

Chapter Thirteen: What Goes up

"Hold onto your drawers and don't piss in 'em!!" - *Cid Highwind*

Rain spattered through the dark sky above the Nibel Area. Thick clouds blanketed the horizon as far as the eye could see. In the distance, streaks of lightning danced in their eternal patterns.

"Engines!! Dammit, I need engines!!"

Cid Highwind held firmly onto the steering wheel on the bridge of the airship Highwind with his left hand, raised his right leg and booted the control panel. Alarms and buzzers screamed throughout the massive ship, occasionally drowned out by the frazzled shouts of her crew.

"Captain! Bogey on radar at six o'clock!"

Cid turned his head in the direction of the aft monitors. He sputtered at the sight before him. A Weapon. Glimmering black and red, in a nosedive aimed at the plummeting ship. Its massive wings were folded on its back, and it was gaining. Its considerably larger mass caused it to fall faster toward the ailing vessel. Cid couldn't remember the Weapons being this large. It was easily ten times the size of his massive airship. And for the first time in many years, the old pilot was afraid.

"F\$%^\$!!! I can see that f#@%\$^in' thing with my own two eyes! Its divin' after us, and we're droppin' like a stone!!" He lifted the small mic mounted on his control panel to his mouth, "Jerry!! Get those blasted engines back on!!" He flipped a switch to transfer his call to the operations room, "Tifa! When I say so, I need you to summon Bahamut ZERO!!"

The bridge teetered and swayed as the crew held on for dear life. Cid grabbed wheel and pulled hard. The massive ship shook. The ground was coming up fast. He turned to see the enormous beast about to overtake them!

"Oh shit...."

A heavy rain pounded the terrain of Cosmo Canyon. The downpour provided the only sign of movement in the meager settling. The villagers sealed themselves in their dwellings, dry and safe, waiting for the shower to end.

Deep beneath the canyon habitation, a man in a red cape sat on a cave floor, legs folded underneath him. Vincent Valentine sat in absolute stillness, like a statue, immersed in a deep trance. He was unaware of the world around him. The iron claw that substituted his left arm lay dormant at his side, as lifeless as any inanimate object could be. His right arm was equally still at his other side, palm up.

Vincent was on a quest.

He ventured deep within his subconscious, swimming through the layers of his psyche. And the dream began.

The former Turk opened his eyes and became aware of his new surroundings. But there was nothing new about this place. The dank and pungent lab below the Nibelheim Mansion. Bile filled his throat and Vincent fought the urge to vomit. If he never saw this place again, it would be entirely too soon. He stood up from his seated position and walked toward the broken glass canisters. Shards surrounded them on the floor. Dust settled on the cracks. But Vincent could still smell it. Jenova. How many times would he curse that wretched name? An alien intruder to this world, festering like a cancerous wound within the depths of the Planet. The 'Crisis from the Sky', as the ancient Cetra had called it. It came as a stranger,

but stayed as a conqueror. And even in defeat it continues to plague this Planet. It haunts his dreams. But is there more to it? Is it all in Vincent's mind? This is what he came to learn.

The very cave where Red XIII was taken by Bugenhagen to learn the truth about his past was where Vincent ventured to learn the answers to his questions. The elders of Cosmo Canyon assisted the former Turk in engaging in this "vision quest" to seek contact with his past - to seek contact with Lucrecia. His lost love was trying to warn him of something, but what?

"Vincent."

It was her. Lucrecia. He slowly turned to face his beloved. She was as beautiful as ever - except for her skin color. It bore the same bluish tint he had seen in his dreams before. The shade of Jenova.

"Lucrecia," he cleared his throat, "What is it you are trying to tell me? Please, my love, tell me..."

The girl simply stared into his ruby eyes for what seemed like an eternity.

"Is there something I should be aware of? Some danger?"

A loud cackle filled the dark lab. Billows of green smoke poured in across the floor like an eerie fog. The insane cackle became focused as a shape moved into the lab through the fog. But this was not just any shape. It was a scrawny man in a lab coat. His hair was black and slicked back, streaks of grey ran through it. A pair of thick glasses sat on his pointy nose, in front of his beady, evil eyes. Hojo.

