

Chapter Three: Dark Corridors

"A pro isn't someone who sacrifices himself for his job. That's just a fool." - *Reno*

"What a dump."

Two men in blue suits walked into the outskirts of the Wutai village. They strode confidently into the crowds of people followed by a dozen armed Shinra soldiers. The townspeople eyed this new addition to their town with suspicion and wariness.

"Calm down, Reece." The larger man with the dark sunglasses lifted his eye wear and glanced at his comrade. "The Pres wants to know what the hell happened to Lions. He came here with Vince on a simple grab mission. He never came back."

"I was at the briefing too, genius." The blond haired man looked back at the first. "Lions just didn't up and spread wings to sail off into the wild blue yonder. He came to this pit and someone sacked him. It don't get much clearer than that." Reece wiped a trail of sweat from his brow and undid his jacket. The Wutai summer was not his ideal choice for a mission. An old man selling bottles of potion looked up from his stand to notice the two sidearms under the blond man's jacket.

Malcom sighed at his fellow Turk's rudeness. He likewise undid his sport coat and wiped the sweat from the back of his neck. He made a mental note to talk to the Colonel about relaxing the dress code for Turks during the summer months.

"We'll start looking here," Reece motioned towards the Turtle Paradise inn. "And maybe we can get some cold drinks on this hot day." Reece smiled back wryly at his fellow Turk.

"Just keep your mind on the assignment," Malcom said in a serious tone.

The Turks, followed by their soldiers, entered the bar to receive looks of mistrust from the patrons already inside. Reece walked to a large table in the corner and approached the two old men sitting there.

"Beat it."

The old men looked at each other in disbelief and then back at the Turk. They shrugged and went up to the bar. Reece and Malcom sat at the table accompanied by some of the soldiers, who stood their rifles against the table. The rest found other nearby tables to claim from other patrons.

The hunt for Lions began.

"What is this crap?" Reece huffed in disgust. A month had passed since the Turks had begun their investigation. They had questioned almost half the citizens in the bustling town Wutai, and they were no closer to uncovering what had become of their missing teammate, Lions. A nearby farmer overheard some type of disturbance during the night about two months ago. When he checked his land the next morning, he noticed what looked like spots of blood on one of his fenceposts. But now, rain had destroyed any evidence there may have been. Reece stood up from examining the fence. Their one lead, useless.

Worse yet, most of the townspeople had been uncooperative to say the least. It was clear what the town of Wutai thought of the Shinra corporation. They didn't like them, that was clear.

"So now what?" Malcom was also becoming impatient, even though that was unlike him. It was the usual manner for

Reece, who often strove to find new levels of spite and impatience. "If I have to spend one more night in this town, I'll go mad! The people here don't like us, and they really like to show it. I wouldn't be surprised if they were all covering for whoever's responsible for Lions disappearance!"

A lightbulb went on in Reece's head, "Damn, Malcom, that's it! These jerkwater losers would love to see us put our tails between our legs and head home failures. They've GOT to be hiding something!" Reece headed back towards town, with Malcom right behind him.

"Godo, I am worried." Shake approached his young friend who sat in almost total darkness. The sun had not set yet, but the blinds were drawn and the windows shut. "The Shinra have increased their efforts in the search for their missing employee. They've brought in more soldiers. Some of them have become rough with the townspeople. We may be looking at a riot if this keeps up."

"I am aware of the situation, Shake," Godo didn't move his head, "But it was you yourself who told me to cease my outbursts against the employees of Shinra. I have allowed them to drill a safe distance from our scared mountains." Godo sighed in disgust. "I still do not know what they expect to find here."

"I've heard rumors that all the exploration is the result for our vast supply of materia. It's possible that this new source of energy they are looking for may be related to materia somehow."

Godo continued to sit in silence. "There is only so much invasion into Wutai I can tolerate," he said finally, "And the Shinra are becoming dangerously close."

"I notice you no longer remind me that you blame them for your father's murder," Shake swallowed hard. Godo turned his head at this. "And I can not help but wonder..."

"If I had anything to do with the Shinra employee's disappearance?!" Godo glared at his friend. "Leave me."

Shake turned and left Godo to his thoughts.

"So how does the search go?"

Reece looked up from his cup of coffee early one morning in the Turtle Paradise inn. "Vince?" He immediately recognized his fellow Turk. He carried a suitcase and had a pack slung over his left shoulder. "Vince! What the hell are you doing here? We heard you had your hands full guarding some egghead convention in Nibelheim!"

Vincent shook hands with Malcom and Reece before taking a seat at the table and carefully placing his belongings on the floor next to him.

