

Final Fantasy VII: Children of Jenova

Chapter 4: Night Terrors

Cid snapped awake, still feeling those green eyes burning into his chest. Shit. Not again. He bolted out of bed and went straight to Junior's room, cracked the door open, and peered inside.

Junior was curled up under the covers just as she should have been, hugging her toy Cait Sith and snoring softly, and Cid drew a shaky sigh. /I can't take much more of this shit,/ he thought as he quietly stepped into his daughter's room and kissed her forehead. Junior mumbled and snorted, then rolled over. /Sephiroth, if you're still out there, just show yourself like a man and we'll get this over with once and for all...if not, stay the fuck out of my dreams./ As if in answer to his unspoken challenge, a shadow darkened the doorway of Junior's room and Cid looked up quickly, his heart racing.

Shera. Just Shera.

Cid tucked Junior back in, left the room, and quietly shut the door. "Goddamn, Shera, don't sneak up on me like that," he whispered. "You scared me to death."

"I'm sorry." Shera reached up and brushed a few damp strands of hair out of Cid's eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I will be." Cid went back to the bedroom he and Shera shared, sat on the bed, and tried to light up a cigarette. However, his hands were shaking too badly and he could not seem to make the lighter flame and the end of the cigarette connect. "Shit..."

Shera plucked both lighter and cigarette from Cid's fingers, lit the smoke herself (pulling a "yuck" face as she did so), and handed it back to Cid. "Here."

"Thanks." Cid took a deep drag and shut his eyes. "Shera, this shit's gonna drive me nuts. I can't stand it anymore."

"Maybe you should talk to someone about it," Shera suggested. "Cloud, maybe."

"No. No way." Cid shook his head. "He's got this idea in his head that Sephiroth's still alive. If I told him about these goddamn dreams of mine he'd wanna hop back in the Highwind and head back North to finish the job. He's got enough worries of his own with Tifa and Zack to look after."

"All right." Shera reached over and squeezed his hand. "Maybe someone else..."

"I know..." Cid picked up his jacket and dug through its pockets for a few minutes, finally finding the PHS phone. "The only other guy that'd be awake at this hour..."

Shera stood up. "I'm going to go make some tea. I'm awake now, I might as well."

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Vincent frowned and extracted the PHS phone from his cloak. Who in the world was calling him in the wee hours of the morning? He flipped it open and thumbed the "talk" button. "Vincent."

"Hey, Vincent. It's Cid. I didn't wake you up or nothin', did I?"

Vincent let out a chuckle. "Of course not, you know I'm a night person. Has something serious happened?"

"Nah, not really. I just need to blow off some steam. You busy?"

"Not at the moment, although I did need to speak with all of you about something. It can wait, though. What's troubling you?"

There was a short silence. "I keep having these goddamn dreams. After we got back from the crater, I had 'em almost every night and I just had another one tonight. I gotta talk to someone about 'em before I go nuts."

"Sephiroth?"

"Yeah." There was the sound of a swallow. "It was one of those stupid things where you think you're lyin' in bed awake but you're still dreaming. Anyway, I'd get the feeling like I was bein' watched."

Vincent nodded, he knew that feeling well. "And?"

"And I'd see those eyes of his watching me in the dark. That's all I could ever see. Just his goddamn eyes. Then I'd see the end of that sword pointing at the bed right beside me, of course I couldn't help but look and I'd see Shera there--" Another pause. "Shit, Vincent...sorry about that, I don't even like to think about it."

"No need to apologize." Vincent also knew that feeling all too well; his own dreams were often haunted by Lucrecia's cries of agony. "Does Shera know about this?" He heard Cid draw a deep, shaky breath.

"She knows I have nightmares and she knows they're about Sephiroth, but I just can't tell her any more than that. Like I said, I can't even stand to think about it." Vincent heard the scratchy flick of a lighter, and then Cid continued. "Anyway...I never really stopped havin' the goddamn things but after we had Junior they didn't come as much. Except--"

"Except now when they do come, it's worse." Vincent tried to think of a way to phrase it delicately and gave up. "He kills your daughter too."

"Yeah." Long pause. "Vincent, I'm gonna go bugshit if this doesn't stop. Cloud thinks he's still alive, man."

"And what do you think?"