The mad scientist ceased his laughter and spoke, "Vincent! How good it is to see you again!" The man walked toward them. "I see you and Lucrecia have been catching up, how nice. How very nice indeed." His words dripped with venom.

Vincent said nothing. In the blink of an eye, he grabbed Hojo's throat with his iron claw and lifted him off his feet. The evil scientist gasped and choked, his eyes became bloodshot.

"Vincent," Lucrecia spoke softly, "This is unnecessary. He cannot do any harm to you. He has no corporeal form. None of us do. We live within Jenova, as memories."

Vincent recoiled in shock! He dropped the scientist, who fell on his hands and knees wheezing and gasping. This was no dream. This was something else entirely.

"Lucrecia, w-what do you mean?!"

She lowered her head and spoke slowly, "This is no dream. Our love has outlasted my life. I am not the Lucrecia you grew to love. I am what is left of her soul, trapped within this unholy prison. An astral spirit, floating through a twisted Lifestream."

"How can this be?!"

"So long as a piece of Jenova remains intact, Jenova lives. There was another. Like myself, Hojo and Sephiroth, injected with Jenova and cursed with its existence. He lived and grew. He became more of the alien than human. And he has poisoned another. Taken a vessel."

Vincent swallowed hard. This could not be true.

"Cloud was injected with Jenova. It gave him the strength to pass as a Shinra SOLDIER, is it - ?"

"No. To be merely injected with Jenova cells is to bond with it, but there would not be enough of the devil to truly alter a person. One would have to receive a large enough dose to completely become one with the alien." Lucrecia turned away from Vincent and moved toward the fog.

"Lucrecia!" Vincent reached out to her, but was unable to pursue.

But she was gone. He surveyed the darkened lab around him, and saw nothing. He was alone.

"Hurry, Vincent..." Lucrecia's disembodied voice surrounded him, "The cancer is attacking..."

Her voice trailed off as the lab faded from sight. A cold blackness was Vincent's only confident.

Space. The distant galaxies twinkled in harmonious patterns. Stars flickered and gleamed. Comets streaked through the cosmos. Among this infinite and endless horizon, the Planet flourished; and screamed.

A distant sparkle heralded the approach of something else. A large, metal dragon sailed through the constellations orbiting the Planet. Beams of sunlight kissed its polished chrome surface and danced. The blinding source of light shot through the universe.

The metal beast spread six razor-sharp wings and halted its flight. It opened wide its maw and screamed. A ball of bright yellow energy collected at the apex of its jaws and grew. The creature's head trembled as the amassed electricity became too much for even it to handle.

Finally, the steely dragon released the bolt of raw power from its jaws! A straight white pulse streaked towards the Planet at an unimaginable rate! The beam of energy raced through the upper atmosphere and tore through the mists and clouds gathered between heaven and earth. It cut through the air and into a rainstorm! Two shapes passed beneath as it seared the raindrops in the surrounding air! The energy bolt struck the second shape with unbelievable force! The giant Weapon roared in agony as it became encompassed in a mushroom cloud of heat and plasma!

"Scratch one Weapon."

Cid Highwind gritted his teeth and held on for dear life as the airship shuddered towards the cruel earth below. The Highwind was pushed forward by the incredible force of the explosion! He watched the enormous Weapon drift downward away from them and sneered. The alarms and buzzers continued their song around the Highwind and Cid cursed in frustration. The old pilot kicked the control panel as hard as he could to no avail! It was then he looked up and saw the ground approaching rapidly. If he had any more ideas, now would be the time to use them.

And out of the corner of his eye, he saw it - his mop. It was rolling around the bridge amidst the confusion. He leapt over the steering wheel and dove to the floor. His fist closed around the handle just as the Highwind was about to collide with the Planet!

"Anger of the Land!!!"

A large bubble formed in the soil of the dry, dead ground below. The convex shape shattered to reveal a towering giant.

The dauntless form of Titan roared to life as the airship closed in! The giant summon monster spread its massive arms wide to intercept the metal behemoth. The Highwind struck the giant with ten times the force of a runaway freight train!