"I requested a few days away from the project," Vincent smiled, "All that scientific research was giving me a migraine." Vincent lied. The sight of Hojo and Lucrecia together tore through him worst than any weapon ever could.

"Damn, man," Malcom looked over his sunglasses, "We thought this assignment was something way too serious too blow off for a few days."

"Yuriko finished that undercover work she was doing," Vincent signaled the bartender for a coffee, "And I convinced her to cover for me for awhile." Yuriko was the fifth and final member of the Shinra special police. The Turks may have been cut-throats, but they looked out for each other. "Have you uncovered any leads on the whereabouts of Lions?"

Reece's smile melted away, "We have our suspicions. The biggest one hangs around the neck of a local hothead, Godo Kisaragi." These words hit Vincent like a needle in his eye. His own thoughts had led him to the same conclusion. Furthermore, Godo and Lions had been in contact shortly before the Turk vanished. But for the moment, Vincent decided not to share these thoughts. With anyone.

"Would you mind if I questioned him?" The other two Turks looked up in surprise. "As you know, I am from Wutai. Maybe I can convince him to talk to me."

"Knock yourself out," Reece raised his cup as the waitress approached the table with the coffee pot, "Mac and I got some other leads to look into. Turks forever."

"Turks forever," Vincent repeated.

The pagoda at the edge of town was quiet and dark. No sounds came from inside. No one stirred about outside. Vincent paused before ascending the steps. He took out his sidearm and checked the clip. Full. He replaced it and approached the steps. Just a precaution. He slowly made his way up the steps and towards the door. He knocked. No answer. He pushed on the door and it opened. Nothing but silence greeted him. The pagoda itself didn't have many windows, and depended on indoor candles for light. But no candles were lit. The Turk swallowed hard, and descended into darkness.

Vincent slowly made his way down a gloomy corridor, past a fenced off indoor terrarium. Tiny fish swam through a tiny pond surrounded by dead flowers and rotted banzai trees. The garden was in neglect, but the opening in the pagoda above it supplied a modest amount of light. But the light itself was surrounded by shadow.

Vincent turned a corner and approached a door. He carefully began to slide the door open to examine the contents of this room.

"You are not welcome, Shinra."

Vincent drew his weapon and aimed at a silhouetted figure sitting near a covered window.

"I have no desire to fight you. Leave." Godo didn't move a muscle when he spoke. He sat still facing the window, and the Turk could barely tell if he was even breathing.

"I have a few questions I would like to ask you," Vincent said in his trademark serious tone. He holstered his weapon and approached Godo.

"I have no desire to speak with you. Leave."

"I was once like you," Vincent stood next to Godo, "Dead inside. When my mother died, I was only ten. My father was from Kalm but found work with the Shinra in Midgar. We lived here in Wutai, but I grew up alone. After my mother passed, I decided that emotions were a costly commodity and killed them off inside of me. I was alive only to the outside world. When my father died, I hardly noticed. I was already dead."

Godo looked up at the Turk and then back out the window.

"But I recently had my emotions reawakened," Vincent continued, "Love, happiness, they were born anew." Vincent

paused and turned towards the door. "That is why it was so hard to have them ripped away again. But that awoke other emotions. Hatred. Despair. Rage."

Godo stood and faced the Turk. "What is it you are trying to tell me?"

Vincent looked back towards him. "I recognize the look in your eyes. I used to see it every day in the mirror. Do not give in to despair. Do not give up. There is hope. There has to be." The two looked at each other in silence.

"What happened to your love?" Godo finally asked.

"She went to another," Vincent clenched his teeth, "And she carries his child."

"When the Shinra took my father," Godo said in a low voice, "I thought my world had ended. The only thing that kept me going was the need for vengeance. But that emotion gave way to despair. How can I fight an entire civilization? For every serpent head I cut off, two new heads will replace it." Vincent raised an eyebrow and turned to leave. "I thought you had some questions."

"You have answered them all."

"Tell us what we want to know, old man!"

The sun set beyond the Da-Chao mountains. The atmosphere at the edge of the Wutai village was quiet and peaceful, save the occasional shouts from a blue suited man. A large oak post stood firm, rotted with age near the outskirts of town. Large trees surrounded the area. Tied to the post was an old man, who hunched weakly during his interrogation.

"We know you're hiding something," Reece raged, "You're the village elder, and that means you know everything that goes on in this berg!" Malcom stood just behind his fellow Turk while the questioning went on, cracking his knuckles with anticipation.

"I..... I cannot help you," Shake looked up at Reece through swollen eyes.

Reece looked gravely at the old man, "Oh dear that's a shame." His grim look became a smile, "We'll have to ask easier questions, then..." He held up a black handle and a blade popped out.

