Eventually you’ll make mistakes and get hit. It isn’t healthy to force yourself, unless you’re Zedd.”

“That guy? He’s an asshole.”

“That he is.”

“Wait, have you just come to insult me then or what?”

A bag tossed right at him, a brown burlap sack, quickly caught, his gaze down upon it then back up to her, “Lunch. Francis told me to bring it to you.”

“That guy...”

“Besides... I thought I’d formally thank you for the other day.”

“It’s part of the job you know, besides, I couldn’t just let you be hurt or worse.”

“Why? I’ve been nothing but rude to you.”

“Because we aren’t like the people you somehow know who sound like a bunch of bastards.”

“Heh... you have no idea.”

“You honestly at times sound hateful towards anything that’s human. Why?”

A sigh, her head shaking, “I told you why. It’s all human nature to sin. I’ve lost people I cared about because of it.”

“And do I or any of the rest of our squadmates seem like that?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“See. Look, Ellie, it might not seem obvious but we care a lot about our own, so much so that we’re willing to die to protect them. It’s how I reacted when you were at risk and, well, clearly how you are as well. Not all people are the same. I’d say you’re aware of that, otherwise why save me?”

“I- I mean- man you’re just a pain in the ass.”

“Hey, there you go insulting ME now!”

“Shut up Shawn.”

A smirk on his face and a small smile on hers, both sighing yet again.

“So long as you’re with us, I will protect you as necessary, that’s all there is to it you know so quit being-”

“-My my isn’t this cute!?”

Both looking left, a scowl from Shawn and a shocked look, Zedd standing in the doorway smirking, “I come by to pick up a pitch at my training and here I find you two being nice. Haha, how pathetic,” came his laugh walking forward.

“Zedd.”

“What’s wrong Shawn, sad to see me? Good.”

Stopping right in front of them, a smirk, then a crash. His fist, slammed right into Shawn’s gut, Shawn flying back and crashing on his back yelling out, “GAH!!”

“Stay down dog... and as for you, what the fuck are you thinking, talking kindly to this, this, this nobody!?”

“I was returning the favor for him helping me, that’s all!”

“Hmph, you’re fucking weak, just like the rest of them. Your compassion... IS A GOD DAMN WEAKNESS!”

His foot stomping down, kicking up a training staff, grabbing it with his right and swinging it down at Ellie’s head, her expression of shock.

CRACK!!

Zedd’s eyes widening though still enraged; right in front of him, Shawn, his right hand holding the staff with the wood cracking a bit, “You’re a real bastard you know that?”

A growl, “How did he get up and block that so fast!?”

“Surprised? It’s called the will to protect those close to you, buddy.”

“Heh... maybe I should test that by cracking your skull open eh!?”

“Bring it!”

“With pleasure!”

Their fists drawn back, swinging forward, CLAP!!

Both looking forward shocked, Steven standing right in the middle of both, glancing back and forth at each, “That’s enough you two. We’ve just received our next mission from Mr. Bishop’s office. I suggest you quit that and hurry along.”

Chapter XVIII

“Date Twenty-four, June, Two-Thousand Seven-hundred and Nine. A Thursday. Inquisition Document Number Seven Four Two Two Eight One Dash B. Incident of the Domes. It would appear that some strange force that we are as of now unaware of is purposefully sabotaging our defenses. The means of this are still unknown. A division of our elite are being dispatched to the city we believe might be next based on a pattern of the outermost cities falling victim. There is no connection, that we are aware of at this time. The captain of this expedition is... is... Spruce, who is it again? I need it for my log.”

“The Division Captain... I believe is Steven. Also stop talking out loud when you use the typewriter.”

“Shut up. Ahem... the captain of the expedition to the predicted city is Steven by train and with elites Shawn and Dawn. We expect results within the next week.”

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Click

Clack

Click

Clack

Down the track the train would go, chugging along, several aboard.

“Dawn and Erin Cabin Three, Stevenson and Raven Cabin Four, Marcelle and Adam Cabin Five, Revan and myself Cabin Six, Francis Cabin Seven for obvious

reasons. Zedd and Arghast Cabin Eight, Jehkal and Ranger Cabin Nine, then for the last time, hopefully, Shawn and Ellie who will hopefully not kill each other in Cabin Ten.”

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH, WHY AM I ALONE AGAIN!?”

“Because you collapse the bunk bed every time because you like being on top.”

“GYAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH, YOU’RE NOT MY MOM!!!”

“No because unlike Mom I’m not proud Francis.”

“HRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!”

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That night...

“So... roommates again... eh?”

“You’re not going to try and kill me this time are you?”

“No, surprisingly not... I’m fine with it.”

“Whoa, what’s come over you?”

“I’m fine with it because I want to ask you more without my teammates butting in.”

“Oh... yeah, that Zedd guy seems like a real winner.”

“You have no idea. He’s the biggest jerk to even his own partners. Anyway, I want to know more about why you guys do what you do. I have to say I’m curious about it, surprisingly.”

“Oh uh, alright, sure.”

“So?”

“Well, what would you like to know.”

“I want to know your story. I don’t care what you say, most people are selfish assholes. Something had to have happened to make you see things differently.”