The airship proceeded forward as the powerhouse dug its heels into the ground, carving a large trench! The ship's speed slowed gradually while Titan gritted its massive teeth. The metal airship scraped against the rocks and earth, the sound of which deafened all in the surrounding area with a ear-splitting screech!

The Highwind eventually slowed to a stop, and the Titan faded from existence. And it was over. The rain from the sky above the Highwind splattered and dissolved on its searing hull. Thin streams of smoke rose from several points around the airship, disappearing into the gray clouds.

Cid slowly opened his eyes and cursed. The old pilot lifted himself off of the steering column and painfully struggled to his feet. He put his right hand on his back and looked around the bridge. He groaned. The bridge crew were likewise slipping back into consciousness and gathering themselves. Damage to the Highwind was minimal, or so it seemed to Cid.

"Everybody okay?" The pilot rasped. "Check the rest of the crew for injuries and start assessing the damage to the Highwind." He took out a crushed pack of cigarettes and then amended, "And then find out where the hell we landed!" Cid walked off the bridge.

A tiny droplet slid down the side of a light-colored glass surface. The glass surface belonged to a half-full bottle of clear whiskey. The golden liqueur glistened under the lights of the Starlet Pub in Cosmo Canyon. Barret Wallace looked up from his drink and frowned. What the hell was he doing here?

Vincent had contacted him about investigating Lucrecia's cave several nights ago. The two had found a trail which led them to Cosmo Canyon. The elders here had tried to help them but Barret couldn't see any results.

And then there was Yuffie. She showed up giving them a hysterical story about some giant Weapon digging its claws into the Dao Chao mountains. Barret didn't completely believe her story, but in actual fact, he didn't really believe her. Even after all they'd been through, saving the Planet from Meteor and Sephiroth, that business with Cloud, the death of Aeris, he still carried the same suspicions from their first encounter with the young ninja. Yuffie had always seemed to be up to something, and that was one thing Barret didn't like.

He looked across the pub and saw her, conning some locals out of the price of her drinks. She was always working. The large man slowly rose from his rickety, wooden chair. Perhaps it was time someone set her straight.

Barret began to move around his table when he stopped short. His gaze fell on the curtain entrance. The steady rain poured outside. In front of the entrance, a rotund patron brushed rain off of his brown suit and adjusted his yellow bow-tie.

Barret couldn't believe his eyes. He wiped his face off with his hand picked up his whiskey bottle. The miner looked suspiciously at the glass container and returned it to the table. Palmer. He was really here. The last person Barret EVER expected to see again was wobbling over to the bar. It was time for a little reunion.

"One, uh tea, please," Palmer spoke as if he had a mouthful of food. He always did. As the bartender moved away, he nervously amended, "With lard!" The bartender looked back at Palmer in disgust and then resumed filling out this strange order. Barret moved up behind Palmer and placed his massive hand on his shoulder. Palmer turned white and glanced behind him.

"Fat-man! What's a tub like you doing in a place like this?"

Palmer trembled as he spoke, "Hey-hey, don't say 'fat'... uh Barret, right?" Barret glared at him and grinned evilly. "Uh, hi... I'm just in the uh.. neighborhood, and thought I'd uh... stop by." Barret took the stool next to Palmer and waved Yuffie over. "So you work for Junon now, right?" Barret tried as hard as he could to look civilly at the obese executive. "So what's Heidegger got you doin' over in this neck of the woods?" Yuffie sat on the other side of Palmer and listened intently. Palmer nervously looked over at the young ninja and then back at the large miner.

"Uh.. Nothing, really. I just stopped in for uh... some tea."

"Really?" Barret raised his hand in refusal to the bartender when he arrived with a steaming cup of tea. "Bring us three shot glasses and the biggest damn bottle of whiskey you got." The barkeep nodded and turned away.

Palmer looked down at Yuffie, who simply grinned, then looked back at Barret, who was likewise grinning. He swallowed hard and was afraid.