Shake looked gravely at him, ".....bolt."

Vincent was making his way back towards town from Godo's pagoda when he saw the sky erupt with light on the other side of town, towards the Da-Chao mountains. Then he heard the rumbling.

"That was a bolt spell," The Turk sprinted towards the source. He drew his weapon as he ran, while horrible thoughts began to fill his mind. This night would not end well. His sides began to burn but he pressed on as fast as he could, when huge flame erupted near the spot where he had seen the lightning. Then the earth shook.

"Fire2, Earth? What in the Planet is going on there?" The sounds of voices yelling and screaming accompanied this symphony of terror. Vincent knew a bad situation when he saw it.

He ran up to the spot of the spells and choked at the sight that greeted him. His two fellow Turks, slightly burned and

wounded, standing before a figure on the ground. The seriously injured form of Shake was very still, but then coughed. Relieved to see signs of life, Vincent crouched before him and took his hand.

"Shake, I am taking you to the hospital," Vincent looked solemnly upon the old man's crumpled form. "Just try and save your strength. You will be alright." Other villagers had surrounded the apparent battleground and looked on in fear. As more stragglers gathered, young Godo broke through the crowd.

"Shake!!!" The young man gasped in horror, "What has happened?! Who did this?!" The old man slowly raised his gaze to meet Godo's. A slight smile formed on his lips.

"Do not.... forget your... duty.... my son..." The words came hushed and raspy as Vincent and Godo looked on. "You must... save....," Shake coughed harshly, "....Wutai...."

And he was dead.

The sun had completely set. The moon and several torches carried by the gathered citizens provided the only light in this dark moment. For what seemed to be an eternity, all was still.

"YOU." Godo turned and faced the two wounded Turks. "YOU DID THIS." He raised a shaking finger towards them. Godo's face was flushed red. Vincent gently placed Shake's arms across his chest, as Godo stood facing the other two Turks. Vincent looked gravely into Shake's dead eyes, and closed them with his hand. Godo raised his sword.

"Raaarrggh!!!" The samurai leaped into the air towards the two Turks and came down swinging wildly! Reece managed to dive out of his path, while Malcom used his rifle as a staff to block some of the strikes. But he didn't block them all. Godo struck the larger Turk with his blade cutting him deeply on his lower side. Malcom screamed in pain.

Vincent was on his feet with his weapon drawn as Reece had both sidearms out, aimed at the furious blur. But Reece was struck from behind by a villager from the crowd! He dropped his guns and fell to the earth. He looked up to see Godo coming down upon him!

"Fire2!!!"

A burst of flame exploded from the ground in front of him, hitting Godo aside! The warrior landed on the ground in front of the crowd, some of whom quickly attended to their champion. Vincent put one of Malcom's arms on his shoulder and struggled to carry him to safety. Reece scrambled to his feet and followed his comrades. But most of the crowd became an angry mob. Those who weren't looking on Godo picked up sticks and rocks and pursued the limping trio. Reece looked back and cast the occasional fire spell to cover their escape.

The Turks managed to enter the nearest building, an item shop. Luckily it was deserted and needed only a bullet from Vincent's gun to unlock the door. The Vincent carried Malcom into the dark structure, who was barely conscious from the wound. His blood soaked his clothing and stained Vincent's hands. Vincent gently sat Malcom down against a wall and rushed to help Reece with the door. They pushed it closed and sealed the door with the deadbolt.

"Vincent, help me push this counter against the door," said Reece as he leaned on the counter top. Vincent helped his fellow Turk move the object towards the door. A final heave blocked the door as the shouts of the crowd became louder.

"What the hell happened, Reece?" Vincent was enraged as he grabbed the other Turk's arm.

Reece looked back in opposition to Vincent's accusing stare, "We were conducting official damn Turk business when the

old codger sprung his materia on us! We searched him for weapons but he must've had a piece in his shorts somewhere..." Vincent did not appreciate his mocking tone. He ripped up a nearby table cloth to use as a bandage for his wounded friend. Reece sensed his disgust, "Hey, you're lucky I keep some materia in my holster! We're lucky we got our asses outta there!"

"Damn it, Reece, what the hell did you do to that old man?!!!" Vincent turned his head toward the smug Turk as he shouted with rage. One could almost see smoke coming from Vincent. Reece loosened his tie and handed it to Vincent.

"Here, use this to tie that wound," A shard of compassion escaped Reece, "We gotta get Mac to a doctor before he spills out all over the floor." The shard had shattered.

