

Chapter Seven: Shattered Dreams

"The Blood of the ancients courses through my veins, I am the one true, rightful heir to this planet!" - *Sephiroth*

Vincent.....

"Who's there?"

Vincent Valentine.....

"Show yourself!"

Imagine a void. Blackness. No light. No surroundings of any kind. Nothing to stand on, nothing to bump into. Nothing to touch. No sound of any kind, save the voice of a desperate man.

"I demand to know what is happening...."

You've failed them all, Vincent.

"No!"

Lions.

"No!!"

Shake.

"No!!"

Yuriko.

"No!!"

Reece.

"NO!"

Malcom.

"NO!!"

Sephiroth.

"Please don't--"

LUCRECIA.

The primal scream of a beast unleashed shattered the dead silence of the black void. For what seemed like an eternity, the voiced screamed itself hoarse. And then nothing.

Vincent opened his eyes to see an eerie green smoke passing before his face. He was back in the lab. In the basement of the Nibelheim mansion. All was silent. The scientific equipment was all there. Even the two large tanks were filled with a murky green bubbling liquid. Vincent looked at his surroundings. The green smoke sat on the floor of the lab like a slithering rodent, moving slowly around his feet. It almost completely covered the floor, and Vincent wondered what could be lurking around the lab floor under the eerie cover. Vincent slowly walked through the lab, the green-tinted light around him obscuring his blue Turk uniform, giving it a crimson appearance. He carefully approached one of the glass tanks and studied the murky liquid within. Then he saw it. Floating dead in the tank, the Jenova specimen seemed to train its eyeless sockets on the Turk. Then the tank began to glow, but faded just as quickly. Vincent swallowed hard and turned to the second tank. The lifeless infant. Dead. It had similar eyeless sockets which were in turn trained on the Turk. The baby's skin had a blue tint, which Vincent assumed resulted from the lack of oxygen when it drowned in this glass coffin.

"Vincent."

The Turk's ruby eyes grew wide. He did not turn his head. He couldn't. He knew that voice. He couldn't face her. Lucrecia.

"Vincent, why do you remain here?"

Slowly, Vincent turned to face the speaker. It was her. But not the same. Lucrecia had her same beautiful features - hair, eyes, face - but her skin sported the same blue tint. The color of Jenova.

"Your work here is done. You failed your mission. Now you must go. Back to the land of the living."

Vincent took her hand, "I cannot leave you, Lucrecia. You or your son."

A single tear trickled down her cheek, "But it is for the best. The Planet needs you. You must rid it of the cancer we have unleashed."

"NO! I will not leave your side again!" Vincent gazed in horror as his love faded from sight, a blue haze which gave way to the green fog that encircled the lab.

She is dead.

That voice again. Vincent was unsettled by the hollow, alien sound it made. Each syllable of speech sent shivers up and down his spine. Yet it had an almost female quality. Where did it come from? Behind him? He turned back to the pair of glass tanks. The two bodies floated, lifeless as ever, in their emerald ooze.

You have killed her. Just as you killed the others.

The ancient artifact remained motionless. Suspended in its bubbling green liquid. By all accounts it was dead. No signs of life. Nothing. But Vincent knew better. This was the cancer that had threatened the Planet. Yet he did nothing to stop it. And that was his sin.

"You've killed us all!!!"

Vincent reeled back to see Lucrecia, Shake, Lions, Yuriko, Reece and Malcom. Dead. Walking zombies. Scars and wounds worn like articles of clothing. And he did nothing. And that was his sin.

"Heidegger, these wars have gone on long enough!"

Colonel Heidegger held his PHS phone away from his ear as President Shinra bellowed through the other end. This was the part of his job he hated most - the battle reports. Everyday the same thing: he gives the President his progress report, the President chews him out for not finishing this dreary war with the small village of Wutai. It had been five and a half years since open conflict had erupted on the Wutai continent, and the President was losing his patience. The continent itself had become desolate to say the least. The rich forests of the southern part of the continent had been replaced with dead wood and grey soil. Nothing grew there anymore. The Wutai village itself had been half destroyed, and the clans had moved all their borders back as the Shinra advanced. But the warriors of Wutai were putting up more of a fight than anyone had expected. They certainly held their ground against a force as large as the Shinra military. Most of the credit for their survival could be attributed their leader, Lord Godo Kisaragi. Godo was adept at mobilizing what little forces he had left. Heidegger himself barely escaped with his life the day Malcom the Turk was killed over four years ago. The Shinra lost two aircraft carriers to their supposed "Water God", the Leviathan. All these factors contributed to the current sour mood of President Shinra.