Nanaki slowly opened his bright yellow eye and frowned. He was still in the Nibelheim hospital. The crimson beast had hoped it was all some disturbing dream. His encounter with the Lifestream had left him weak, but at the same time it strengthened his inner spirit. Red XIII had been given a second chance to say goodbye to his grandfather, his mentor, Bugenhagen. But there was something else. A darkened corner of his subconscious. Why hadn't he seen it before?

The rain continued to pelt the window pane in his room. Cloud and the others had hurried off to investigate reports of some trouble in Rocket Town. Could it be that Rufus Shinra was alive? Rufus. What was it about that name that sent a chill down his spine?

But such musings would have to wait, for here in the darkened room, Nanaki of Cosmo Canyon must rest. As he slowly fell into unconsciousness, an uneasiness washed over him. Even above the ether and bandages, he could smell something else. Oil. But not just any oil, oil from a firearm, well polished and maintained. Then he heard the floorboards outside his room creak, ever so slightly. The sound was almost inaudible even for him.

"Who's ...there?!" His voice was weak and raspy.

Suddenly, a masked soldier leapt into the room and muzzled the beast! He held a cloth tightly over Red's mouth and nose. Red XIII weakly struggled to avail, and began to lose consciousness from inhaling the strange chemicals soaked into the cloth. As his eyelid lowered, he watched the soldier carry him out into the rain...

An orange sunrise gently caressed the horizon in the endless Corel desert surrounding the Gold Saucer. The barren landscape was dry and harsh, all but completely devoid of human contact. Except, that is, for today.

The blackened Highwind lay motionless under the desert sun. The iron behemoth sat at the end of a long trench made during its hasty and highly unorthodox landing. It was tilted slightly to one side, and thin trails of smoke climbed into the sky.

Damage to the massive airship was extensive. Metal plates in the ship's hull were bent open. Black scorches decorated the outer edges. Giant claw marks ran across either side. If this vessel would ever fly again, it would not be soon.

A handful of men in blue and orange uniforms gathered around one side of the airship along with several civilians. In the center of this gathering - Cid Highwind.

“F@&*\$!!” The old pilot threw a cigarette butt onto the dirt and ground it out with the toe of his boot. “This is gonna take a lot more work than I thought. Shera, you and Jerry try to fix those blasted fuses. The lightning probably melted them into their damn holes! Reeve do you think you could get our radio working again?”

"No problem, Cid."

“Good. The rest of you do whatever it takes to get this heap back into the air! Unless you all want to wait for magic chocobo carriages, the Highwind’s our only way outta this heat swamp. Now move out!” The group parted and went to their appointed tasks. Cloud and Tifa stayed behind to talk to Cid.

"Cloud, Tifa, I guess you realize where the hell we landed." Cid took out another cigarette and lit it. "I figure Corel Prison's just over that hill," The pilot glanced off into the distance, "With Cait and Red gone, we'll have to do the best we can to guard the crash site from cons, at least until we can get our asses into the air."

"Right," Cloud nodded and took out his sword. He carefully checked the materia slots. Tifa did likewise with her gloves.

“Now lets get this boat into the sky!” Cid turned and headed towards the ship with Cloud and Tifa close behind.

"ZZZzzzZZZzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz"

Palmer rested his round head on the bar at the Starlet Pub in Cosmo Canyon. A mountain of empty shot glasses littered the bar around him. His two drinking companions were walking out into the morning sun.

"Damn!! I can't f&^%\$#in' believe it!!" Barret cursed aloud as he and Yuffie quickly descended the stone steps into the canyon. "That snake Rufus Shinra has been hidin' under a rock the past year, and now he's upta no good!"

"Why the hell would he send Palmer looking for Red XIII?" Yuffie frowned up at Barret, "I got a real bad feeling about this, Barret."

"You ain't the only one, sister..."

Barret and Yuffie hurried through Cosmo Canyon and ascended the steps to Bugenhagen's cave. When they reached the iron entrance, they were halted by the elder Hargo.

"You must go no further." The old man raised his hand in protest.

"Outta the way, Hiawatha," Barret spat, "We got somethin' real important to tell Vince. I ain't got anymore time for this crap."

"Your friend has come to seek the answers within. He must not be disturbed." The elder folded his arms across his chest in defiance.

"Just great." Barret glared down at the old man.