“I guess, while I can’t defend everyones actions, I can at least do what I can. My sister and I never really knew our parents. The Church needed people and, well, we were drafted for the Mission of God. To this day I don’t know if they’re even alive really. Because I never knew a real family, I’ve just made it my business to do what I can for others.”

“So that’s why you’re so you. Huh... alright then. You already heard my lovely typical sob story.”

“Yet you work for the Church, which is one thing I don’t get. You hate people, yet you fight for them.”

“Hmph, maybe I’m just looking for an excuse to throw my own life away. Not everyone can just kill themselves by their own hands you know.”

“Why?”

“Does it really matter? My own teammates said the weak would die, I know I’m weak.”

“Heh... what a cliché overused in all stories reasoning you have.”

“Shut up, life isn’t a book you know.”

“No because life is driven by fate. We make our own paths, even if they do seem that way. Oh and one more thing, in response to your *typical* sob cliché outcome you came up with on your life, let me fire a cliché response back at you that will make your eyes roll probably, Ellie. You’re not weak, I personally think you’re a strong willed woman for doing what you do, I give a damn you know.”

“Ha, you’re right, I am rolling my eyes.”

“Told ya. What did they say back in the day, L.O.L. I think it was? Well, there’s that, L.O.L.”

“Ha... ha... ha...”

SCREEECH

The room jerking and rumbling, Shawn flying back against the wall slamming the back of his head against a shelf, “FUUUUU-” and then Ellie crashing into him shrieking, the bunk bed falling over atop them both with the dresser slamming into the bed, pictures falling off the wall with flowers, a yell heard,

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!! MY TURKEY GRAVY
MASHED POTATO DINNER.

HRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA. WHO THE FUCK
DARES!?”

“Darkling on the track!!!”

The door opening, “SHAWN, ELLIE, GET- whoa!!”

“HELP!!” came a shout from the next room, “MY BED FELL ON ME!!”

“Dammit, it happened here too.”

“Kids, stay put, we’ll handle this!”

Rushing off with Dawn and Erin quickly running into the room, shouting,

“Shawn!?”

Running forward, quickly grabbing and pulling the dresser back with the bed falling aside, Shawn would be visible with a cut on his left arm, both wrapped around Ellie with his upper back and head arched over her, blood flowing down, having protected her from the impact of the bed frame, though that said, her legs also bleeding having kept the dresser from smashing through via pure force, both collapsing to their sides sighing.

“What the heck happened?”

“The Conductor was found dead with a Darkling Slash across his throat.”

“What!? No way! But the Light Shielding!!”

“That’s just it... there was no sign of forced entry, whatever or whoever it was did it from inside the train.”

Chapter XIX

Fire spreading, the tracks damaged, bodies of soldiers lying scattered, a train near, yet another attack. An entire group now surrounding the base near the train, sorrow flooding most of their faces, “How could this happen again..”

“It happened recently, some of these corpses are still in rigormortis.”

“Then there’s a chance the enemy is still here.”

“Or that they’re intelligent enough to have stopped us from reaching the main city.”

“I already wired a transmission to HQ, they’re dispatching another team while we investigate this. Spread out and look for survivors but be cautious. Darkling might still be present. Stay with your bunkmates!”

“Right!”

Quickly darting away, those remaining would be Shawn, Dawn, Erin, Ellie, Francis, and Steven alongside Revan.

“How could this happen Revan?”

“I don’t know but something fishy is definitely going on. You kids search the area. Francis, go with them. Steven, with me.”

“Shouldn’t we spread out more evenly?”

“Day is close. The area is small so it shouldn’t be too difficult. Move!”

Shawn nodding, looking to Ellie, both walking, followed by Dawn and Erin walking in a different direction, Francis yowling and doing the same, leaving both

Steven and Raven to look across the area, “Man I just don’t know anymore, ya know man?”

“I’m not sure. This is a fresh scene so maybe we’ll find out.

“Hey, Steven, Revan, get the fuck over here!”

Both quickly rushing over to Francis, skidding to a halt in surprise, the daylight slowly climbing up over the area over a mountain of corpses, one twitching, an arm on fire severed, “A survivor!”

“Quick, Francis, get him out of there!”

Moving over, his hand out, Francis’s hand grabbing the man’s and quickly yanking though to his dismay, the arm tore right off, black liquid flying out though instead, a yowl heard followed by an explosion of flames from the body, igniting the entire pile as Francis stumbled back, collapsing on his ass, “WHAT THE FUCK!?”

“Was... was that a-”

“Oh no, the others!”

-

A foot stepping down, long handled ax in hand, a man smirking with his glasses shimmering, Shawn skidding back and stopping looking ahead, “Bastard. What are you doing!?”

“Is it not obvious? I’m here to kill you fucks!”

“Why... why help the Darkling, they’re our enemy!”

“Why?! HAHA, have you fucking twits seriously not realized it yet!? I AM A DARKLING!”

Bolting forward, the shimmering and then the crashing of the weapon, ax slamming down with Shawn launching backwards with a flip, skidding back again, “How!? How is that possible?!”

“FIGURE IT OUT!!!”