"I - I'm sorry, Mister President," The Colonel swallowed hard, "The forces of Wutai are more of a problem than our tacticians had expected. Their materia reserves seem inexhaustible."

"I don't want to hear it!!!!"

Sweat rolled down Heidegger's face, "P-perhaps if you could send over some more troops, I could -"

"Yes. That is exactly what I shall do. A Gelnika will be arriving on your position in the morning. I expect the soldier inside to be given a hero's welcome. And if you don't end this war soon, it will be on your miserable head!!!"

"Yes, my president, thank y-"

::CLICK::

Heidegger slowly returned his phone to the communications post set up before him. Several officers stood nearby awaiting orders.

"I want the attack lines doubled!" The Colonel pushed two troops aside as he bellowed, "If we do not end this soon, it will be on your miserable heads!!" And with that tirade, Heidegger stormed away.

Deep beneath the Northern Crater, and unholy interaction was about to take place. Miles below the snowy fields of the continent, something slept. But today it was not a peaceful sleep. Something was interrupting its eternal slumber.

Soon we will be one, my child....

A small earth tremor shook the snow above. The residents of the Icicle Inn would dismiss these rumblings as an avalanche,

but their true nature could rip the very Planet from its orbit. The normally peaceful caves below the snow fields were in unrest. The cancer was spreading.

Nanaki looked into the holographic representation of the Planet with apprehension. He wished to himself that his grandfather Bugenhagen had not shown him how to operate his machine. Then perhaps he could live in blissful ignorance, unaware of the evil that stirred in the Lifestream. But no. He was destined to be a protector, and there was no better time to act in his role than the present. It was his birthright. For all those who lived in Cosmo Canyon and on the rest of the Planet, Nanaki would be strong. He would be brave.

"You seem troubled, young one."

Nanaki turned his head to see an old man enter the room and close the iron door behind him. Bugenhagen was usually in a jubilant mood in the worst of times, but now that the Shinra had discovered the Lifestream and mistook it for a new source of energy, his mood was soured to say the least. He still tried to hide it behind his dark sunglasses and boisterous laughter, but Bugenhagen was worried. Nanaki, if no one else, could clearly see this.

"Grandfather, something is moving in the Lifestream." The puma looked back to the holographic display, "Could the Shinra have started to experiment with it already?"

Bugenhagen sighed, "No, no I believe they are still occupied with their struggle in Wutai. They have not yet begun to exploit the Planet's energies. But it is only a matter of time. Hoo hoo hoo."

Sunrise in Wutai. The battle lines from both sides have begun to form. With the dawning of the sun, another battle was about to begin. And even if neither side realized it, it would be the most important fight of the entire war. In the Wutai village limits, clan warriors formed lines across the length of their homes. Weapons were drawn, materia was checked and rechecked.

Farther south on the continent, Shinra soldiers sandbagged the area. Rifles were loaded, checked and rechecked. Foxholes and trenches were dug. Sights were set on Wutai. Colonel Heidegger surveyed his army and readied himself for his greatest victory yet. He raised a massive hand into the air and signaled the entire force. He waved his hand in the air and pointed across the sandbagged walls to Wutai. That was the signal to start the attack. Troops marched across the grey and charred soil towards the village.

And then they saw it. Every warrior Wutai had left. Standing, weapons at the ready. Prepared for a titanic battle. With Lord Godo himself on the front line. And the battle was joined!

Swords and rifles raised, blades gleamed, bullets soared. This was to be the greatest battle in the history of the Wutai continent. Flags with Da-Chao's name swung high opposite the corporate logos on the other side. God and Country. Heaven and Earth.

It would all be decided here.

