

Phase 3: War

A loud tap on the door of his office gave the president of ShinRa Inc. cause to look up from his computer monitor. Talking a puff from one of his endless supply of cigars he called "Enter."

Sephiroth pushed open the door and entered the room before walking over to stand in front of ShinRa's desk. Giving a smart salute he said; "You wanted to see me, Sir."

"Yes, at ease, at ease - all that fancy crap gives me the judders! I needed to talk to you about this damned war."

Startled, Sephiroth replied "Me, Sir? What insight could I possibly give?"

"Look I know that this is highly irregular but your commanding officers have been telling me great things about you, young man. And with this conflict springing up I can use all the good officers I can get - I'm not going to see your talents wasted doing grunts work. That's why I've decided to give you a promotion - if you'll accept it."

"Of course, Sir. What position would you like me to take?"

"General - in charge of 'C' squadron"

"*GENERAL*??" he spluttered "Are you serious?! I'm not ready for that!!"

ShinRa looked at the young man in front of him "I've been told you are - don't disappoint me. You're uniform's in your room - get changed, grab your weapon and get to the runway - you take off in 30 minutes for Junon."

"Uh...Y..Yes Sir" he managed to stammer before hurrying out of the room. As he entered the elevator he grinned; 'General' - "man is Carmoi gonna be pissed!" he laughed to himself as he descended to the first floor.

When he reached his apartment he found Carmoi waiting for him and his new uniform on the bed.

"So" said Carmoi cheerily "I guess you're feeling pretty good about yourself. But I'm warning you now that if you force me to salute you I'll clock you but good!" Checking his watch he added "You'd better get a move on - the Highwind takes off soon - you don't want to be left behind."

Sephiroth gave an internal sigh of relief - he was half worried that Carmoi would resent his new position and the fact that as commander of 'C' squadron, he'd have to take orders from him. "Right" he agreed and changed into the new uniform. It was a more elaborate variation on Carmoi's own outfit. A long black leather coat that fastened at the waste, leather trousers with metal straps above and below the knee to keep the thigh-high boots in place. Similar straps adorned each wrist. Metal plates were attached to both shoulders. Brown straps crossed his chest below the coat as well as a decorative belt. He glanced at his appearance in the mirror - he looked very grand but felt highly uncomfortable in his elaborate get-up.

Carmoi chuckled behind him "Stop staring at your gorgeousness and hurry up! We've got a plane to catch and troops to organise!"

"Uh - yeah, right!" Sephiroth grabbed his Murasame while Carmoi clipped his rifle into its holster. He was ready.

Come what may he was ready.

[Author's Note (WHAT?? It's been a while since we've had one so I thought I'd add a comment!): heehee - getting exciting huh? No? hmmm.....If you hate my story so much why are you reading it?? Huh huh???? Hey! Where are you going?? Don't leave! I'm lonely! Please?]

"Sephiroth, allow me to introduce you to Major Cid Highwind - the best Pilot in the entire ShinRa airforce." Carmoi paused before adding with a grin "You'll get used to his more obscure habits - right, Cid?"

The man Carmoi had addressed let out a short snort of disgust and took a long drag from the cigarette that hung from his mouth. He was a little older than Sephiroth though no more than 21. A pair of flight goggles kept his shock of blonde hair out of his eyes with a packet of cigarettes tucked beneath the band just above one ear. He wore the dark blue uniform of

an officer of the airforce with the ShinRa logo on a sleeve as well as the back. Holding his hand out to Sephiroth he said, "How'd you end up with Carmoi? This bastard's been causing me trouble for f>ing years."

"I think I can handle it, Sir" he replied, amused at how the Major had displayed his 'obscure habits' in such a short time.

Cid looked pleased that someone had finally remembered to call him 'sir' - usually most people thought of him as just a regular pilot rather than a skilled, high-ranking officer. "Yeah, well - just watch yourself - this one's plain f>ing evil when he wants to be!"