Ripping his weapon out, the man charging, Shawn’s eyes widening as before him flew another with twin daggers, Revan, blocking with both daggers as the blade came down, surprising the man, “Another one!?”

“Darkling, you’re mine!”

“Bring it!”

“Oh, don’t worry, *WE* will!”

SPLATTER

A crackling, a flopping, an eye bulging out with an arrow sticking out, shot into the back of Revan’s skull and out the front, daggers and arms dropping with him falling, an archer stepping forward, both laughing staring upon Shawn.

“Captain!”

“You see that!? Your people are no match for us!”

Both rushing forward, though for the ax-man to head first swinging wide, jabbing with the spiked end of his weapon, the Archer taking aim waiting, Shawn jumping back and moving side to side, staying within a set boundary, the Ax-man’s shadow.

“Hold still you bastard!”

“You’re the bastard!”

Dodging left, his hand slamming down grabbing upon the Ax’s poll, his grip solid looking forward at the Ax-man, “You two killed a great man. For that, I shall cast you both down!”

CRACK!!

His fist flying slamming into the man’s face, sending him crashing down yelling, “Dammit!” though as he fell, a laugh could be heard, the Archer taking aim, “And I will cast you down, NINGEN!!”

SNAP!!

The Archer stumbling back, his blood spraying from his torso with the bow and arrow both snapped in half, his eyes wide looking forward, Ellie there with a short sword having just cut through the Archer, “Wh-what the deuce, why-” he grunted, collapsing down bursting into flame, his black blood flying out also burning, a turn around, her eyes cold resting upon Shawn and then the Ax-man.

“Shawn, hold on!” came shouts, the Ax-man looking around, growling.

“So I am surrounded eh? Heh, well I will not be captured by a mere human!”

His left arm rising and resting upon his right hand, flinging out a gold ring off and dripping into the nearby river, immediately flames erupting around, yowling in pain as his body quickly burned away.

“Shawn!”

As the body collapsed, Francis, Steven, Dawn, and all the others would stop, all surprised.

“There were more.”

“Th-those guys, they were-”

“We know, Darkling that can walk in the daylight due to those rings.”

“Ellie, thank you. Had you not been here, I would’ve likely been badly hurt by that Archer guy.”

“You saved my brother? Th-thank you, Ellie.”

“It’s... it’s just in my nature.”

His eyes widening, Shawn looking upon her, then off to the side at Zedd, then to Erin and even back to Francis, “(Does that mean, the Conductor was killed from- no. One of my squadmates is a Darkling!? No... please, don’t let it be-!)”

Chapter XX

Day break, high noon, dozens of recon units having gathered around the area. Having reported via a wire regarding the incident, additional orders were distributed with other scout groups moving in combing the area to find more, the train under guard by several, the Vice-Conductor working heavily upon it alongside other volunteered workers.

-

Off near the riverside, Ellie sitting at the bank alone, legs curled up, arms wrapped around, staring across the river, Shawn standing right behind her, having arrived mere seconds before.

“So... it all makes sense now, doesn't it?” she'd murmur.

“Yeah... to think you're a Darkling.”

“What are you waiting for then? Shouldn't you be cutting me down? No one would know.”

“I won't do that.”

“Why not? I am the object of your vendetta, the reason why you fight.”

“Hmph... you're not it. As far as I know, you haven't killed anyone, you've simply withheld information.”

“Why? Why not just kill me now!? I'm no different than the Darkling you've seen up till now, isn't that right!?”

Silence, moments of silence, glancing back waiting, Shawn remaining without motion, a sigh soon to leave, “You’re wrong Ellie... I may not know as much about you as I should to make a confident comment but I can tell you’re not like many of the others. You actually care, unlike Zedd who I assume is also a Darkling.”

“I might not have, in my life I’ve only killed six humans, three being the ones who killed my mother, the other two in training, the last by accident. He actually has killed for sport but it doesn’t matter. He got the Conductor, he’s sabotaged and killed plenty. If you blow the whistle on him, I’ll go down anyway so you should just do it.”

”No.”

“Why not?!” came her shout, turning round with an angered expression though slowly turning to one of shocked, a sad look returned by Shawn, “I won’t do that to you Ellie... while it’d be valuable intel if he were captured, I’d rather just kill him. His body would just disappear and I could claim a Darkling tore him away from the group. You’d be safe.”

“Why do you even care!?”

“BECAUSE!!”

Looking down, his face tense, then glancing back to her eyes, “You might have the body of a Darkling, the appearance of a human being fake, but your heart is a human’s. You have a human heart and that isn’t fake.”

Her face now with shock, eyes shaking, resting and looking into his, a sincere look returned, “You have a human heart that isn’t fake Ellie, that’s all I need to trust you.

You've even saved my life. If you were a Darkling, even a human one, you would've let me die. You're a human born a Darkling, that's all. Your origin shouldn't define you!"

"You... you don't know what you're saying Shawn, you just don't.."

"Look at me Ellie and tell me. If you're the same as the Darkling or Zedd then kill me."

Shock flooding her, a spec of horror mixed, his voice continuing, "I won't resist. If you're truly like them then kill me now. I know your secret, I'm a threat, and I'm defenseless."