The sky opened up with lightning spells, and the earth trembled with fire and quake. Shinra artillery boomed across the battleground, shaking all in proximity. Swords clashed against rifles and guns were fired off at will; only these sounds could be heard above the agonizing cries of war!

Godo sliced through the first line of troops with a blurred fury, and his target caught his eye. Heidegger: hiding behind the last line of defense on the Shinra side, behind sandbags and makeshift cover. Godo leapt towards his location, slashing and

casting Bolt3, clearing a path to the old war dog. Nothing seemed to stop him. Bullets and soldiers missed by far in their futile attempts to slow his progression. It seemed that Heidegger's days were numbered here.

But like some divine intervention, a Shinra Gelnika transport plane swooped into the battle to deploy its precious cargo. As bolts of lightning hammered the struggling craft, the bay doors opened and a shape descended from the sky. The Gelnika exploded with a raw fury and orange flames surged from its last location, but its mission had been completed. The cargo had arrived.

Two black boots touched the ground. The fall alone could have killed a lesser man. But not this one. Over six feet above the black boots, a pair of bright green eyes were nestled between long, white locks of hair. The man simply stared into the mass of soldiers and warriors, most of whom stopped to stare back. He held a long slender sword, studded with various colors of materia. Sephiroth had arrived. Let the Planet tremble.

The Planet trembled. The cancer which plagued it was spreading. Deep below the snow fields of the Northern continent, a bonding took place.

Soon we will be one, my child. And you will take this planet.

The Lifestream bubbled.

Or destroy it.

Another tremor shook the Icicle Inn. Once again, the patrons dismissed the rumbling as a distant avalanche.

We have waited centuries. But soon our time will come.

"Mbarrier." He only spoke, but his voice boomed like the wrath of God. Sephiroth leapt into the center of the fray with his sword raised. Several warriors wasted no time in casting bolt and fire spells. The skies above the battle opened up and electricity poured out. Bolts hammered the invisible bubble above Sephiroth again and again with no effect. The sound of the colliding energies echoed above the screams of the soldiers and warriors all around him. Wutai warriors quickly fell below the white slashes of the Shinra fighter's blade. Materia-studded swords hit the ground, already flowing with crimson puddles of blood. And Sephiroth paused. He looked up. He saw him. Godo. The two warriors stared across at each other. The battle around them continued, but they stood still. Then, as if mirror images, they both leapt into the air and crossed swords! A loud clang erupted from the meeting of the two mighty blades. Godo and Sephiroth each gritted their teeth and glared into each others eyes. Godo pulled back and swung hard! Sephiroth leaned away from the white streak of his opponent's weapon and struck back! Godo roared as he blocked the other sword and kicked his opponent back. Sephiroth flew high into the air and came down hard with his Masamune! Godo narrowly dodged the life-ending attack which only tore his clothing. The Wutai master swung his sword upwards and caught Sephiroth's blade!

"Bolt3!" Godo rasped at the other warrior! A huge mass of electrical spears poured out of the sky and shattered the invisible force bubble that encased Sephiroth.

"Fire3!" Sephiroth boomed at his opponent, who barely cast deflect in time to stave his fiery oblivion!

But Sephiroth followed through his attack with a strike from his Masamune blade! Godo wasn't able to get his sword up fast enough to block and his sleeve became stained crimson. He howled in rage and caused several warriors to look back at their leader. The Shinra soldiers wasted no time in taking out as many enemies as they could. But the warriors of Wutai retaliated with the hatred and energy of a thousand suns! Wounded warriors were blanketed with restore spells and healthy Shinra soldiers were assaulted with bolt and fire spells.

Godo glared up at his opponent. "Omni-Attack!" Godo's entire body was encased in a bright light as swirls of energy formed around him. Sephiroth stepped back as the warrior rose to his feet.

Godo flew at Sephiroth with his sword up! Sephiroth blocked and countered! Godo crossed his sword with the Shinra's, and surged forth! Both fighters flew into a trench, weapons locked, and renewed their struggle. The sounds of battle echoed above them with the clanging of swords! The sky opened up with electricity as both cast spell after spell while continuing their physical struggle! The two warriors gradually made their way through the long trench swinging and chopping at each other! They made their way to the end of the battle pit and Godo stood, back against the excavated wall, ready for his opponent's next move. Sephiroth rushed towards him, but the Wutai Lord leapt into the air! Sephiroth clamored up the wall after him, but he was gone. Sephiroth looked all around and raised his weapon.

