

## Final Fantasy VII: Children of Jenova

### Chapter 5: Rebirth

"They're late." Reeve stared out the window of his office, looking out over the sea for any sign of the Highwind. Red XIII, Cloud and Tifa (who had brought Zack along after hearing of the monster attacks on several cities around the world), and amazingly enough, Yuffie had all shown up as planned. Cid, Vincent, and Barret had not. "I hope they're okay."

"Well, I know Barret was heading for Rocket City to catch a ride with Cid," Tifa mused. "And I'm sure Vincent's fine wherever he is. They can take care of themselves. You heard the reports. All the monsters that attacked Rocket City either ran away or got killed."

"I know, I know." Reeve sighed and sat down, almost unconsciously scritchng the sleeping Cait Sith behind the ears as he did so. "It's just not like them to not be somewhere when they say they will. And Yuffie even showed up before them... I'm REALLY starting to worry."

"Oh, get bent!" Yuffie spat. The others snickered nervously. "C'mon, you guys all know Vincent always does dramatic crap like this, and Cid probably had to stop for cigarettes on the way. Lighten up!" At that moment, the intercom on Reeve's desk buzzed.

Fearing the worst, Reeve gingerly reached out and poked the button as if it were a cockroach. "Yes?"

"Sir, this is the airport control tower. We're picking up an airship on radar...I could be wrong, but it doesn't look like Shinra." There was a long pause. "We've got it on visual now...heh...it definitely ain't Shinra. There's a half-naked woman painted on it."

The tension level in the room plummeted like a lead ball. Even the inactive Cait Sith seemed to heave a sigh of relief. "Who all's on that ship?" Reeve asked.

"Hang on, I'll check." Another pause. "The regular flight crew, Barret Wallace, Vincent Valentine, and two Cid Highwinds."

Zack perked up. "C.J. came too?"

Cloud nodded. "Cid probably didn't want to leave her at home after the attack. At least they're all okay."

As if in reply, a faint voice came over the intercom. "Hey! HEY! Reeve! You hear me? If I hafta walk up more than one flight of goddamn stairs I'm gonna wring your neck!"

Reeve laughed. "Give them clearance to land immediately, and show them up here." He thought about it a second, then he grinned. "Cid? Can you hear me?"

Faintly but audibly enough, Cid's voice came through the intercom. "Yeah?"

"I'm afraid the elevators are out of whack." Reeve's grin widened evilly. "If you want I can have Cait Sith come down and give you a piggyback ride."

Cloud reached down and covered Zack's ears just in time to block the stream of profanity that issued forth from the intercom box.

"Reeve, that wasn't very nice," Red XIII scolded.

"That's payback for Junior's birthday party," Reeve answered with a smile. "I TOLD him I was gonna get him back for that."

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At length Barret, Vincent, and Cid Junior entered the office, followed closely by a panting and cursing Cid Senior.

"I'm just gonna sit right down here, Reeve," Cid started, plopping himself in a chair. "And as soon as I quit seein' spots I'm gonna get up and beat the livin' crap outta you."

Of course, everyone knew Cid wasn't serious. "I told you you were going to owe me, didn't I?" Reeve laughed. He discreetly fiddled with a hand-held remote control of some kind, and Cait Sith opened his eyes and stood up on his Mog. "Zack, Junior, why don't you go with Cait Sith and have some ice cream?"

"Cool!" Zack bubbled. Junior didn't seem as excited.

"I want to stay here with Daddy." She sniffled and climbed up into Cid's lap; he gave her a hug and a kiss on the forehead.

"Go on, kiddo. We're just gonna talk about a buncha boring grownup stuff. Maybe if you ask real nice Cait Sith'll tell your fortunes again." Cid nudged Junior towards the door, where Zack was already jumping up and down and raring to go. "You don't wanna keep Zack waitin', do ya?"

Junior shook her head. "No sir."

"Good girl. We'll all be right here. You just yell at Cait Sith if you need to get a hold of me, okay?"