"I... but... dammit, I can't-"

"But I can."

The unsheathing of a weapon and then the sound of water splashing on the ground, red running away from Shawn, horror upon Ellie's face and shock on Shawn's, Zedd standing behind, smirking, laughing a moment later with Shawn falling forward, crashing to the ground.

"Ellie, when you told me you didn't want to do this anymore I didn't know why, I must confess, but now I see why. You're in love with a fucking human. Childish child, ABSOLUTELY CHILDISH!! Now, I'M GOING TO KILL HIM!!!"

"STOP IT ZEDD!"

"And WHY would I do that HMM!?"

"Because!! I have the codes we need. If you kill him I will take my ring and burn, undoing everything we've done for the last few years up until now, I swear it!"

“BAH!! You’re such a child Ellie.”

Sheathing his weapon, walking left leaving Shawn, Ellie looking down, “Let’s go Ellie, now! Arghast is sabotaging the train as we speak!” A sigh, her steps approaching Shawn, reaching down with a hand on his back, another disappearing below him for a second though near unnoticeable to Shawn, “I’m sorry...” she’d murmur, standing back up turning to walk.

Their steps echoing, “H-hold it!” came the shout of Shawn, both stopping, Zed turning back chuckling, “Ho? You want more?!”

“E-Ellie... tell me... what do the others mean to you!? What do I mean to you!?!”

Silence from her and a twisted laugh from Zedd, “That’s rich, a human asking a Darkling for their thoughts on a human. COMICAL!”

“Shut up Zedd!!”

Turning, red tears streaming from her eyes looking down, the tears dripping with hair covering her face, “Shawn... I want to thank you for everything... you just might have been the first friend I’ve ever really had. I’m sorry-”

Both turning, Zedd laughing, Shawn’s vision clouding then head dropping.

-

Eyes twitching, blinking, gradually opening, Shawn looking up into the world, bolting straight up, “ELLIE!!”

“Shawn, calm down!”

Arms wrapping around him pinning him back down, Francis’s and Stevenson.

“You were badly hurt.”

“It was Zedd... that bastard is a Darkling.”

“We know... he and Arghast short-circuited the train, leaving us for dead.”

“Those two, Jehkal, and Ellie, to think they were all dirty rotten Darkling right under out-”

“You’re wrong!” came his bark, looking right at Francis, “I don’t give a fuck WHAT you, the Church, or anyone else says, Ellie is NOT like them!! At the very end, Zedd was going to kill me but she stopped him. She left with tears in her eyes by force!”

“It doesn’t matter what she is Shawn, we need to take her and the others down, with lethal force if necessary.”

“I... I couldn’t, not on her-”

“But if we could, we could take them alive for questioning.”

“Where would we even go? They escaped man.”

“The scouts reported them walking along the old tracks on the other side of the river by the fallen bridge. Those tracks lead into the mountains. I venture to guess that we’ll find them there.”

“Count me in.”

“Shawn, in your condition-”

“I don’t care!! I swear, I will bring Ellie back with us if it kills me, I won’t let Zedd take her.”

“I agree with the boy,” came a familiar murmur, slowly standing, Officer Revan next to him, “When do we leave?” he murmured, though taking a glance to Shawn, seeing a white card sticking from his coat pocket, a bit of black liquid dripping off it.

“Shawn, what’s that?”

“Huh? What’s what?”

“In your pocket.”

Reaching in, pulling out the card and opening it, his eyes filling with shock in no more than a few seconds, “This is-”

Revan approaching, giving it a quick look over, his also widening, “Contact the Church immediately!”

Chapter XXI

“If you were faced with following orders or your own heart, neither being necessarily right or wrong, what would you do? I had often asked myself this in the line of duty... on this, this final mission to save my friend, I would figure that answer out at long last. What happened next I would never forget.”

-

Rushing along the tracks, the entire crew of the train: Shawn, Dawn, Stevenson, Erin, Raven, Marcelle, Adam, Ranger, Steven, Francis, and Revan, all in this for the sole purpose of survival. Through the forest they'd run, heading straight at the mountain, a shout back from Steven, “Everyone be ready. This is probably going to lead us to a Hive, the one responsible for all of the latest attacks!”

“How will we respond sir!?”

“We kill, pure and simple. The humans are to be taken alive IF possible.”

“Leave Ellie and Zedd to me!! I have a score to settle with that bastard!”

“Are you up to it for certain Shawn?”

“I've been training for this! Ellie is my friend and I will take her back from him!”

“Alright, the rest of us will deal with everything else. We sent a wire and in about a day an army is going to march on the mountains. I guarantee that's where we'll find a Hive all things considered!”

“A good guess. Up ahead, it's a cave!”

Straight ahead, the mountainside, above that, a cave, “Yeah though I have a feeling I know where they actually are heading. Follow the rails into the mountains!”

It wasn't long though, straight ahead, the group would run along the tracks heading right into the mountains along the flat ground, many upon many miles having been trained for such large distances... not a single soul around them with nightfall approaching...