Carmoi grinned - he obviously knew Cid well enough to be able to wind him up at times. "If you've finished we've got to get this lump of rust off the ground or we'll never make it to Junon in time to counter attack the allies' air strike.

Cid scowled at Carmoi "for your information you lil' motherf>er this ship is the greatest ever built and it doesn't have a spot of f>in' rust!" He paused to calm himself down while Carmoi laughed merrily at his reaction "Besides, those damned bastards in Wutai couldn't build a decent plane even if I'd've drawn the plans myself and given 'em step-by-step instructions!!" He turned around and spoke into a small microphone on one of the control panels in the bridge of the giant aeroplane, "Any officers scheduled to be in Junon get your damned asses in gear. That includes anyone in 'A' or 'C' squadron! Move it you pansies - we take off in five!!"

Sephiroth watched as Major Highwind busied himself with last minute adjustments and checked his watch impatiently.

The door to the bridge slid open and Sephiroth turned to see Reno and Zahra at the doorway. Reno gave his usual baby-faced grin while Zahra looked at Sephiroth with little interest.

"So, how's things, Seph?" asked Reno, he was in good humour as usual.

"Fine - we're just about ready for takeoff. What are you two doing here anyway?"

"We have 'business' to attend to in Junon" replied Zahra "So to save on resources we're hitching a ride with you. You have a problem with that?"

Sephiroth smiled at the agitated Turk, he knew she hated flying almost as much as she hated being paired off with the oft hyperactive Reno - to have to do twice in the same day was obviously stressing her out. "Of course there's no problem - I'll get someone to make sure you're comfortable."

Satisfied she replied "Thanks - make sure you do." Turning to her young companion she added "I'm going up on deck for the takeoff - don't follow if you know what's good for you!"

Reno shrugged "Of course, Sugar-Nut!"

"Why do you insist on calling me that?" she cried in exasperation.

"Look, some people get on highs when they eat certain things, then the effect rubs off and they get all crabby and irritable. You're like that - blowing hot and cold all day long so you're nuts on sugar or whatever - you could be a Milk-Nut but I think sugar sounds better - it's a personal preference." He gave her a lop-sided smile "satisfied?" In response she turned and left the room "I'll take that as a 'yes' then shall I?" he called behind her.

The hum of engines starting up caught Sephiroth and Reno's attention and they turned to see Cid ordering around the handful of staff that were on the bridge before adeptly turning the huge aircraft round on the runway and lift it smoothly into the skies. He then left the general running of the ship to his co-pilot, ordering him to inform him when they were within 10 miles of Junon.

[Author's Note ^_~: Ok so that's my little ambition fulfilled - Vincent, Reno and Cid are all here (or have been seen (heard?) here in Vince's case) - I know, I'm brilliant!!!]

For the remainder of the journey Sephiroth spent his time idling on deck with Reno and Carmoi. Cid sometimes joined them but for the most part he organised things below. Up in the sky, feeling the wind blow against his face Sephiroth felt an incredible sense of freedom.

When Cid announced over the Ship's radio that they were about to land Sephiroth looked over the edge of the Highwind at the huge cannon that jutted out 200 feet towards the ocean. It was a truly magnificent sight though no more so than the sea itself - an endless expanse of glittering blue that seemed to go on forever. Sephiroth smiled, when his time in SOLDIER was done he'd live by the sea.

Carmoi approached him when they'd landed "The troops are itchy to get their feet on solid ground again" he said "We should give them an hour to themselves before giving any briefings."

"Yes I suppose so - do you think I should tell them?"

Carmoi grinned "I think so, 'Sir'"

Sephiroth nodded - he was nervous - most of the men he was commanding had been in SOLDIER much longer than he had. Sure he was good in a fight, but leading? He shook his head and made his way below deck.

Carmoi watched him go and felt sorry for the young general, it wasn't going to be easy for him - he had 1000 men to command, no mean feat for someone with no experience.