"I don't know what the hell to think." Cid swallowed dryly again. "Except that I got a wife and a daughter I gotta look after. If that bastard's still alive...ahh, shit, I don't know. I shouldn'ta bothered you about all this."

"It's no bother." And Vincent meant that. "As for what I was going to tell you, it can wait until tomorrow. I've already spoken with Reeve, and he wants to see all of us in Junon tomorrow afternoon. Until then, you should try to get some rest."

"Yeah, I'll try. Thanks, Vincent." And Cid hung up.

Vincent slipped the PHS phone back into his cloak. He could think of few people less deserving of that sort of nocturnal torment than Cid, and that angered him. Was Sephiroth alive? He didn't know. But if he was, there would surely be hell to pay.

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Cid stuffed the PHS phone back in his jacket pocket just as Shera returned to the bedroom with two cups of tea. "Are you feeling any better now?" she asked as she handed Cid a cup. He nodded and took a sip.

"A little. I'm kinda worried, though. I'm supposed to go to Junon tomorrow afternoon to talk to the guys. I think Vincent and Red found something bad."

"Then worry about that tomorrow afternoon." Shera set her cup down on the nightstand, reached up, and started rubbing Cid's neck, and he sighed gratefully. "You need to get some sleep."

"God, Shera, you don't know how bad I needed that." Cid shut his eyes and let his head droop forward as Shera worked out the tension in his shoulders. "All this shit with Junior getting beat up and the Lifestream poppin' up all over the place and now this--"

"Shh." Shera wrapped her arms around Cid and laid her cheek on his shoulder. "Don't worry about that now. Just try to relax a little." Then she laughed softly and added, "Although I wouldn't mind another kiss like the one you gave me when you came home today."

Cid smiled and gave Shera what she asked for. And then some.

* * *

Reeve had not slept well either. He'd been pulling another all-nighter at the plant and instead of going home and going to bed like he probably should have, he was napping on the sofa in his office. Cait Sith stood in the corner, inert; the Mog stood in its usual threatening pose while the cat was curled up in a ball on its back.

/I should have known,/ Reeve thought as he stared at the ceiling. Vincent had called him just a few hours before to tell him there was a pretty good chance Scarlet was running the company now, and Reeve was kicking himself over it. /I had every damn chance to take control of Shinra...none of this would be happening./

But he knew that wasn't true. If he HAD taken Shinra over, he probably would have been dead by Scarlet's hand by now. A fat lot of good he'd be able to do then. He took some comfort in the fact that he was doing at least a little bit of good here in Junon...but not much. He had also been pleased to find out that the Turks that had served Rufus were still alive; Reno had come to visit him the other day. Once you got him away from Shinra, he was actually a decent guy. Rude and Elena had been busy--the old Turks now hired themselves out to anyone that needed a little extra muscle--but Reno had been able to visit with him a while. Reeve had offered Reno and company a permanent job with him; God knew that with Scarlet running things at Shinra Reeve could probably use the extra security. Reno had seemed keen on the idea but wanted to talk it over with Rude and Elena first. And yes, Reno did still have a crush on Elena.

Reeve allowed himself a small laugh at this thought. Poor Reno. He just wouldn't give up.

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The aroma of coffee and sausage and other assorted breakfast-type things coaxed Cid from the blissfully dreamless sleep he'd finally fallen into. Morning already? Bah. Pulling on a robe, he shuffled into the kitchen to see Junior already wide awake and full of beans, tucking away pancakes and sausage and juice like a human garbage disposal. Operating on auto-pilot, Cid blindly reached out, plucked a mug off the mug rack over the sink, and held it out to Shera. "Ugh," he said. Translation: "give me caffiene."

Shera smiled and filled the mug, and Cid shuffled over to the table and plopped himself in a chair. "Feeling better?"

"Mmm hmm." A few swallows of hot black stuff later, Cid was back in the land of the living. "Thanks to you." He yawned and ran a hand over his face. He was still rather sleepy but at least he wasn't worn to a frazzle now, having burned off a considerable amount of stress (with Shera's help) the night before. "Hey Junior, is Evan back in school yet?"

"He's s'posed to be back today. That's what Ryan said." Junior shoveled another sausage link into her mouth, chewed, and swallowed. Cid nodded.

"That's good to hear." He ruffled the kid's hair. "You better get a move on, kid. You don't wanna be late."