-

Still rushing, Steven at the head of the group, on and on, their target ahead, a massive tunnel in the mountainside with the tracks running inside, “In the olden days, these tunnels were built for shelter from possible terrorist bombings or nuclear war. They'd make a perfect place for the Darkling!”

“Then once we're inside, we're in enemy territory?”

“Correct!”

“I don't care, let's do this!”

Five, four, three, two, and then, right inside they had gone with one second remaining, their speed doubled following the tracks, a dim glow ahead not visible from the outside, growing brighter and brighter until right ahead-

A vast room, many tracks all around along with a swarm of darkness, shrieking high pitched heard all around, shock flooding their faces, all the darkness moving on the level below, the entire floor covered with Darkling. Ahead of them, a train with dozens

of cars attached, all passenger and storage, Steven's growl audible, "It all makes sense. That's how they've done it."

"Steven?"

"They've been using the rails to transport their own from city to city... the Darkling humans infiltrate and deactivate the natural light systems, letting those things get in and cause massive damage without leaving a trace."

"This is top scale, there must be hundreds of abandoned outposts like this!"

"Hundreds of old rail systems all leading to various cities, all connected to each other... this is not good. Forget finding those two, we need to report this back to the Church immediately. We're facing a full scale invasion here!"

The flapping of fabric, above dropping into the middle of the group, Shawn's eyes lit up to see a hooded figure wearing a ring, "Thank goodness, reinforcements. I am Special Agent Rickie with-"

SLASH!!!

"Guh-!" came the figure's shriek, split clean in half from the waist collapsing on the ground, "B-bastards!" came her growl flames erupting from her quickly followed by a shout from another, "INTRUDERS!!!"

Revan slamming his sword down, looking forward, "So much for surprise," he muttered holding a spherical device and with a grunt and a toss, a bright light exploded forth, shrieks heard below with Darkling scrambling back, quickly bolting for the tunnels, some continuing towards the group only to burst into flames. Steven and

Francis quick to toss several more, completely lighting the room up with only a few humanoid Darkling remaining.

“These things won’t last for long, we need to-”

The sound of the engine, clicking and clacking along with it, the box cars and passenger cars shutting up as the train lurched, slowly chugging forward, shock flooding Steven’s face, “They’re departing, dammit!”

Francis, glancing down, seeing dozens of humanoid Darkling rushing, “GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH, Revan, Dawn, Shawn, you are the fastest, run along the ledge and board that bitch, we’ll hold the line!”

“But Franc-”

“THIS FAT SACK OF SHIT IS ORDERING YOU, GO!!!”

Skidding down the side, he’d quickly lurch off to battle, followed by all but Steven, Revan, Dawn, and Shawn, Steven turning to look, nodding, “Do it right, I know you three are all we’ll need to send.”

“Thank you, Steven,” came the murmur of Shawn, all bolting quickly along the side as he too dropped down, a final glance back seeing all of them engage the human Darkling, looking back forward with the train moving, closer and closer, a slow turn putting them right in line to jump on as only eight cars remained to pull out.

“Shawn, Dawn, jump!”

“Right!”

All yelling leaping and jumping, crashing down atop the cars, pulling out quickly inside the tunnel, having landed on the fifth, darkness overshadowing them only for a short bit before they were out in the sunlight once more.

“Dammit, there must be, twenty cars ahead of us!”

“Shawn, Revan, we need to stop this thing before it gets to its destination wherever that might be!”

“I hear ya.”

Quickly running along the top, leaping to the next car, the five continued quick, knowing their time was short for come the night, there would be no stopping the legion of Darkling in the cars below them. Clanking, clonking, dropping and rolling, though not before long... leaping out from between two cars ahead, dropping down, the muscular Arghast, shades on his face, chuckling, “Hold it there meat sacks. If you wish to get ahead, you must fir-GYAHADAODN!!!!”

Grunting, Shawn having bolted slamming a light dagger into his gut, looking him in the face, “You’re not the target so I haven’t time for you, OUT OF THE WAY!” Slashing up he’d roar, bursting into flames with the wind taking him, flying back and over through disappearing beyond the cars in seconds, leaving Revan and Dawn looking shocked.

“Is he ever this seri-”

“No.”

“We need to keep moving guys!”

“Why do that?”

Leaping up and dropping down, cloaks flapping, a blank faced Ellie and a serious faced Zedd, smirking.

“ZEDD!”

“Ah, Shawn, good to see you, what was it, not even a day!? You recovered fast, didn’t you?”

Ellie glancing to him then with a look down, Zedd continuing with a chuckle.

“So, you’re here to stop us eh? Heh, foolish. Do you want to know what our main target is at the end? That’s right, your home!!”

“You won’t get away with this Zedd... I swear it, we will end this and you here and now!”

“HA!! Two injured men and a little girl are going to stop US!? You jest, SURELY! Ellie, let’s get them, NOW!”

Both rushing forward, Zedd with his staff and Ellie with twin daggers, both heading at the three, Shawn glancing back and nodding, pulling out a short sword and rushing ahead with the other two, Dawn and Revan both blocking Zedd’s staff with longswords, both quick to be forced back as Zedd pulled back, swinging down again, laughing, meanwhile Ellie swinging both weapons, blocking and parrying Shawn’s sword to swing with the other dagger, slicing his chest, slicing his shoulder, then his face, grunting, one more swing as a foot quickly swept him from behind, Zedd’s, sending Shawn falling back, Ellie quickly up and atop him, double daggers to his throat.