He ran a hand through his windswept hair that he'd had the sense to get cut before they left - instead of falling halfway down his back it now rested on his shoulders. At least it would be easier to manage.

He strolled along the runway and into the main halls of the Junon airbase. Hundreds of soldiers lined each room and passage; some were being sent to Wutai that afternoon, others to Mideel and Nibelheim. Most were fighter pilots preparing intercept the Wutain air strike that planned to destroy the cannon.

Carmoi shook his head - the allies would fail. The might of the ShinRa armies was too strong and the companies' influence stretched across the globe. He almost felt sorry for them.

He turned right into a small bar and pulled up a stool at a table in a corner. The bar was nearly empty, just a few soldiers taking a break for a quiet drink. Carmoi rested his chin on the palm of his hand and closed his eyes for a moment, he felt incredibly tired after the journey.

A few minutes later the bar tender looked up to see him sleeping soundly and chuckled to himself.

Meanwhile Sephiroth had just emerged from the temporary barracks that housed his soldiers. He shook his head wearily, trying to remove some of the cobwebs. It had gone more easily than expected - no uproar from seasoned officers, no visible dissension in the ranks. And for the most part morale was high.

He spotted Zahra who was watching aircraft land and take off as the sun set. Taking a deep breath he walked over to her, praying for her to be in a good mood.

She turned around as he approached and gave him a warm smile before turning back to look at the planes.

"Uh, how's it looking out there?" he asked

"Looks like the allies will be here any minute - they're ordering our forces into the skies." She turned to look at Sephiroth "You look troubled - what's up? Are your men bothering you? If they are that's easily fixed!" She grinned and punched Sephiroth lightly on the nose"

"Nothing much - this uniform is just far too OTT for me - I think I preferred the regular one. I mean how am I supposed to breathe in this get-up, let alone fight?"

Zahra smiled and patted him on the back "You're an officer now, kid - you leave the fighting to the poor suckers that you command. You really don't have an awful lot to worry about, Seph - just remember where you've sent people and what you've told them to do. Oh - and always do a head count - you don't want to lose men - there's always someone who'll remember them and kick up a stink!."

"Oh, yeah - right, I guess I never thought of that" He shook his head "There's a lot I haven't thought of lately - I'm just really not cut out for this job. I mean as combat goes I'm good, but I know that battle tactics and stuff are just totally over my head! Why can't anyone else see that?" He frowned and rubbed his head that was beginning to ache.

"Look don't worry about it! You'll be fine - just listen to people with experience and learn from them - it's all anyone can do. Maybe you don't need to hear this but I reckon that you and Carmoi would do better swapping heads for the remainder of the war. He's good at the thinking side of stuff whereas you do better in combat. The only reason he's not in a higher position is because his fighting skills got knocked for six when his mind went a bit screwy. ShinRa likes its commanding officers to have flair and pizzazz, which is something you've got - it doesn't matter if you're crap at the job as long as you make it look good. That's the biggest problem - the better you are at fighting, the further you get promoted,

but it also means that the best men aren't actually doing anything productive in the field. It sucks but that's life - deal with the hand you've been dealt as best you can, Sephiroth. In the end your best is all you can ever do!"

Sephiroth nodded more to himself than to his companion. Just then the roar of jet engines came overhead - they looked up to see the first bombardment of the allies' air-strike zoom overhead. At once the sky erupted with light from guns and explosions.

"Maybe we should get inside" said Zahra "It'll be safer in there - the entire base has been reinforced to deal with this and there are people everywhere using materia to put extra shields around the place."

Sephiroth readily agreed and the pair hurried into the building.

Carmoi awoke with a start as the first bombs shook the side of the Junon airbase. He looked in puzzlement at the empty bar wondering what the hell was going on.

A second wave hit and he jumped to his feet and ran outside - the early evening sky was alight with gunfire as the ShinRa troops defended the airbase with all their might.