"Okay." Junior sniffled again, but took the cave moogles' hand and went out the door.

Cid watched her go and rubbed his eyes. "Y'know, I think she'd rather eat a truckload of brusselsprouts than admit it, but she's scared to death. She's a brave little thing, but when I found her at school...God, that look in her eyes..." He lit up a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "This is too much for kids like her and Zack and Marlene to have to deal with. Shit...Reeve, you mind if I use your phone? I gotta call Shera and let her know what's goin' on...if she gets home and finds me and Junior gone and a buncha dead lizards all over town she's gonna go ballistic, and I don't like the idea of her bein' home alone after all that shit."

"Sure, knock yourself out," Reeve replied, handing Cid the receiver. "In fact, if you like, I'd be more than happy to send a chopper to pick her up and bring her here."

Barret looked up sharply. "How the hell you get that kinda authority? Ain't you just in charge a' the light company?"

"Before, that was all there was to it, yeah." Reeve sat on his desk and looked back out the window. "I had a visitor the other day--Reno. He had some bad news for me about Shinra, and I decided we need all the security we can get here, and that includes a little airpower. I guess you all know who's in charge there these days."

Tifa nodded gravely. "Yeah, Scarlet."

Cid, upon hearing this, spluttered and dropped his cigarette right into his lap. "WHAT!? What the hell happened to hyena-man?"

"Heidegger seems to be second-in-command," Vincent said. "Which left Palmer or Scarlet as possibilities, and I think it's pretty obvious which of the two would be more suited to the task of reviving Shinra."

"As Junior would say, 'Duh.'" Cid stuck the cigarette back in his mouth and then turned his attention back to the phone. "Shera?...Listen, I...hey, are you okay? What happened?" There was a long pause. "Goddamn. What are you gonna do?...okay, okay, don't worry about that now. I'm gonna have Reeve send a chopper down there to pick you up and bring you here and we'll talk about it, okay?...Okay. Love you, woman. Hang in there." He hung up, shaking his head. "Son of a bitch...well, at least now we know what Fatman's up to."

"What happened?" Tifa asked. "Is Shera all right?"

"She said Palmer just walked into the aircraft plant she's workin' at and said it was now under Shinra's control--they're building up their airpower again." He chuckled a bit. "So she told him to take this job and shove it."

"Good for her!" Cloud exclaimed. "I hope they don't decide to come after her, though."

"Oh, they won't, I guaran-damn-tee you that." Cid puffed angrily on his cigarette. "If they so much as try it they're gonna be eatin' this goddamn spear." He stood up and banged his fist on the desk. "Damn, I'm pissed! What the hell does that bimbo think she's doin' up there!?"

"Obviously she thinks she's going to follow in Rufus's footsteps." Red XIII growled softly. "Anyway, I think you should all know what I've found."

"We're listening." Cid ground his cigarette out on the sole of his boot, threw it in the trash, and lit another. Reeve pulled a face and opened a window.

"I've discovered three intact spirit bodies drifting in the Lifestream. The first I saw--I don't know for sure what it is. At first I thought it might have been Aeris." Red sighed. "But I don't think it is. It may be another Cetra, but again I don't think that's the case."

"Then who is it?" Cloud asked softly. He did not have a good feeling about this. Not at all.

"Well, this is where I get confused." Red scratched his ear nervously. "To be honest--it looks like Sephiroth."

"Shit," said Cid and Cloud in unison.

"Let me finish. I said it LOOKS like Sephiroth. Here's the weird part. The aura's wrong. To be perfectly honest, this being is carrying a weaker form of Holy energy in its spirit." Red quirked his head to the side, much like a dog does when it hears a high-pitched noise. "That's confusing enough, because the second spirit body I saw is DEFINITELY Sephiroth."

"I knew it." Cloud shook his head slowly. "What was he doing?"