“SHAWN!!”

“HA!! He’s so determined that he left his back wide open!”

Blocking both their strikes, swinging wide, Zedd quick to advance and push both, swinging at their feet and heads, both Dawn and Revan only able to back away blocking due to his fast strikes.

Ellie’s blades pressed, her cold eyes locked with Shawn’s, “Ellie, please, you’re not like him!”

“I’m sorry Shawn, this is just who I am-”

“You’re not a murderer Ellie, through and through, you’re a human!!”

“Tch... Shawn, I have to follow orders-”

“Orders from people who just put you down, people who don’t give a damn!?”

Ellie, it’s your life, not there’s, you need to decide, here and now!”

Her eyes aglow, looking to Shawn, then ahead to Zedd with his back to her, though head slightly turned, “What’s going on back there Ellie, I told you to do it!”

Looking ahead into his eyes, his right leg flying slamming into Revan’s gut, sending him back collapsing, Dawn quickly backing away getting by Revan, groaning from the pain from the kick, the two left on their own with Zedd half stepping to have his left face them and his right to Ellie and Shawn.

“So it all comes down to this then eh? You pick a bunch of humans over your own kind? HA! You’re a nobody bitch, at least not now. If we succeed with this mission, we’ll be the biggest names in our history going forward. None of our kind will ever

surpass our legend! Come on Ellie, you know what I'm saying is the truth, there's no denying it. Come on, finish that nobody and we can do this together sis!"

"I... but- I just-"

"Ellie... whatever you do, I won't hold it against you... I've seen your heart, I know that these are your people,"

"If you won't do it then I'll fucking do this for you!" came Zedd's bark, staff raised rushing forward, ready to slam it down and settle this, only for a grunt to fly out of his mouth, "GYAH, ELLIE- NAAAAAA-"

A dagger in his torso, stumbling back and then a yell, flying off the car disappearing below, shock filling Revan's face and a smile on Dawn's, a smile from Shawn as well, standing above with her hand held out. A swift nod and a strong clap, his hand clasping hers and with a tug, pulling him up to his feet, "Shawn... I..."

"No time, you two can kiss and makeup later, right now we need to figure out how to stop this train."

"Jehkal was supposed to be up ahead guarding the command box at the front. You guys arrived just in time, there are only three of us capable of defending this thing in the daylight."

"Regardless this train is full of Darkling, we need to derail this mother and send it into oblivion."

"It's a coal engine. I don't know how you would but if you have any explosives, you could always-"

“-set them ahead of the train and let it blow.”

CLACK

CLICK

SMACK

Two screams, Dawn flying over to the left and Revan to the right, to crash into the sands below them, Shawn shouting quick, “DAWN!!!” Both standing ready, Shawn with his longsword, Ellie with her remaining dagger, Zedd slamming down with the staff growling, black liquid leaving his torso, “Ellie, I must say, I never pictured you as a traitor but its over. There’s no way to stop this train now!”

Shawn stepping forward, eyes aglow with rage, arm out, “Ellie... please... can I count on you to stop the train?”

“Shawn, in your condition you can’t face my brother alone.”

“I promise... I will get the job done-”

“You’re going to kill me!? HAHAAHAHAHA!!! On another open note, Ellie you’re such a disgrace! Siding with the humans!? Pathetic! You’ve fallen in love with this one haven’t you?!”

“I don’t know enough to say love or what but he is the first person I can definitely call a friend, the first one to actually give a damn about me!”

“Weak HUMAN emotions!!! You are no human!”

“You’re wrong Zedd. She may not have the body of a human but she has the heart of one!”

“Then she can die just like one!”

“Shawn... I don’t know what there is for me after all this is done but I owe you this last one. Dawn, Revan, the cabin should be unguarded! We’ll deal with Zedd!”

“Wait what!?” came Zedd’s roar, looking back to see two figures bolting up and atop the cars, ropes now flying back above Zedd and then over Shawn and Ellie, both Dawn & Revan with a nod before bolting.

“Oh no you don’t, you’re not going-”

“Hey Zedd, do you think you honestly have time to deal with my sister and our teacher?”

“Tch, I’ll get them soon enough. Ellie, how could you betray your own people like this!? You were one of the few able to evolve into a human form, a secret weapon of the Darkling!!”

“Well you and I are both still imperfect. We need rings or bracelets blessed with our power to even exist in the light My heart was imperfect as a Darkling, I see what the humans have compared to our own, a bunch of brutes who live only to destroy!”

“How dare you!?”

“We were blessed with human forms brother which gave us what they call humanity. It’s evolution to think beyond instinct like the rest of our kind. You’re still just a beast that hasn’t changed!”

“If I’m just a simple beast then my instinct should be superior Ellie, think about it! Unlike you, I haven’t any pathetic emotions to hold me back!”