"Okay." Junior got up and plopped her plate into the sink. She then gave Cid and Shera kisses on the cheek, picked up her bag, and ran out the door.

Shera loaded two more plates down with pancakes and sausage and brought them to the table. "What time are you supposed to leave?" she asked Cid.

"I got a few hours...I thought I'd finish up fixing Junior's plane before I go, though. I oughta be back in time for dinner, but if something's come up it might be later."

Shera nodded. "They're still doing all these tests on that new passenger jet at work, so I'll probably be home late again today." She took a bite of pancake, frowned, and drizzled a bit more syrup on top of her stack. "I already told Junior to go to Ryan's house after school."

"I hope that little son of a bitch isn't waiting for her again today," Cid sighed. Shera burst out laughing, almost sending a mouthful of sausage shooting across the table. "What's so funny?"

"I don't think we'll have any more problems with that boy. I had some choice words for him and his father yesterday."

Cid grinned. "Oh yeah? What kinda choice words?" Shera told him the uncensored truth, and Cid's eyes went wide. "Damn, woman! You said THAT!?"

Shera shrugged. "I was angry." She checked her watch, got up, and dumped her plate in the sink. "I'd better get going." She gave Cid a kiss, pulled on her lab coat, and went out the door.

Cid shook his head and snickered. Yes, he was proud of Shera. She definitely had a spine when it counted, especially where Junior was concerned. Sometimes Cid thought that having Junior was the best thing that had ever happened to Shera. He seriously considered calling Ryan's folks up and asking them if they'd mind keeping Junior a little later that night; it'd been a while since he'd taken Shera out to dinner or anything like that, and the woman deserved a break.

He finished his coffee and his breakfast and lit up a cigarette. It would probably take about half an hour to finish up with the Baby Bronco; after that he'd try to grab a quick nap before firing up the Highwind and heading off to Junon. What was it that Vincent had found? Damn, it was hard to figure out what was on that guy's mind. For all Cid knew, Vincent's big news could have been that he'd just won ten million gil in the Shinra Clearing House sweepstakes. His reaction would have been the same no matter how good or bad whatever he'd found was.

Nah. Cid knew Vincent well enough to know that he'd found something serious. Neither of them cared to admit it, but from day one Cid and Vincent had always seemed to be able to get into each others' heads better than anyone else in their little army. Hell, he was probably the closest thing to a friend Vincent had. And Cid knew that Vincent wouldn't be getting on the horn to Reeve and calling for a meeting if something big wasn't about to go down. Still, no sense in worrying himself sick over it till he got there and heard what Vincent and Red had to say. He got up, dressed, and headed outside where he scooted back under the ultralight. Nah, it wouldn't take too long to fix now; he just needed to finish bolting the new gear on and checking everything out.

Cid had been working for about ten minutes when he heard a snuffle and a grunt near his foot, and felt something sniffing his leg. "Damn dogs," he muttered and kicked in the general direction of the sniffing noise.

The dog made a very un-doglike noise and attempted to take a bite out of Cid's steel-toed boot.

"Goddammit!" Cid came flying out from under the little airplane, only to see a green lizard-like creature about the size of a large dog gnawing on the toe of his boot. Startled, it reared back and hissed. Cid was on his feet in a flash just as the creature was joined by a few of its friends. Monsters. Freakin' monsters! One of them clawed at his leg; he gave it a hard kick and it ran off making little whining noises. Several hollers and screams in the air told him they'd found their way into the rest of the town. Cid ran inside, slammed and bolted the back door, and headed for the garage. One of his old weapons, the Viper Halberd, stood in the corner and he took it up once more. He did not know where the Venus Gospel had gone to after the battle with Sephiroth and at that moment he did not give a rat's ass. The Viper Halberd would do. A few minutes of rummaging through a backpack on the floor next to the weapon rewarded him with a few Materia; one Fire, one Slash-All, and his old buddy Ramuh...Cid threw them onto the weapon and stormed back outside. "Okay, you little sonsabitches, let's see you chew on THIS shit!"

Apparently, the little lizard-thingies had some intelligence; a fair number of them turned tail and ran. Some did not, and Cid laid waste to all that dared cross his path. Running down the street a bit, he saw that the town had indeed been overrun with them. "Oh, shit," he gasped. The whole town.

