

Final Fantasy 7: Children of Jenova

Sneak Preview 1: Cid Junior's In Trouble...

Barret was just getting ready to have a nice dinner when the damn PHS phone rang for the first time in almost seven years.

"Whoever this is it better be damn good," he muttered. "Marlene just fixed up dinner an' it's gettin' cold..."

"Barret, you gotta come out here." Cid's unusually worried voice answered. "Get whoever you can find and get your butts here soon as you can."

"Hey, hey, hey...calm down, Cid-man. What got you so riled up?"

"The Tiny Bronco II's missing." There was the sound of a swallow, and then: "Junior...she's gone too."

"You think...you think someone took her?"

"I don't know. All I know is my little girl's gone, my airplane's gone, and Shera's going to pieces in the living room!"

"Shit, man." Barret shook his head. "Marlene, you wanna leave my dinner in the oven? I gotta go see Uncle Cid."

"Sure, Papa."

* * *

Cloud, Tifa, and Barret had all showed up at Cid's house to attempt to organize some kind of search. According to the near-hysterical Shera, she had been making dinner when she heard the Tiny Bronco II's engines start. She didn't get a good look at whoever was flying it, but she did know that Cid Junior was also missing and that the restored Shinra Stingray had gone south.

Cloud was about to suggest firing up the Highwind when there came a knock at the door. Cid opened it and found a guy in a shirt and tie standing there looking very surprised.

"Captain? I thought you were out flying."

"No, I've been right here. My kid and my airplane are gone. Why the hell would I be out flying?"

"You mean you...but Junior was on the radio...ohh, shit. Captain...I think you better come to the tower, like right now." And under his breath he muttered, "Gawd, he's not gonna be happy..." and left.

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On the way to the tower, Cid and company had visions in their heads of horrid things happening to poor little Cid Junior...some nasty character in the back seat of the Tiny Bronco forcing her to talk to the tower like nothing was happening...no, it was best not to think of that.

As it happened, they reached the tower just as Cid Junior's cheerful little voice requested clearance to land on the south runway. Cid grabbed the microphone out of the controller's hand.

"Junior!"

A pause. "Hi, Daddy!"

"Junior, what the hell's going on? Who's got you? Is someone trying to hurt you?"

"No sir! Nobody's here, just me!"

Cloud, Tifa, and Barret's jaws dropped. Surely the kid didn't mean what they THOUGHT she did...Cid turned several interesting colors and needed to sit down.

"Junior," he began, slowly and calmly. "Are you telling me that you are flying that airplane by yourself!?"

"Yes sir! Watch this!" And out of the southern window of the tower, all the gathered crew watched Cid Junior execute a perfect barrel roll. Several crewmen passed out. Cid fell out of his chair. "See, I did it just like you showed me! Cool, huh?"

"Aack! Junior, DON'T DO THAT!" He dragged himself off the floor as Cloud, Tifa, and Barret sweat-dropped behind him. "You wanna give your old man a heart attack!?"

"Looks like someone's gonna be grounded for the rest of her life," Tifa muttered.

Cid ignored her. "Junior, you got the south runway clear. You land that plane right now, you hear me?"

"Okay, Daddy! See ya."

* * *

Cloud was very proud of Cid. He didn't lose his cool.

Not right away, anyway.

After Junior pulled off a beautiful landing and parked the Tiny Bronco II back in the back yard, Cid took her firmly by the hand and led her inside.

"Cid?" Shera hopped up off the sofa, saw Junior, and scooped the grinning kid into her arms. "Junior! We were so worried! Are you okay?"

"Yes ma'am," Junior bubbled as she hopped up on the sofa.

"Junior is in big trouble." Cid sat down calmly. "You're not gonna BELIEVE where she has been."

"Where?"

"She..." Cid gulped, realizing he was probably going to end up in the doghouse for not keeping a closer eye on the kid-- "She took the Tiny Bronco II out for a joyride." Yep, he was right. Shera immediately stopped weeping and turned almost purple.

"She WHAT?"

"I did somethin' bad, didn't I?" Junior asked in a very small voice.

"By HERSELF!?"

Cid Senior suddenly felt as if he were two inches tall. "Um...Shera..."