“It’s because of those emotions that I she is stronger. Yeah, instinct might make you better at fighting but emotion and caring for others will make you fight harder. We both have the determination to take you down, Zedd!”

“Hmph... so be it. Then let this be the final battle! If you fail to take me here, then your entire way of living will be obliterated by the hordes within the bowels of this train!”

“So be it Zedd, no mercy!”

“I’ve been waiting a long time for this Golden-boy. I’m going to wipe that smirk right off your fucking face!!”

-

Running on ahead, Dawn and Revan glancing back about a dozen cars, seeing movement from the three finally going at it, worry spreading through Dawn, “I hope they’ll be alright-”

“We have our own problems to worry about, look ahead!”

A quick shot glance ahead to see another standing, Jehkal, hood blowing over his face with his brown trench coat flapping away, Dawn muttering, “Why do bad guys always wear edgy looking clothes?!”

“Save that for later, right now we need to stop this guy!”

“So, Zedd couldn’t even hold off three humans and his own sister? Pitiful. I guess I have no choice.”

“.. Dawn, I’ll hold him. Stop the damn train somehow, anyhow.”

“Can you definitely take him?”

“Yes now go!”

Turning left and with a quick leap off the edge, grabbing upon the sides with the window blowing far stronger in her face, looking ahead to the front a mere three cars away, Revan running forward at Jehkal, slamming their blades against the others, clashing with the clacking of their metal, moving back away with Dawn leaping from window to window, seconds passing and finally with a final flip, arriving at the front of the coal train looking around, “Alright so... how does one stop a train on a collision course with a massive city?”

Look down, her eyes filling with shock, the panel smashed and the lever broken clean off, “Crap!”

-

Leaping back, sword swinging and a swift dodge, tackle forward; the clanging of the metal on the roof and then flying off the side with Shawn flying back and rolling across the next car, Zedd standing with Ellie to his back swinging her dagger left, right, up, thrust forward and right swipe. A swing of the staff right into her arm, then a sweep at her feet sending her flying back and crashing to the ground.

BANG

Rolling right barely dodging the staff drilling down, leaving a big dent in the roof with a quick spring kick out, “OOF-” came the grunt of Zedd, back flipping back, his laughter hitting the air with Shawn and Ellie quick to get back up.

“This is great, hahaha, I haven’t had a fight like this in a long time!”

“Zedd, you can’t beat the both of us!!”

“Of course I can, you’re still making this just too easy! I know how to turn it up a notch though, haha, HRRRRRAAAAAA-”

Launching forward slamming the staff right into Ellie and then his head flying forward, slamming into hers right as she’d block, twirling with a kick to the gut taking her down. Collapsing with a grunt, a smashing sound could be heard, glass shattering, smoke drifting off along with glass dust, “BURN BITCH!!!”

“ELLIE!!!”

Leaping forward round house kicking, Zedd with a quick leap dodged, Shawn standing in front of Ellie now casting a shadow over her smoking body, Zedd laughing, “I broke her ring, she’s as good as dead in the daylight!”

“Shawn, you have to stop him, forget about me!”

“Enter cliché ending where boy attempts to save the girl,” he muttered, “Although this case-”

Flapping, his jacket coming off, turning round handing it off over her head, hood out around her head, “I’m not doing it just to save you, for once, I just want to kick this guy’s ass and resort to violence!”

“There’s no way you can beat him though!”

“Never said I had to, you’ll see.”

Echoing tapping and launching ahead, Shawn with a flip crashing down on the roof of the train, looking right ahead to Zedd, glaring, “Round two dirt bag; I’m doing this for everyone you people have hurt, including your sister... plus I just really want to beat your face in! I’ve wanted to do this for forever!!”

“Awww, so you do think about me.”

-

“Dawn, update me, NOW!!!”

“I, I can’t shut this thing off!”

“What do you mean you can’t shut the train down!?”

“He smashed the friggen panel that controls it. I can’t do a damn thing!”

“Well think of something!! Jehkal is FYUUUU-”

CRASH!!!

SMASH!!

Rolling, the sound of metal being crackled via walk, Revan now in her view with Jehkal in front of her.

“ANY DAY NOW DAWN!!!”

“Shut up and let me work! Wait... something on the tracks up ahead!!”

“What?! Wait a minute, that’s-!”

-

CRASH!!!

CLANG!!!

BANG!!!

Rolling across once again, Shawn, breathing heavily, Zedd's laugh ringing in his ears, cuts across both their faces and across their bodies, "HA!! This is where it ends Shawn. You've fought well I shall admit but this, this is just, honestly I find it laughable."

"Huh... heck, you know me Zedd, or at least you should, I'm too stubborn to quit."

"Too stubborn to quit but how about too stubborn to die!?"

Quickly appearing right in front of Shawn in the blink of an eye and then the punch, straight to the jaw sending him groaning flying back crashing alongside Ellie on his knees, Zedd laughing, "Face it, you can't beat me!!!"

"Heh... wasn't trying to beat ya Zedd," came his cough, arms around picking Ellie up, stumbling to stand though standing firm, blood dripping from his mouth and nose, a serious look on his face, soon followed by a smile, "Just trying to stall ya."