The goddamn SCHOOL.

* * *

Junior was sitting in her little desk eagerly absorbing multiplication tables when the noise came. It sounded like something was trying to bash down one of the outside walls of the building. Junior peered out the window and gasped as she saw three big green lizards and something that looked like a very ugly bird clawing and beating on the brick walls. A few other kids saw it too, including the bully; he was now cowering under his desk. "Whoa!" Ryan jumped out of his seat. "C.J., get away from that window!" He grabbed Junior by the hand and dragged her away from the window just as it exploded in a shower of glass. One of the lizard things sniffed her foot, and she kicked it.

"Get off me!" she yelled; Ryan continued to drag her away from the hole in the wall. "Stupid boogerhead lizard! I oughta kick your butt!"

Mrs. Cole was white as a sheet, but she kept her composure as best she could for the childrens' sake. "Everybody get out of the classroom and go to the library! There aren't any windows there!" She stood by the door, shooing the kids out and down the hall. Most of them were crying, except for C.J. and Ryan. The former was still yelling at the lizard; the latter was still dragging the former out by the hand. When she was satisfied that all of the children were on their way to safety, Mrs. Cole slammed the classroom door behind her and herded the kids to the library. She did not see the one child she had left behind, the one curled up under his desk...

One of the lizard-things broke down the door and gave chase, and with a rake of its claws ripped a jagged hole in Mrs. Cole's skirt. Junior saw it and stopped dead in her tracks. That was IT. NOBODY messed with the teacher. She reached into her back pocket and pulled out her little slingshot; the green orb on its handle sparkled as she held it up in the air. "BOLT!" she cried, and lightning flew. The lizard was cooked medium-well in a fraction of a second, and a collective gasp rose up behind her.

"Holy wow," a short red-headed kid--Evan--gasped.

A few more of the lizards came tearing down the hall, and Junior would have gladly stood where she was to fend them off had Mrs. Cole not picked her up off the floor and taken off towards the library with her.

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"Goddammit, Junior--" Cid heard the crackle of lightning as he ran up to the school. Then he saw the gaping hole in the wall of the third-grade classroom. What kind of chickenshit monster would go busting up a school, for God's sake? Right now, nothing mattered to Cid except getting his girl the hell out of there. He stepped over the rubble that had been the classroom's north wall and found four more of the lizard things trying to squeeze through the busted ruins of the door at once. Something caught his attention; a whimper coming from under one of the desks. It was a boy that looked a little too big to be in third grade, curled up in a ball on the floor. "Hey! Kid!"

The kid looked up. "Huh?"

Cid squinted at him. "Ain't you the little punk that tried to beat my girl up yesterday?" The kid opened his mouth to answer, and Cid shook his head. "Forget it. Stay right there for a sec and don't look..." The lizards finally got a clue and realized that they were about to be dead lizards, and they backed out of the busted door slowly. Cid slashed his way through them, then he bent down and picked the crying kid up. "Where's everyone else?"

"Th--the library," the kid sobbed. "There's a buncha them things in here! They're all over the school!"

"Can you tell me how to get there?" Cid asked. The kid nodded.

"It's right down that hall, to the left." The kid sniffled. "Mister, I'm not gonna mess with C.J. no more. She just pasted one a' them lizards!"

Cid snickered. "That'll teach ya." As he ran down the hall with the kid under his arm, he passed the charred and still-smoldering carcass of one electrocuted lizard and couldn't help but grin. "Damn, she did a number on it, didn't she?" There

at the end of the hall was a set of double doors. The sign on the right one said "Library." Cid set the kid down and beat on the doors furiously. "HEY! We got one more kid out here! Open up!"

The library door swung open just enough to let Cid and the weeping kid pass. The kid went to the nearest corner, curled up in a ball, and began to blubber in earnest. Cid quickly bolted the door shut again and swept his gaze over the assembled children. "Junior? Where are you?"

"Daddy!" Junior screamed. She jumped up and ran to him, and he dropped his spear and swept her up into his arms. "Daddy, I wanna go home..." She wasn't crying yet, but she was damn close to it."

"I know, punkin." Cid held her tight as something much bigger than the lizards he'd busted up started slamming against the library door. "We can't go anywhere yet, though...not with that thing out there. Can you sit tight for a few more minutes while I go trash that critter?" The thing slammed against the door again with a loud squawk; this time the bar holding the door shut bent a bit. Junior jumped and then scowled at the door.