The entire town was deserted; everyone was hidden away in their homes.

Which is where you should be you stupid jerk Carmoi scolded himself and began running for the barracks.

Glancing up into the sky he saw two allied fighter planes break through ShinRa's defence only to be shot down mercilessly by laser fire from one of the prototype Gelnika aircraft.

He stood dumbstruck for a moment as the wreckage from one of the planes came hurtling towards him.

It took a second for his brain to tell his legs to move and as he made a dodge the plane crashed down ten feet away from him. The force of the explosion sent him flying along the road like a rag doll until he slammed, back first, into a lamppost.

His head swam from the force of the impact and it took a moment to clear his foggy vision. He grunted in pain as he tottered to his feet. By some small miracle he managed to stay upright and began heading once again for the barracks - determined to get there without another plane trying to squish him flat.

As he passed the smoking wreckage he heard a soft moan coming from it. When he heard it again he realised that the plane wasn't talking to him - the pilot was still trapped inside and was somehow still breathing.

He searched the smouldering debris until he found the head and shoulders of a man sticking out from under the mess.

"Are you ok?" croaked Carmoi, still feeling winded from the blast.

The pilot opened one bloodshot eye and looked at the person who was talking to him "I.....I...can't feel anything" he whispered, blood trickling steadily from his nose and mouth.

Carmoi nodded sympathetically and began trying to pull some of the lumps off metal off of the wounded pilot - an enemy he may be but he was still a human being!

Carmoi worked away for several minutes, being as careful as he could so as not to hurt the man any further. He ignored his own injuries for the moment, concentrating on the task at hand.

Finally the man was free of the debris and Carmoi hauled him to his feet "Can you stand?" he asked.

The man shrugged weakly.

Carmoi grit his teeth resolutely and began the painful journey to the barracks with the man's arm firmly around his neck so that he could carry/drag him to safety.

[Author's Note: Isn't Carmoi a nice wee chap?? Although he's a bit loony if you ask me. Why? Who else would think that a smashed plane was trying to communicate?]

Meanwhile Sephiroth was pacing up and down the length of the mess hall wondering where the hell Carmoi had gone - he'd hoped to find him here but he was no where to be found. None of the other soldiers had seen him since they'd landed and the young general was getting incredibly worried.

The hall was bustling with activity, the sound of gunfire had died down and word had it that the ShinRa forces had driven the allies back with little damage to person or property.

"Sir - you're wanted in the infirmary... Sir?????"

Sephiroth turned to see a young soldier nervously saluting him. "Pardon?"

"The infirmary, Sir - the Commander wants to see you."

"Oh... right - sorry I was miles away - thank you." Sephiroth hurried out of the room and headed for the base's medical complex - he still wasn't used to being called 'Sir'. He pushed his feelings of inadequacy away from his mind - he wanted to know why Carmoi was in the infirmary!

He flung open the door to the large ward to see Carmoi sat on one of the beds looking dirty, bruised and very, very dazed.

"What the hell happened?"

Carmoi looked up and gave Sephiroth a weak grin; "I had a little encounter with an exploding jet. No big deal, I'll mend."

"You look like shit!!"

"Heh... thanks a lot, I really needed that."

"So what happened? Really - no jokes, that's an order!" He sat down next to his friend.

"Yes, SIR!! Jeez. Well... I was walkin' along, pretty as you please when this great big plane starts falling towards my head and BOOM!!!! The damned thing explodes right next to me and I'm sent whizzing down the street and into a bloody lamppost!! It kinda hurt but y'know - I'm a big tough guy - I can handle it. Besides, I'm not as bad as the poor bloke in the plane is!!"

"Poor bloke in the plane?"

"Yeah - he's getting stitched up as we speak, he's kind of a mess actually - they don't know if he'll last the night."

"I don't doubt it - how about you, is there anything serious?"