"Stall me? Stall me for what!?" came his snap, a quick turn round glancing forward, eyes quickly filling with shock, "NO-!!!"

Ahead, visible by now, the final bridge, a large one filled to the brim with explosives tied around pillars, track, and wires. Standing on the sidelines around the bridge, dozens of people in robes and hoods.

-

"It's the Black Guard, they wired the fucking bridge!!"

“What!?!” came the surprised howl of Jehkal, turning around, eyes wide, then quickly launching left, “FUCKING DAMMIT!!!” came his yell, leaping clean off the train and crashing down in the sands, tumbling back.

“DAWN, JUMP NOW!!!”

“OH SHIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Both quickly rushing right and leaping, both flying through the air, twisting and turning, crashing down into the sand tumbling back, stopping with a jerk with sand piling up atop them both, coughing with the dust flying up.

-

“No, how did they know about this!?”

“It’s all thanks to Ellie. Remember earlier when she came back up to me and bent down? She left a little note in my pocket, one with the details of your grand master plan.”

“WHAT!? ELLIE!!”

“She sold you guys out before even leaving so we wired the church. I will say what they’re doing seems a little extreme but I guess it can’t be helped.”

“You wretch!”

“Zedd. While your instinct might have led you to winning our battle, even if fought a hundred times more, it also led to you being outsmarted. Goodbye Zedd, may we never meet again,” came Shawn’s chuckle with a smirk, holding to Ellie tightly before leaping off to the left, tucking his legs in and rolling once hitting the sand.

The train, quickly approaching, five seconds out, Zedd turning back around eyes wide, “DAMN YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

A flash of light, then the blasts, rows of several, explosions rocketing up with the train lurching to half speed, the front blowing to pieces torn quickly open, another set blowing up through the next car as it'd slide forward, cars behind detaching, the lurching of the cars forward and back sending Zedd up air born with the blasts coming straight back at him, his eyes wide, for once in his life, wide with fear, “GRYAHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” came his roar, the flames engulfing him with cars spilling off the tracks, three sent buckling off the side, one sliding clean off and down into the ravine right below where the bridge was, the entire structure collapsing as more blasts flew off, shrieks heard with the howls of Darkling, the cars exploding, smoke flying.

Continuous explosions, seconds into minutes, Shawn glancing up, exhaustion striking, a wide grin and a slight laugh, “HAHA, YEAH!!!” at the sight, more cars flying forward, spilling off with the bridge downward into the ravine itself, blasts flying and flying and flying, cutting off at the count of eighty-three in just thirty-two seconds, smoke flying high into the air.

Shawn's gaze going from the train, to seeing the robed figures rushing towards the cars with weapons drawn, several white robed and silver robed people rushing forward with them, dozens upon dozens, then those in gold with black approaching Shawn and the others though only a few with medics, a laugh coming from his mouth, a look back

seeing Dawn and Revan stumbling forward, Dawn having to help Revan up covered in wounds, both smiling, then a look forward, seeing a shining ring in the sand right in front.

Looking down with a smile, grabbing the ring with his left hand and moving it over to Ellie, placing it upon her finger, jacket coming off, both looking to each other, smiling, “It’s finally over...”

-

“Well... there you have it. The story ended with a bang, as most do. Thanks to Ellie, we had alerted the Church in time to set up a defensive, though we had no idea they were going to fork out so many explosives with people from each of the main guards. Because of her effort, saving perhaps millions both now and in the future, the Church under demand from all of my squad and those who had heard the story, they were more than happy to grant Ellie immunity in exchange for all the intel she had. It was a struggle though we made sure it was done right.

Because of this, it became well known that the Darkling had evolved to the point of being able to use human form, even giving live birth to humanoid Darkling though, as stated, a still imperfect task. From this, the Church made several new moves, including the increase of security for their officials and stationing guards around the various Light Field control units and even the rails, seeing the threat in allowing the Darkling to continue operating in such a manner.

The Church also decided to make a new class of fighters, real elite that would go out into the field to do what they had to do, units at equal status and, while without the secrecy, all the perks of the Black Guard. We were known as many names though the official name is of course the Inquisition, each of us being Inquisitors tasked with training new Inquisitors for field work with Ellie's guidance.

We could confirm the death of Zedd and somehow, I just knew that bothered Ellie a bit though not too much, meanwhile Jehkal managed to slip away somehow. It's actually been a few months since then and she's managed to fit in well, having a completely different tune though she's still kind of a bad ass.

Anyways... we aren't sure what they'll plan next but I know this. So long as people are willing to fight for what they believe in, the war will never be lost. The old days of humanity drew to a close centuries ago and we need to move on from the mentality they all had back then that somehow still stuck with us. All sentient beings are capable of emotion, that's what defines us as a single mass, not what we are, just how we are. I know that one day, there might be more like Ellie, and I welcome that day. In fact... I think it's time for me to end this log with my final comments and to just say we have gotten rather close... really close... in fact the reason I'm ending it now is because if I'm not careful, I'll be late to our wedding and I can't have that now can I? Haha... well, this is Shawn, I guess, Inquisitor Shawn, signing off until next time."

End of Volume 1...