You are no man....

Vincent opened his eyes and looked up at the speaker. The former Turk was sitting on something hard, made of rock, and the speaker was standing on some sort of ledge above him. The sky around them was dark and full of clouds, and Vincent could not see his true surroundings. The speaker was immersed in shadow. Vincent could only see his red eyes.

"Who are you?!"

You hide from your responsibilities. You hide from your life.

"Who are you?!"

You are useless.

"Answer me, damn you!"

The speaker crouched down to eye level. It was no man. Some sort of disfigured beast. Like a half wolf, half man fictional monster. It was hideous. It growled at the Turk.

I'm.....

"No!!!"

.....I am you.

"No!!!!" Vincent jumped down from his rock seat and saw it was no seat. It was a gravestone. He swallowed hard and looked at the writing: Here Lies Vincent Valentine - The Man

Vincent frantically looked back at the howling creature and saw it. Himself. Vincent Valentine stood before him, in a red cowl with long, black hair. And bright red eyes. And Vincent the Turk was dead.

The basement of the Nibelheim mansion erupted with the horrible screams of a dead man.

Sephiroth stood on the peak of the Da-Chao mountains. He carefully eyed the scenery spread out before him. Godo was here. He could feel it. Out of nowhere, Godo struck! The two crossed swords on the mountaintop in what was to be their

final battle! They traded blows, blocking and attacking, strike after strike! The heavens were alive with the sounds of their struggle! Sephiroth swung hard and Godo, who raised his sword to block again. It shattered!

Godo watched, in slow motion, the pieces of his weapon fall from their rightful place above his handle, and plummet through the air to the cruel earth below. And he looked up, slowly, into the eyes of his conqueror. Sephiroth's gaze narrowed as he brought his sword on an upward arc, and finished it.

Godo's limp form soared off the peak of the Da-Chao mountains and fell through the air. He did not scream. He thought of his daughter, too young to fully understand their struggle, but old enough to know something was wrong. His wife died years ago during the initial conflicts, and Godo was the only family Yuffie had left. But now she would be alone. As Godo plummeted towards the awaiting Planet, he spoke a silent prayer to the gods of Wutai, for his daughter, for his village, for their hopes and dreams. The vision of Da-Chao filled his mind, and he knew he would not die, but he knew he deserved death.

And it was over.

Tseng walked up on the beach of the southern part of the Wutai continent. A large Shinra reactor hummed with activity. Workers scrambled about the site, moving equipment and checking gauges. Tseng walked up to a large man in a green military uniform.

"Colonel Heidegger," He spoke in a serious tone, "Turk: Tseng reporting. How goes the operation here?"

Heidegger looked in awe of such a ridiculous question. "Tell the President that the reactor is ready to produce Mako. But our initial readings show the vein is unstable and could result in this part of the continent breaking up. But not to worry, we'll still get enough Mako to help in the construction of the new Midgar reactors."

Tseng saluted his commanding officer and walked back towards the awaiting ship. He turned his head for a second and looked towards the Wutai village. It was only two years ago that they had ended the war, and the village was rebuilding itself at an amazing pace. But Wutai was only a quarter of the size it used to be, and no more than a resort town. The Shinra seized almost all of their materia after the wars ended. Wutai resisted Shinra and paid the price. Tseng smiled and proceeded on his way.

Author's notes: Well, if you hadn't guessed, Godo of course survived the fall and eventually recovered. But Wutai paid a heavy price! The southern part of Wutai where that circular pattern of water meets the sea was where the Shinra built their first reactor. But, like Mideel, the island came apart and a crater formed, which was eventually filled in with the ocean water.

Next chapter, we jump ahead to a year after the strike of METEOR, and we see the entire FF7 cast putting their lives back together. But there is a new threat to the Planet no one anticipated! The cancer remains. Keep watching the skies!