"Well, I haven't seen him since just before you called me about the geyser at the mythrill mine. And that worries me, because just before THAT he appeared to be speaking to the third spirit I saw. And there's no doubt in my mind who THAT one is." Red took a deep breath. "It's Jenova. I'm sure of it." A collective gasp and groan rose from all in attendance except Vincent, who nodded sagely at Red's words.

"This could be very serious, in light of what I found in the library at the old Shinra mansion," Vincent said. "According to Professor Gast's notes, Jenova was...well, for lack of a better word, she was pregnant when they dug her up. Gast found her to be carrying a large number of what appeared to be eggs."

"Good God." Cid turned white and sat down heavily. "What happened to those goddamn eggs, then?"

Vincent shrugged. "Gast's notes indicate that Hojo probably did something with them. Beyond that I've got no idea."

"Okay." Reeve drummed his fingers on the desk. "Who's the head of the science department at Shinra now? Does anyone know?"

Vincent shrugged. "I saw her at Nibelheim, but I didn't catch her name. Average height. Thin. Pale. Dark glasses. Young, but her hair was mostly white."

Reeve nodded. "Vail. She was one of those weirdos that always kept herself holed up in the labs when I was at Shinra. I didn't see much of her, but there were a couple of weird things about her. One, she'd get really pissed off if anyone compared her to Hojo. Two, no matter how damn hot it was, she always wore long sleeves. And she never took those glasses off. She's one creepy broad, I'll tell you that."

"Creepy or not," Tifa began, "she's the best chance we've got at finding out what happened to those eggs. We've got to get in touch with her somehow."

"I'll handle that," Reeve offered. "Don't expect much, though. If she's anything like she was the few times I had the ill fortune to get stuck talking to her in the old days, she probably won't be a whole lot of help." He frowned. "Of course, on the other hand, she always hated Hojo and I could probably use that little nugget of wisdom to my advantage."

Cid nodded. "Red, we gotta find out who that other guy is that's floatin' around down there."

"Actually..." Red looked thoughtful for a minute. "I do have a theory, but it's sketchy at best. I think maybe Sephiroth's spirit was starting to break apart like it should have, but somehow he stopped it. Only he didn't catch it in time, and his spirit ended up being broken into two pieces."

"Major split personality," Yuffie commented, and Red nodded.

"That's probably not so far from the truth. If I'm right, then the first spirit body I saw would probably be Sephiroth's conscience, the part of him that was still human."

"Which means the other part..." Tifa looked down at Red. "The other part is the part of him that Jenova was controlling."

"Oh, that's just wonderful." Cid scowled and lit up yet another cigarette. "So you're tryin' to say we got TWO Sephiroths runnin' around now?"

"It would appear so." Red nodded. "For the sake of clarity, I've taken to calling the first Sephiroth Lumina and the second Sephiroth Obscura. And I believe that if it were possible to communicate with Sephiroth Lumina somehow, he could be persuaded to help us--"

"I don't give a rat's ass WHAT he could be persuaded to do!" Cid stood up and began to pace around the office. "All I know is that son of a bitch killed Aeris, he killed Tifa's dad, he killed a whole shitload of innocent folks in Midgar and NOW you're sayin' half of his goddamn split personality's on OUR side?"

"Basically, yes." Red shrugged again, and Cid just stared at him.

"And what if you're wrong?"

"I don't know." Red blinked and sighed. "I don't know."

Cid threw up his hands. "Goddamnit, Red! Do you have ANY idea what the hell you're saying?" He was dimly aware that everyone in the room was staring at him, but at that point he didn't care. "This is crazy."

Cloud sighed. "Cid, yelling at Red isn't going to do any good. And I think he knows more about this than any of the rest of us do so please sit down and stop shouting."

Cid glared at him for a second, opened his mouth to say something, closed it again, then shook his head and stormed out the door. "Oh, fuck it!" he spat on the way out. Cloud started to follow, but Vincent stopped him with a look.

"What!?" Cloud exclaimed. "What the hell is wrong with him? If anyone oughta be going off like that it's me! I'm the one Sephiroth was always screwing with!"