Rufus Shinra was pleased. Everything was going according to plan. The launch of the Junon - 1 was only days away. His control over Junon Inc. was absolute. Soon everything on the Planet would return to the way he liked it: under his control.

He strode confidently through the newly-acquired Rocket Town towards the launch site. Overhead, a sleek, black helicopter circled for a landing. When the advanced vessel touched down, the hatch door swung open. Colonel Heidegger carefully stepped off the helicopter and ran to Rufus, his head down to avoid the spinning blades.

"Did you find them?" Rufus spoke to Heidegger with little civility.

"Yes," Heidegger nodded carefully.

Three more passengers stepped off the helicopter and ran under the blades toward the Colonel and Rufus. Their blue suits gleamed in the bright sunlight.

Rufus Shinra was pleased.

The afternoon sun bleated down on the Corel desert and everything within it. Lizards, snakes and scorpions sought shelter beneath rocks and dirt. The intense heat baked what plant life managed to live in this harsh environment. And within this heat, the Highwind's crew desperately toiled to repair their ailing ship.

Cid Highwind had long since discarded his trademark flight jacket, sporting a dusty and sweaty white undershirt. The pilot wiped his forehead and continued dragging a metal beam through the sand towards his ship. The two mechanics from Rocket Town worked on makeshift staging patching up the hull of the ship.

"Here," The pilot rasped, "I got this from below deck. You can use it to plug some o' the holes in this heap!" Cid dropped the beam next to the staging and entered the airship through the side hatch. He followed the wall inside the ship, using it as a hand rest as he made his way through the tilted vessel. Cid came to the tiny iron door that led to the radio room. He opened it and entered the small room.

The heat inside was unbearable. The metal walls had only magnified the desert sun. The entire room was more than strikingly similar to that of an oven. And in the center of the room, Reeve worked. The mayor of Nibelheim knelt among a sea of colored wires and tiny metal parts.

"How's the radio coming, Reeve?" Cid was impressed by the mere fact that Reeve had not passed out in this tiny room.

"Great!" The former Shinra executive answered in a bubbly tone. "It ain't no thing for your favorite fortune-telling machine!" He happily continued his work.

Cid paused, "Uh, Reeve...I think you've been working too hard." The pilot carefully eyed his sun-stroked friend. It was then Tifa happened to be passing by. "Tifa, could you take Reeve to the galley and get him some water?"

"Sure, Cid," Tifa entered the room, "Holy! The heat in here..."

"Hey!" Reeve turned to Tifa while he worked, "Would you like your fortunes told??" Cid and Tifa exchanged wary glances.

"Come on, Reeve," Tifa helped him to his feet, "I think you've earned a break." It was then that Tifa noticed the bump on the back of Reeve's head. "Cid! Did you see this?" The pilot looked over at the spot on Reeve's head as Tifa held it still.

"\$#&^%*!!" Cid looked solemnly at the large goose egg. "He musta got this when we crashed. Do you think a cure would do anything for 'im?"

"Hey! Can I go to the Gold Saucer and play 'Mog's House'??!" Reeve leapt free of his two friends and bounded down the hall.

"Reeve!" Cid and Tifa pursued.

"What is the meaning of this?!!" Red XIII bellowed as loud as he could in his weakened condition through the glass cage he had awoken in. "I demand to know why I am being held here against my will!"

Red XIII looked around the darkened room surrounding the glass cage with ire in his eye. He could not see anything specific in the shadows all around him. There was movement. But nothing else. Above him, inside the glass cage, a strange orb suspended by wires and a metal rod descended into the glass cage. Red couldn't specifically recall where he had seen it before, but there was something eerily familiar about the orb. Then it began to flash. The orb shifted from color to color, blinking on and off faster and faster. There was almost something mesmerizing about the orb and its flashing pattern. Something comfortable.

Blinking.

Faster.

Faster.

No worries.

No fears.

No will.

No soul.

And Red XIII was no more.

"One of two things are gonna happen here."

Barret Wallace stood over the Cosmo Canyon elder and glowered down at him. The large miner was easily three times the size of the man blocking his entrance to Bugenhagen's cave.