"Stupid ugly bird..." She sighed, then she let go of Cid. "Okay."

"I'll be right back. I promise." Cid kissed Junior on the forehead, unbolted the door, and slipped out. He did not see Junior follow him until the door had been bolted again and the bird thing was right on top of him, and he almost passed out. "What the--Junior!? Are you NUTS? What the hell you doin'!?"

"Helping," Junior replied simply, and called another bolt of lightning. It struck the bird, causing it to flap and squawk even louder.

"Goddammit..." Cid ground his teeth as he slashed angrily at the creature and missed. "Junior, you want your mama to kill me when she gets home?" Slash. Miss. "Dammit!"

Junior said nothing, but reached into her pocket and loaded a small rock into the slingshot. "Eat this," she muttered, letting fly with it. The rock hit the bird's skull with a "thwack" and the monster dropped to the floor, momentarily stunned.

"Good shot," Cid said, taking another swing at the bird. This time he connected, but the thing wasn't dead yet. "Come on..."

Junior fired off a barrage of three more rocks. One missed, one dealt a glancing blow to the top of the bird's head, and the third hit it dead on in the left eye. It lashed out with its wing and swept Junior into the wall behind her.

"JUNIOR!" Cid screamed, slashing at the bird again.

"I'm okay," she said through gritted teeth. Junior stood up slowly, with a look in her eyes Cid recognized all too well.

Junior was pissed.

Would it be enough, though? Cid sure hoped so...and his hopes were confirmed when he saw the familiar red battle aura flare around her. She threw her slingshot down in rage and with the scream of a banshee she took off at a full sprint, throwing her shoulder right into the bird's white meat and knocking it backwards. She then proceeded to pummel it with six quick punches to the head, and the bird squawked in protest. By the time Junior got done whaling on it, it was on the ground flapping weakly and kicking feebly with its clawed feet. Cid finished it off with one quick slash and looked over at Junior.

She shook her head and looked at the bird. "Wow," she whispered. "How'd I do that?"

Cid laughed and picked her up. "You got mad, kid," he said as he gave her a hug. "Do me a favor, okay?"

"Sure."

"Don't tell your mom about this." He looked around him and saw a few more lizards coming down the hall. "Shit...we're not outta the woods yet." He set Junior down again. "You think you can manage some more lightning?"

Junior nodded. "I think so." She held up the slingshot and screamed "Bolt!" a third time, and once again the flash of lightning tore through the lizard closest to her. "I think that's it," she sighed. "I'm tired."

"Okay, baby. I'll get 'em." Cid toasted the remaining lizards with Fire spells, picked Junior up again, and ran down the hall towards her classroom, where he hoped to escape through the wall with her.

Things didn't quite work out as planned. As soon as Cid was outside, he was surrounded. The beady little eyes of at least twelve lizards and four bird things were all on him, and they all saw him and Junior as today's blue plate special.

"Okay," he sighed, setting Junior down on the grass. "Let's get this over with." He was too close to the school to risk summoning Ramuh; the old geezer'd more than likely take a few chunks out of the building along with the monsters. He didn't have much choice but to try to take 'em the old-fashioned way, and he raised the Viper Halberd and swung at the closest pack of lizards.

He noticed two odd things then.

First, as the spear whizzed through the air, it seemed to be making a noise very much like machine-gun fire. Second, lizards and birds he wasn't even aiming for were going down.

"Hoo boy! Looks like we found ya just in time, Cid-man!"

Cid looked up from the perforated body of one lizard to see Barret standing there grinning. "No shit," he wheezed. "Where'd you come from?"

"This ain't the best time to be talkin'," Barret replied. He pointed his gun-arm at one of the remaining birds and filled it with lead. Then there were three sharp cracks, and the other bird was filled with bullets; this time from a different source.

Junior, meanwhile, was gathering rocks from the ground around her and plinking at the last of the lizards. Her aim was off, though, and she wasn't having much luck. A few bullets from the new source of firepower helped her out there, and she looked up to see who had fired them. "Vincent!" she yelled, stood up shakily, and threw her arms around his knees.

"I'm glad to see you too, Junior." Vincent awkwardly patted her on the head. "You're hurt."

