

Chapter One: Empty Threats

"That's when the one who injured the Planet... or the 'crisis from the sky' as we call him, came." - *Ifalna Gast*

"So how does it feel?"

"Huh?"

"This is your first time back in your hometown, right?"

"Yeah.." Vincent Valentine looked around Wutai with uncertainty. The Da-Chao mountains loomed on the horizon. He looked at his companion, Lions Kain. The two Turks led a small squadron of Shinra Soldiers into the town square.

"I wouldn't know the feeling," Lions looked around at the bustling town, "I grew up in Midgar. I have never really left mine." Lions reached into his suit pocket and pulled out a yellow envelope. He opened it and read the paper inside. "He lives on the far end of town. Usually, I would say this is probably a complete waste of our time, but since this is YOUR hometown, there might be something here worthwhile." Lions mockingly smiled at the other Turk.

"Just keep your mind on our assignment," Vincent said in a flat, serious tone. "Heidegger believes this Kisaragi boy is a possible candidate for the new SOLDIER program. As Turks, it is our job to take him into custody for the company to determine whether he is."

The two blue suits walked into the nearest bar, the Turtle Paradise. Neither of them drank, but they figured this would be as good a place as any to start looking for their quarry. Vincent ambled up to the bar in his trademark cool manner. He raised his hand in gesture to the barkeep.

"What can I get you two gentlemen?"

"We're looking for a man. In his twenties. Godo Kisaragi." Lions eyed the barkeep with suspicion.

"He lives on the other side of town. Towards the temple," the bar tender polished a glass with a clean cloth. "Now what would two well-dressed men like yourselves want with young Godo?"

"Nothing," Vincent said as he turned towards the door. Both Turks left the bar and rejoined the five soldiers waiting outside.

"The swill merchant inside says we can find him on the other side of town." Lions spoke to the other soldiers. "President Shinra wants this done as quickly and as quietly as possible."

"You cannot be serious, Godo!"

"I am serious, Sake! The Shinra has gone too far this time," Godo Kisaragi turned and looked out towards the horizon. The sun began to set beyond the Da-Chao mountains. The shadows from the mountains sprawled across the trees on the outskirts of town. It was a peaceful site. The very one which adorned many of the postcards sold in the item shop downtown.

"But we have not the strength to resist them. Wutai is one of the world's most prosperous towns, but we simply do not

have the resources to fight a company of Shinra's size," Sweat rolled slowly down Sake's forehead under the heat of the Wutai summer.

"They mean to drill into the Da-Chao mountains! They seek to desecrate the very traditions that make us who we are!" Godo turned and glared at his old friend. His face was flushed with desperation. It was as if the very weight of the world had rested upon his massive shoulders.

"Now, Godo, I know you still blame the Shinra for the death of your father," Shake looked warily at his younger friend, "But you cannot expect the town to--"

"Shake you fool!" Godo stood suddenly, "The Shinra corporation had my father assassinated to make an example of him. Without my father to rally the other clans, the resistance to the Shinra will be minimal at best!" Godo turned back towards the window. "And as you see now, the clans have no intention of preventing the Shinra from proceeding with their exploration drilling!"

"Do not think your little stunt last week will garner any support," Shake became serious and direct, "Single-handedly destroying most of their equipment and felling an entire squadron will not put a stop to the Shinra's efforts."

"You can stay and rest on your cot for the rest of your days if you want, but I will not stand idle while some faceless corporation attempts to spit in the eye of our god!" Godo turned back to his friend, "We have company."

Vincent and Lions walked up to the pagoda leading the squad of soldiers. Vincent turned to his comrade and motioned him to wait at this spot. The he walked up onto the steps of the pagoda and went inside.

"Vincent Valentine," Came a voice ahead inside the pagoda, "What brings you back to your humble and lowly hometown?" Shake came around the corner and approached the Turk. Vincent said nothing for what seemed to be an eternity.

"Shake... is it? One of the village elders?"

"It is nice to see you remember me. I see you have done well for yourself with the Shinra corporation." Shake looked down and cleared his throat.

"Are you here because of the incident last week?"

Vincent eyed the old man, "In a manner of speaking, yes." The Turk adjusted his sport coat. "We are looking for a man. Godo Kisaragi. We learned of him through his display at the drill site last week."

Past Shake, around the corner, Godo listened with rage. The very mention of his name by the Shinra dog acted like a poison in his soul. His spine tensed and shivered.

"What could the Shinra possibly want with young Godo?" Shake began to feel an uneasiness about the entire situation. "Do they mean to prosecute him for his role in the assault?"

Vincent looked back towards the door, where he could see Lions and the soldiers waiting. It was clear that they had become impatient. "Not exactly," he finally said.