"I asked you a question!" Vincent feverishly worked to try and stop Malcom's bleeding. "What the hell were you doing by that post?! I saw charred ropes around it on the ground!!"

"Hey, we were doing our JOB," Reece became very defensive, "We weren't taking time off to chat with the enemy!"

Vincent tightly tied the bandage on his unconscious friend and stood up. "What is THAT supposed to mean?!" But their confrontation was interrupted by a rock crashing through the window! The angry townspeople had surrounded the small shop - and they wanted vengeance.

Your efforts are futile, girl...

A pregnant woman in a lab coat limped along a stone corridor towards a spiral staircase. She leaned on the wall as she walked shakily towards the bottom of the stairs. Sweat rolled down her face as she huffed in exasperation.

You cannot escape your destiny. Soon you will give birth to a conqueror. My conqueror....

"N- No....." She wheezed under an intense strain.

"Lucrecia!" A shrilling voice shouted behind her within the lab in the basement of the Nibelhiem mansion. "Come back here!" A thin man in a lab coat ran out of the lab and after the woman. "You're in no condition to act so foolish!!" He shrieked as he approached her.

"Leave me be! You and that torturous voice! I hate you!!" The woman collapsed.

"How can this be, my Jenova? How did she break free of your control?" The man kneeled beside Lucrecia's fallen form.

It does not matter, my love..... she is ready....

"Grarrgh....!!!!"

And Lucrecia went into labor.

Vincent examined the broken window. Shouts of anger erupted from many of the people in the surrounding mob. He carefully approached the window and peeked over the ledge. Godo broke through the front of the crowd and fumed toward the item shop. He looked down at the handle of his sword and inserted a green polished gem. He held up his weapon and glared at the structure.

"Reflect!" Vincent held his gun in the air as he shouted to the heavens. A shimmering bright green bubble encased the tiny shop and flashed out of sight. A bolt of lightning crackled from the sky and struck the invisible bubble with shrieking energy!

"That will not hold them off long," He spoke in desperation. "Reece, see if you can find some cure potions, or perhaps some restore materia!" He looked down at his wounded comrade, still unconscious and bleeding through his makeshift bandages.

"Right," And the Turk hurried over to some wooden crates. Vincent turned back to the window and watched as other villagers armed themselves with materia and assaulted the force field with various spells. Vincent suddenly remembered he had his cellular phone with him and frantically dialed a number.

"Private Cole? This is Vincent," The Turk heard a lot of static and background noise on the other end, "What is happening?" "Well, sir," An explosion interrupted his sentence, "Me an' the rest of the soldiers were resting at the inn when a large group o' villagers showed up makin' a ruckus! They got a lot 'a materia out there an' they ain't afraid to use it!" Another explosion erupted in the background.

"Here, this is all I could find," Reece handed Vincent two cure potions.

Vincent turned back to his phone, "Okay, try to make contact with headquarters and explain our situation. We are at the item shop holding off an angry crowd of citizens."

"Yes, sir," The private answered quickly.

"And, Cole?"

"Sir?"

"Do your best to avoid any fatalities. Please." Vincent closed his phone and returned it to his jacket. He loosened his shirt and sighed heavily.

"They're not working!" Reece looked up from his wounded comrade serious and afraid. "Damn, Vince, he's gonna die!"

"All right, calm down," More explosions erupted outside, and Vincent could tell his reflect spell was fading. "What we need is some restore materia. A few Cure3 spells might heal him enough for a doctor to save his life. He has lost a great deal of blood, so time is of the essence."

"That's it!" Reece snapped his fingers and jumped up, "Mac has a restore on him!" He carefully approached his fellow Turk and removed a green gem from his belt pack. He handed it to Vincent and stepped back. Vincent examined the bauble.

"Damn! Only a Cure2," He sighed in defeat. "It will have to suffice. Cure2!" The materia glowed for a second and ceased. No effect. "Cure2!!" Again the gem flashed. No effect. "Come on, Malcom, do not let me down." Reece looked on in desperation. "Cure2, blast you!!" Malcom sputtered and coughed, and the other Turks sighed deeply.

"You gave us a scare," Reece looked at his friend with a smile, "You big ape."

Just then the bubble shattered in an enormous explosion!

Angry villagers led by Godo rushed up towards the shop screaming bloody murder. Mob mentality had taken over. Tonight was not a good night to be a Turk.

Author's notes: Well doggy! Things look pretty grim for young Vincent! The citizens in Wutai aren't ready to play Parcheesi to settle up with Shinra. Things are coming to boil! And Lucrecia seems to be having her own share of woes with her unborn child. Things look bleak now, but it'll all work out in the end. I hope!

Until next time, move out!