"I'm okay." She let Vincent go and sat back down on the grass. "What are you n' Uncle Barret doin' here?"

"Well, we was gonna see if we could hitch a ride with your dad on the airship, since we all gotta go to Junon today." Barret reached into his pocket and tossed Junior a small green bottle. "You better drink that."

Junior uncapped it and sniffed its contents, shrugged, and drank, then she grinned as she felt the cure potion erasing the damage the bird's wing had dealt her. "Thanks!"

"I think those were the last of the monsters," Vincent said. "Barret and I disposed of quite a few on the way over here. I've advised the citizens to stay inside anyway, as a precaution." Cid nodded.

"I gotta call Shera and tell her not to come back here," he said. "You guys get Junior to the Highwind and don't let her outta your sight. She's comin' with us. I'm not leaving her anywhere."

"Gotcha," Barret replied, taking Junior's hand. "C'mon, kiddo."

As Barret and Junior headed off to the hangar Cid had stashed the airship in, Vincent looked around and surveyed the damage. "Attacking children. Unbelievable." He spat on the lifeless body of one of the lizards. Cid nodded and lit up a cigarette.

"It's a damn good thing Junior had that Materia on her. And to think Shera wanted to get rid a' that slingshot..."

Vincent smiled wryly at him. "Are you planning on telling Shera about this?"

"Hell, no. She'd rip me a new one if I told her Junior got into this shit." He laughed and puffed on his smoke a bit more. "Kid's got a lot of guts, though."

"She does favor you," Vincent mused. "We'd better get going. I'll go inside and tell the teachers to see the kids home."

* * *

Scarlet rolled her eyes as the reports began to pour in. Monsters had attacked Rocket City. Monsters had attacked Branford. Monsters had attacked Wutai. All had failed. Bleah bleah bleah. The only thing she cared about was that the filthy little beasts hadn't dared to set foot, wing, or paw in Neomidgar. Stupid monsters. Oh well. So there were a few unpleasant side effects to having fired up that reactor again. So there were a few pissed-off monsters roaming around. Scarlet was still in charge. Long live Scarlet.

She heard the door open behind her and turned around, ready to start screaming at whoever had the audacity to walk into her office without so much as knocking, then shut her mouth. "Oh, it's you, Vail."

Vail blinked at her. "I hear there's a bit of unpleasantness going on in a few places."

"Well, yeah. Here a monster, there a monster...y'know." Scarlet yawned, and Vail nodded.

"This could work out to our advantage, President." The scientist chuckled. "If we were to send out SOLDIER to deal with the monster attacks it could work wonders for Shinra's image. I think you know as well as I do that most people outside Neomidgar aren't exactly thrilled to see us back in business."

"Tell me something I don't know," Scarlet muttered. "What do you want?"

"Nothing, really. Only to tell you that we should have our first batch of SOLDIER troops ready by tomorrow." Vail smiled thinly. "I believe I've found and corrected the fundamental flaws in my-- in Hojo's original process."

"You better have," Scarlet snapped. "Don't disappoint me, Vail."

Vail nodded. "You will not be disappointed, President." And with that, she turned on her heel and walked out of the office.

Once in the elevator, Vail scowled to herself. What had she been thinking, almost making a slip like that? She reached up and rubbed her eyes and as she did so, the sleeve of her lab coat slipped down almost to her elbow revealing a small tattoo on her arm: the Roman numeral XIX.

Author's notes: D'oh! It was not a Rob that was beating me over the head for not putting Vincent in sooner; it was a Jon. Gomen nasai to all the Robs out there. I don't know what the hell I was thinking. I found the FF7/South Park fic again by accident, and this time I remembered to bookmark it. I definitely plan on expanding on the Cid/Vincent friendship thing; it has a lot of potential. I've gotten a lot of very positive response to this series, and I thank you all for your kind words. Totally unrelated to this fic: Sailor Moon Aia is on hold indefinitely. I have major rewrite work to do on it, i.e. completely altering the storyline from chapter 4 on, and CoJ is my priority at the moment, plus I've realized that I really haven't seen enough of the series from R on to be writing about crap that happened after that time period. Reeve is going to be getting a bit more action in this story than he did in the game, and not just as Cait Sith. And yes, Vail is a clone.