"Either you're gonna step your ass aside and let us in there," He gritted his teeth and sneered, "Or I'm gonna rip yer arms off..."

The two men glared into each others eyes for what seemed like an eternity.

"Got it!" Yuffie turned away from the metal door as it slid open and grinned widely. Barret moved around the elder towards the doorway.

"I must protest this action!" The elder made a last, futile attempt to halt the two adventurers.

Then they heard it. A loud wail. It sounded like someone was in agony. More specifically, it sounded like Vincent was in trouble.

"Vince!" Barret bounded down the stone steps to the pit where he had accompanied Red XIII on his quest over a year ago. He quickly grabbed the rope with his one hand and slid to the lower level, with Yuffie in pursuit. The agonized shouting continued to grow louder and louder as they neared their companion's whereabouts.

And they found him, huddled in a ball on the cave floor, in the middle of violent convulsions! Barret and Yuffie choked when they saw their friend in such a state.

"Vince! Goddammit!! What the hell's wrong?!" Barret grabbed Vincent by the collar to attempt to shake him back to his senses. Yuffie looked on in horror, holding a fist to her mouth. The elder Hargo hurried into the cave with them. Barret glared up at the old man.

"Snap him outta this! Now!!!"

"I cannot." The elder was clearly upset at how things had turned out. "He must find his way back to us on his own."

"GRAAARRGGGHHHH.....!!!!!" Vincent continued to violently convulse on the floor, knocking Barret away! The large miner regained his balance and pounced on Vincent, pinning him still. It took all the strength Barret could muster to restrain his ailing ally. Yuffie knelt next to them to try and aid. "NOOOOO!!!!" Vincent was not in his right mind.

"Vincent, snap your ass out of it!!!" Barret roared!

Vincent threw Barret aside once again and held his head in his hands, twitching erratically, whispering something. Yuffie bent down to try and hear what he was saying:

"Jenova is Weapon..... Jenova is Weapon..... Jenova is Weapon..... Jenova is Weapon....."

And the Planet screamed.

Nights in the Corel Desert were typically cold and peaceful. Until now:

Cid Highwind banged his wrench against the hot metal hull of his airship, "Damn you tin can!" Tifa and Cloud emerged from the side hatch as he prepared to take another swing. "Hey, how's Reeve doin'?"

Cloud looked solemnly at his old friend, "We think he may have a concussion. That would explain his behavior."

"Yeah," Tifa agreed, "We have to get him to a hospital as soon as possible."

"Tifa," Cid snarled, "There ain't nothin' I'd rather do than get this heap back into the air but she's just-" Cid struck the Highwind with his wrench, "a-" He struck it again, "damn-" Again, "stubborn-" Again, "piece-" Again, "of-" Again, "Shi-"

"Cid!" Cloud grabbed the pilot's arm and halted his tirade! "I thought I heard something." They listened. Nothing but the twinkling of the first stars in the late evening sky above the desert.

Suddenly, beyond the distant hill, Weapon rose from the behind the formation and roared. It was enormous. The onyx giant completely blocked out the moon when it stood. The cigarette from Cid's mouth plummeted to the ground, his jaw hanging wide.

The beast opened its arms and spread its massive wings and let loose a blood chilling cry. The ground around them shook and trembled in its wake. It began towards them.

Jenova is Weapon.....

Author's notes: Well! How did everyone like this chapter??? It's come to my attention that more than three people are actually reading this thing! All I have to say is: WHY? No, but seriously, if you're reading and enjoying 'Crisis' by all means drop me a line and let me know! Is there anything I should focus on? Is there anything I ruined?

AND, I got a request from a reader to include Sephiroth in some form or another, like a flashback or dream sequence. I wasn't planning on including him, mostly because I feel he was duly dealt with at the end of FF7, and there are plenty of other fics out there that exclusively include Sephiroth, and I'm striving to make sure Crisis is as unique as possible! BUT, if enough readers email me and tell me to write him in somewhere, thy will be done!

So chapter 13 was the blockbuster of all chapters! So much revealed, but so much more to come! Can I top this chapter? I'll damn well try!!!

Comments and criticism welcome!