"Cloud." Vincent just looked at him. "There are some things you don't know about Cid's situation. He shared your fear that Sephiroth was still alive. Ever since we returned from the Northern Cave he has seen Sephiroth slaughter his wife and his child in his dreams, so I think you can understand how he feels about this new development."

"Well, I feel like a real jackass now," Cloud muttered. "He told me he didn't think Sephiroth was alive. Why the hell would he lie to me about something like that?"

"Because he didn't want you to overreact. He knew of your fear as well."

"Well," Reeve sighed, "someone needs to go out there and calm him down before he really DOES come back in here and beat me up..."

"I'll talk to him," Vincent replied and left the office.

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Vincent found Cid not too far away, with his back against a wall and his arms folded over his chest, staring at the floor. Vincent said nothing; he simply leaned against the wall as well. When Cid was ready to talk, he'd talk.

And after a few minutes, he was ready. "Hey, Vincent."

"Yeah."

"You remember that time you told me you wished you had my go-get-'em attitude?"

Vincent chuckled softly. "Of course."

Cid was silent for a moment, then he spoke up again. "Sometimes I wish I could be more like you, y'know?"

"No you don't." Vincent shook his head. "The way I am is a direct result of having nothing left to lose. You have a wife and a daughter to think of, and you have every right to get upset about any chance of anything happening to them." He smiled. "And you've seen what happens when I DO get angry."

"Yeah, well." Cid shrugged. "The changing-into-gargoyles-and-shit part I could do without."

They shared a bit of a laugh at that. "You're right. I don't think I can quite picture Chaos with a cigarette in its mouth."

"Oh, Lord." Cid laughed a bit harder, then he sighed. "Sorry about makin'a scene like that in there."

"No need to apologize. I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of explaining your situation to Cloud and Red."

"Ahh shit, Vincent...oh well. I guess it's better if Cloud knows he's not the only one scared shitless about Sephiroth. And he was right, Red does have a better picture of what's goin' on than the rest of us do." Cid stepped away from the wall and started back towards Reeve's office. "Guess I better go back in there before they start thinkin' I flipped out or something."

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Vail yawned and rubbed her eyes. God, she was tired. She'd been awake for two days? Three days? She didn't know. But that was all right. After she checked out the first batch of SOLDIER troops in the morning she could go home and have a nice long nap.

When she heard someone calling her name, she automatically assumed she was dreaming on her feet. Then she heard it again.

"Vail."

Vail blinked and looked around. Yes, she was alone. The voice had come from thin air, not heard with her ears but with her mind. She set down her notes quickly.

"It's about time," she said. "I didn't think you were coming back this time."

"You underestimate me." Was that a hint of amusement Vail heard in the disembodied voice? "And it took five years the last time as well. I would have returned sooner, but there have been...complications."

"What sort of complications?"

"Nothing really. It may even work out to my advantage." The voice paused. Then: "Have you done what I asked of you?"

Vail grinned. "Of course. It took some fast talking, but I convinced Scarlet that I needed to get some core samples at the Northern limits. Nobody else cared to go in there with me. I found it just where you said it would be." She stood, inserted a keycard into a slot on the wall, and watched as a hidden panel slid back to reveal a secret vault. Vail reached into this vault, closed her fingers around a leather-wrapped handle, and pulled out a sword as long as she was tall, with a blade of blackened steel. "What should I do with it? Hang on to it until you find a body?"

The voice laughed; its tone hollow and chilling. "I've already found a body, but it isn't ready yet. I will come for my sword when it is." Vail shivered as she thought she felt a finger running itself down her jawline and under her chin. "Don't fail me."

"No." Vail forced a smile. "I will not fail you, brother."

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Author's notes: Well! Now we know what Vail's problem with Hojo is. The question is: exactly who is her mama? Yet another slow-moving chapter; don't worry, the action will pick up quite nicely very soon. Web page news: I have just received a gift from the Captain himself--a very kawaii little CG of Cid Junior on the battlefield! Wai! It's on my Cid shrine; URL in .sig as always. See ya.