"Nah, I'm fine - it looks much worse than it is, I'll be bruised for a couple thousand years but other than that it's okay!" He patted Sephiroth on the head "Don't you worry yourself over me, kid I'm tougher than I appear!"

"Good - We're off to Wutai in an hour, I hope you're ready."

Carmoi grinned and shook his head "Get outta here - you've got troops to organise!"

Sephiroth smiled at his friend and stood up from the bed. He left the room and headed to the barracks again to organise his unit. He felt increasingly nervous; after all he was headed right into a warzone. He prayed he was up to the task, if he wasn't a lot of good men could lose their lives because of his incompetence.

"Gerald are you even listening to me? GERALD!!!! Stop raving, shut up and listen!" Reno slumped into a nearby chair still holding the cell phone to his ear. "Are you listening now? Wonderful - OK so the Allied air strike was basically a miserable failure, only a handful of casualties and no fatalities. Carmoi got a bit roughed up but other than that nothing went wrong." He paused. "Gerald you don't need to yell - I'm not deaf! ... No, nothing happened to Sephiroth though if I keep following him around he's going to get suspicious - can't I just drop it?" He held the phone away from his ear - Gerald was not in a good mood. "OK, OK I get your point - don't let him out of my site, got it! ... Sure I'll send Zahra back to HQ ... Yes she's picked up the kid ... YES I'll make sure nothing happens to Seph!!! Jeez, what am I his nanny?" A string of obscenities screamed down the phone line "Bye Gerald - I'm hanging up... Yeah like you'll really fire me...Bye Gerald...BYE!!!" He hung up and breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"Problems?"

Reno looked up to see Cid standing at the door to his hotel room "Ah, y'know how it is - ShinRa screams at Gerald - Gerald screams at me, it's no biggie, he'll get over it! Have a seat, Cid!"

Cid flopped into the chair opposite Reno and pulled a cigarette out of his breast pocket - he offered the packet to Reno who shook his head.

"No thanks - I don't smoke."

"Drink then?" he went to pull a small flask out of the inner pocket of his flight jacket.

"Nope."

"God damn you don't even drink? What are you some kinda \$%&£in' saint?"

Reno chuckled, "Nah - just health conscious"

"My ass" he took a long swig from the flask, replaced the stopper and tossed it to Reno "I'm not letting up until you drink the contents of that!" He smirked and took a long drag from his cigarette.

"What're you trying to do get me drunk? Besides we've gotta fly to Wutai in 15 minutes." He looked at Cid hopefully - no luck, reluctantly he removed the stopper and began drinking.

[Author's note: He had to start sometime ^_~ hehheh]

Sephiroth stood on the deck of the Highwind watching the world roll by below him. The moon was high in the night sky and cast it's eerie glow all around. His long silver hair fluttered in the wind and he swept a few stray strands out of his eyes. He rested his chin on his palm and let out a long sigh, he was about ready to resign.

His troops had finally started acting up, Reno was drunk and Zahra had been screaming protests at him because Reno had ordered her back to HQ with some Rufus-kid they'd been sent to collect.

All in all he'd had a lousy few hours and he felt terribly lonely - Carmoi was below deck joking and playing cards with the other soldiers (How did he find it so easy?), Reno was sleeping off the alcohol, Cid was busy running the ship and he was up here, on his own and feeling desperately sorry for himself.

Carmoi watched his young friend silently from the doorway that led to the lower decks. He knew this wasn't easy on Sephiroth, he'd been forced from First Class SOLDIER to General in a blink of an eye and he was finding it extremely hard to adjust.

"Sephiroth?" he called out to the lonely figure.

Sephiroth turned sharply on hearing his name. "What?"

"Come on - I'm missing a perfectly good game of Poker to come and check on you, I wouldn't be surprised if those jokers haven't stolen all my money. Hurry up and get your ass moving." He headed back through the door.