Shera ignored him. "CID HIGHWIND JUNIOR, WHAT IN THE WORLD WERE YOU THINKING!?"

"I dunno." The kid knew she was in trouble, and she began to sniffle. Cloud suddenly felt very sorry for her.

"Junior, do you have ANY idea how worried we were!?" Cid yelled. "I had to call Uncle Cloud and Uncle Barret and Aunt Tifa out here to help look for you! Your mother was about to have a heart attack! -I- got about fifty more white hairs I didn't have this morning!"

"I think we'll be leaving now," Cloud said nervously and scooted out the door.

"Um, yeah." Tifa followed, and whispered "Good luck, kid," to Junior as she left.

"Junior, you're a good kid. You get good grades, you keep your room clean, you help me and Mom out around the house...so I think you'll understand that I'm more than a little bit pissed off about this!" Cid shook his head. "This is gonna hurt me more than it hurts you, Junior..."

All was silent outside the Highwind house for a few minutes. Then the silence was pierced by the distinct wail of a five-year-old girl getting a sound spanking.

And that is the story of the only spanking Cid Highwind Junior ever got in her whole life...

Fourteen Months Later...

Sneak Preview 2: The Turks

"Hey!" Rude pounded on the door of the men's room anxiously. The Turks had been drowning their sorrows for the better part of the evening and now Rude was starting to feel the more--urgent--effects of the large quantities of beer he had ingested. And there was some jerk in the men's room that seemed to be trying to pass a cantaloupe. "Come on, I gotta go!"

"Urgh...grr...I'll be right out..."

"Hurry up!" Rude shook his head. Five minutes later:

"Ugh...aargh..."

Rude, meanwhile, had gradually begun to do what most five-year-olds called "the peepee dance." He was now hopping from one foot to the other and grimacing. "Oh, the hell with this...when you gotta go, you gotta go." Rude picked his way back to the table he, Reno, and Elena shared and leaned down to Reno. "I gotta take care of some...ahem...business outside..."

"What, that guy's STILL in there!?" Reno looked at the closed bathroom door and laughed, a bit too loudly. A woman seated alone at the bar with a beer and a shot in front of her and an impossibly long cigarette hanging out of her mouth (not to mention the impossibly long blonde ponytail she had that stopped inches short of the floor when she sat down) shot him an annoyed glance. Gawd. A biker chick. Had to be. She wore more leather than three cows combined, it seemed...black leather jacket with a picture of an evil-looking bird and the word "Blackhawk" on the back, black leather gloves, boots to match. She also wore a pair of beat-up aviator's goggles with a pack of those damn footlong girly cigarettes tucked in the headband. And Reno was fairly sure the woman could probably kick his ass, so he shut up. The biker chick went back to her beer and her shot, shaking her head. "You want me to get him outta there?"

"Nah, I can't wait that long. Be right back." And with that, Rude dashed out the door. Elena rolled her eyes.

"And you say we WOMEN take too long..."

It is a known fact that alcohol has some...liberating effects on the human brain.

It is also a known fact that when you get a member of the male species drunk, the nearest member of the female species suddenly becomes the most beautiful creature he has ever seen.

Finally, it is a known fact that Reno had always harbored some sort of affectionate feelings towards Elena, which she did not return.

Bearing these three facts in mind, it is a bit easier to understand why Reno's answer to Elena's comment was to grab her around the waist and try to plant a kiss on her.

"Hey!?" Elena facevaulted, reached out, and slapped Reno upside the head. "What the HELL --"

"Ahh, a woman with SPIRIT!" Reno guffawed. "Woohoo!"

"Cut it out, you jerk!" Elena kicked him in the shins; Reno, in his state, didn't seem to notice. The biker chick shook her head, downed her shot, and slid off the bar stool.

The next thing Reno knew, there was a leather-encased hand grabbing him by the hair and pulling him off Elena. "What, you don't hear so good? The lady said 'no.'" Reno managed to turn around just enough to see the woman's bright green eyes drilling into him. "What part of that don't you understand, my friend?"

Elena looked up at the biker chick and sighed. "He does this a lot. I'm used to it. Thanks anyway, though."

"You shouldn't put up with it." The biker girl released her grip on Reno's hair and meandered back to her bar stool. "Find yourself a man with some class, honey," she yelled over her shoulder.