"Liar!!" Godo leapt from the shadows past Shake and swung a sword wildly at Vincent! The Turk dove backwards to avoid the blade and prevent serious harm. When he hit the floor, he realized his suit had a clean cut across the front with luckily

only a scratch underneath. Godo jumped through the door of the pagoda towards the soldiers waiting below! They raised their rifles to the warrior who quickly struck his sword across the first rifle breaking it in two. The first soldier screamed as he crouched to the ground holding his bleeding arms to his chest! The second soldier fired at Godo who narrowly stepped to the side and grabbed his gun. The third soldier also managed to get off a round but Godo pushed the second soldier into the bullet's path! As the wounded soldier fell, Godo attacked the last two soldiers with his gleaming sword!

Lions raised his Dragoon Lance to engage the warrior and the two crossed weapons! Godo advanced on his foe swinging his blade from side to side while Lions blocked and parried every action. Vincent shakily emerged from the pagoda and took out his handgun. He fired off a round into the air, causing the two fighters to pause and look towards him.

"This is not what we came for," Vincent beckoned, "Godo Kisaragi, I presume." Godo looked up at Vincent with hate in his eyes. "The Shinra have seen you in combat," Vincent began, "And have chosen you as a possible candidate for Professor Gast's new SOLDIER program."

"I am not interested in your programs or your company," Godo spat. "The Shinra killed my father," He glared at Lions, "Assassinated in the night; bludgeoned by a large, sharp weapon. They stole him from our village. They stole him from me! I am now the last remaining Omni- Master, and it will one day soon be my role to lead this village."

Vincent thought for a moment. He was not sure what disturbed him more: the conclusions Godo was drawing, or the ones that began to form in his own mind. "I can only assure you the Shinra had nothing to do with your father's murder. We will take our wounded to the local hospital and continue this conversation tomorrow. If I were you, I would get used to the idea of leaving this town."

That night, Vincent's sleep was disturbed by visions and dark thoughts. He had heard rumors about some of the corrupt policies of his company's executives, but had quickly dismissed them as just that. Rumors. Finally, he gave up his struggle to sleep and arose from his bed. The inn was quiet. Too quiet. He put on his shoes and went to check on his comrade in the next room.

"Lions?" Vincent tapped on the door before noticing it was unlocked. Carefully, he pushed open the door. Nothing. The room was tidy. The bed was empty. It was clear that no one had slept there. Vincent backed out of the room and returned to his own. He quickly put his jacket on and did not bother to put on his trademark dark crimson tie. He knelt beside his bed and took out a rather large shotgun. His Death Penalty. A present from his father before he died. The Valentine legacy. He loaded it and left the room. He walked out into the quiet town to search for his friend.

He would not find him.

In a darkened cave in the Da-Chao mountains, a cloaked figure limped towards a wooden chest. The chest had a green tint under years of rot and neglect. The only light in the cave was provided by a source of fire deeper into the cave. The figure opened the chest and placed a large, bloodied spear into it. The Dragoon Lance.

The next morning, Vincent was startled awake by the ringing of his cellular phone. He had come home only hours before after searching most of the night for Lions.

"Yes?"

"Vincent, this is President Shinra. I have a very important job for you."

Vincent was instantly alert. "Yes sir, but we have not secured the--"

"Never mind what you're doing now!" The President spoke in dire tones, "This new assignment is far more important than any other Turk business. You are to rendezvous with a freighter ship on the northern continent. It is carrying very important cargo as well as three of our most important scientists. You will accompany them to the town of Nibelheim where you and Lions will secure their presence in the Nibelheim field office. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir, but," Vincent felt a lump form in his throat, "Lions is missing, sir. He disappeared sometime last night. I haven't been able to locate him."

"What?!!" And with that, Vincent held the phone from his ear to prevent serious hearing loss from the verbal onslaught.

"This is indeed a serious matter, Vincent," The President continued, "But I need someone I trust implicitly to oversee the Nibelheim project. That is you and only you." And with that Vincent realized this new mission must be serious. President Shinra was not a man to compliment his employees. "I will send Malcom and Reece to investigate Lions' disappearance."

"Yes sir," Vincent prepared to hang up the phone.

"...And Vincent,"

"Sir?"

"I'm counting on you on this one."

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Author's Notes: The first chapter of my humble little fanfic is out of the way, and what did everyone think? I'll admit the story is a bit slow right now, but I'm building to something. So hold your water, dammit!! As you may have guessed by now, all this friction between Wutai and the Shinra will eventually lead to WAR! That's right! And don't put money on which side our favorite ex-Turk will choose! Plus, as the war wages, the Shinra may have to send in a certain young cadet Highwind into the fray..... The rest of AVALANCHE will be joining the storyline when it reaches their time! As if you didn't know, comments and criticism welcome!