"But, Carmoi I... I really don't... aw crap!" He shook his head and plodded after his friend - he really didn't want to do this - he didn't even know how to play cards.

He followed Carmoi into the engine room of the ship - it was hot and nearly dark save for one lightbulb that dangled from the ceiling. Beneath the bulb was a small round table with three men, Carmoi's friends, sat around it. They were laughing loudly and passed a bottle of something between them - even though it was against regulations Sephiroth noted. They looked up as Carmoi and Sephiroth neared the table, they greeted Carmoi with a couple of rowdy greetings. However they soon fell silent when they noticed Sephiroth and quickly shoved the bottle away.

The three men looked at each other apprehensively then shot Carmoi an accusing look as if to say 'What did you bring him down here for?'

Carmoi ignored it and gestured for Sephiroth to sit down next to him, which he did and then sat quietly watching the others - he knew two of their names. Corran was in his early thirties, a big man with a short temper - he drank too much and it got him into trouble. Virgil was in his mid twenties and was constantly getting someone's back up but he was a good soldier, if he weren't so irritating then he'd probably have been promoted by now. The third man he was introduced to by Carmoi as Dorsey, he was only a little older than Sephiroth but seemed very confident. How did Carmoi manage to befriend such a group?

"Ok look, guys - we're all off duty for a couple of hours so bring out the bottle and deal already - I'm in a mood to win all of your Gil." Carmoi broke the bitter silence.

"With him here? Yeah right..." Virgil replied, gesturing to Sephiroth "Never play cards with a superior, Carmoi - it's the rules."

"What rules? Don't talk so much crap."

"He's right, Carmoi - what if we kick his ass and he takes it out on us by putting us on double shifts or something?" Dorsey added.

"Oh fer cryin' out loud! Corr, back me up here will you? It's no big deal!"

Corran placed the bottle on the table and looked at it thoughtfully for several minutes, meanwhile the others watched him, waiting for him to say something. Suddenly he grinned and pushed the bottle to Sephiroth who barely caught it before it slid off the table. He looked at Virgil.

"Deal"

Carmoi breathed an inner sigh of relief and then looked at Sephiroth who seemed to be clinging to the bottle in hopes of salvation.

"Drink already, Seph" he told his young friend "Don't want you being the only one sober now do we?"

Sephiroth looked around the table, Virgil was shuffling the deck of cards but the others were all watching him. He shrugged and took a long swig of what turned out to be whisky, he removed the bottle from his lips and handed it to Dorsey with a smile.

Dorsey chuckled as he accepted the bottle "Drink here often, Sir?"

"No, but I plan to do it more often from now on." He grinned, "Must be the warm greeting you get..."

Virgil laughed and dealt the cards and the game progressed.

Sephiroth managed to pick up the rules, though not before losing most of his money, which amused the others a great deal.

By midnight everyone bar Carmoi was broke and feeling a little worse for wear from the alcohol. Corran had stashed quite a lot of it down there with help from a few others who smuggled it on board. They were going to regret it in the morning.

They finally staggered out of the engine room and made their way slowly to the sleeping quarters where they all collapsed into their respective bunks, not bothering to get changed.

As the others snored loudly Sephiroth lay awake for a few minutes, despite apprehensions on all sides the evening had gone pretty well.

Well, except losing all his money - but what the hell - it was worth it. He smiled to himself before the alcohol took complete control and he slipped into a deep sleep.

The dawn alarm rang loud among the camp and 10,000 thousand soldiers dragged their weary bodies from their tents and made their way to morning drill. It had been a long week for all of them, they had set up this temporary base of operations just 15 miles from Wutai and so were constantly on alert from possible attack.

Now it was time for action - the meetings with the allies had failed to come to a peaceful conclusion and so ShinRa would take down the threat with all due force - namely A, C and D squadron. B and D were playing back-up across the water where they were busy with their own fight to protect reactors at Nibelheim and Corel.