"Wha--" Reno stood up unsteadily and wove his way around chairs and tables until he stood nose to nose with the biker girl. "Maybe I oughta find myself a real woman. How about a kiss, babe?"

As the fireworks began behind her, Elena grinned and finished her beer.

* * *

"Whew! I didn't think I was gonna make it..." Rude was "doing some business" behind a shrub planted off to the side of the bar's entrance. "Gonna have to drag that guy outta there one of these days, though..."

At that precise moment, there was a loud crash and fragments of the bar's door exploded onto the street. A suddenly airborne Reno followed them.

"AAAAAAAAAAH! Oof!"

"Erk!" Rude jumped, as he was just a little surprised that someone had managed to bodily throw his partner THROUGH a wooden door, and had a minor accident in the process. "Ahh, damn...my shoes...Reno, you were hitting on Elena again, weren't you? I TOLD you she was gonna bust you one someday..."

"Bah!" Reno picked himself up, and Rude saw that he was bleeding freely from his nose and lip. "Elena didn't do this...it was that biker chick!"

As if on cue, the lady in black leaned out what was left of the door and yelled "And stay out, you PIG!" This was answered by raucous applause from the bar patrons. Rude looked at her, at Reno, and back at her.

"Say, do you need a job?" he asked her. "We're one man short here..."

The biker girl blinked. "What kinda job are we talking about here?"

Rude shrugged. "Mostly mercenary work, I guess. We used to work for Shinra, but we kinda got fired."

"Shinra? Hmm." The biker lady scratched her chin, drew another one of those long smokes from the pack in her goggles' headband, and lit it with a silver lighter. "I make plenty of money doing mechanic work and stuff, going town to town, and I like what I do...but I might have a job for you." She extended a hand to Rude. "C.J. Blackhawk."

Rude shook C.J.'s hand. "Rude. The guy you just beat up is Reno. The girl in there is Elena. What have you got for us, Ms. Blackhawk?"

"I'm trying to get home, but this bike ain't gonna carry me over the ocean." C.J. gestured at the beat-up Hardy Daytona leaning against the

front of the building. "The way it's been running, I'll be lucky if it carries me to the next town. I think they water the gas down in Gongaga. It's been running like crap ever since I filled up there." She snickered and took a drag off the cigarette. Almost as an afterthought, she pulled the pack of Mystique Lights out of the headband of her goggles and held it out to Rude. "Where the hell are my manners...you smoke?"

"Nah."

"Good, more for me." C.J. put the smokes back where they'd come from. "I'm no ace pilot, but I can make an airplane go and I think that's what I need. I remember some stories my old man told me, about Shinra putting these little secret hangars all over the place and never using them again. If I remember right, he said there's one up in the mountains around Corel somewhere, and I'm hoping they might have something flyable stashed in it. But there's a problem. First, even if it's abandoned, there might be some boobytraps and shit set up there to keep trespassers like myself outta there. Second, if it isn't abandoned, there's no way in hell I can take out a bunch of SOLDIER guys and stuff on my own. Third, I'm willin' to bet there's some kinda security gateway up there and I need help from someone that might know how to crack it. Like I say, I work on machines. But I work on big stuff that rolls and flies and such. All this computer shit is out of the question for me." C.J. puffed on her smoke some more. "What do you say?"

"Sounds kinda fun," Reno muttered, picking the last of the debris out of his hair. "I'm up for it."

Rude nodded. "What's our cut?"

C.J. popped open the ammo box she carried as a purse and tossed Rude a small bag. "There's two grand. You get the rest when we find that hangar, plus if we run into any resistance you three can have whatever they leave when we take them out."

"I'm in," said Reno. Rude nodded.

"Me too. Think we should bring Elena?" Rude caught a glimpse of Reno facevaulting out of the corner of his eye. "Silly me. Why'd I even ask..."

End of sneak previews. Please exit the theatre at the back or through the marked "Exit" doors and pick up your trash before you leave. Thank you.

Hmm...who IS that mysterious biker lady? When will Reno get a clue and quit bugging Elena? And how the hell did a five-year-old child get into a restored fighter jet, do a complete preflight check, taxi, and takeoff, and not have anyone see her?