Sephiroth stood with Carmoi and the other squad leaders and watched their men line up for roll-call. This was it - he either proved himself here or lost it completely. He walked the lines of his troops calling names and checking numbers before sending them back to their tents to prepare themselves for the coming onslaught - they would regroup in 20 minutes before travelling to Wutai's North side and beginning ShinRa's primary attack.

Hopefully, if all went to plan C squadron would drive Wutai's defences South into the path of the waiting A and D squads - both squads were at least 3 times the size of Sephiroth's own and would take the main brunt of Wutai's troops.

He glanced at Carmoi who was pacing a short distance away - for all his bravado Carmoi looked how Sephiroth felt - nervous as hell. Sephiroth couldn't help but grin - his friend was human after all.

Meanwhile Reno stood with Cid on the deck of the Highwind, which bobbed majestically a short distance from the camp. They watched in silence (a first!) the preparations and Reno could not suppress the nervousness in his stomach, not for himself - hell, he'd be right out of the conflict! But he worried for his friends who were risking their lives.

He took the flask that Cid handed him and drank solemnly and prayed silently to a God he'd given up on years ago.

"Alright you've been told the plan at least a couple 'hundred times so I'm not going to bore you with the ins and outs of it all over again. Any one of you, or even all of you could die here today - I'm not saying that to depress you, I'm saying it because it's the truth. I'm not going to feed you some bullshit about glory and honour either - All I want you to know is that I'm proud to lead you into this. I know that when I first took over that most of you doubted my abilities - hell - I even doubted them myself! But you let me get on with it and I finally feel confident that as a group we can win this. Together.

When you get in there and your asking yourself what your fighting for don't kid yourself that you're doing it for ShinRa or for me or even for your fellow soldiers - you're doing this for you so stay true to yourselves. That's what I'll be doing when I get in there..."

A murmur went through Sephiroth's assembled troops and Carmoi shot Sephiroth a meaningful glance as if to say 'What the hell are you talking about?'

Sephiroth smiled "Yeah that's right - I'll be in that mess with you. I'm trained to fight so that's what I'm going to do - I can't just stand around while the rest of you are up to your necks in bullets and blades. I hope I won't let you down.

We move in five - make sure you're ready!"

He turned from the group, ignoring the looks on their faces and the questions waiting to erupt from their mouths.

"What the hell are you doing, Seph? Are you out of your mind?!"

"No, Carmoi - I've never been saner. I joined SOLDIER to fight and that's what I'm doing."

"ShinRa's going to throw a fit!!"

"Carmoi..." Sephiroth sighed.

"What?"

"Shut the hell up - that's an order, Commander!"

Carmoi scowled at Sephiroth who merely laughed.

"Heh... I should throw my weight around more often - the look on your face is priceless!" His face darkened "I'm serious, Carmoi - I have to do this. For me - do you understand? It feels like my whole life has been leading up to something huge and I need to find out if this is it."

"All right, have it your way. But if you get yourself killed don't say I didn't warn you!"

"No problem - when and if I'm dead I'll let you gloat all you want but for now lets just get this done - I wanna go home to soft mattresses and hot baths - I feel stinky."

Carmoi dived behind the wall of a huge pagoda and took a moment to check all his limbs were in place - this was not going well!! He discarded his tattered coat and winced as it brushed against the bullet wound on his left fore-arm.

He chanced a look around the corner of the building and all he saw was carnage - The entire Wutai-Mideel army was there when only the Wutai army had been expected and C squads minimal forces were being pushed back.

He pulled the radio off his belt, "Sephiroth? Are you there?"

No reply

"Sephiroth??"

Silence.

"SHIT!! C squad to A squad this is Carmoi do you copy?"

"Travers here, were reading you - what's the situation?"

"Chaos - where the hell are you guys?"

"No fear, Commander were 3 minutes from you - just hold them off just a little longer."

"Got it - just hurry it up or there won't be anyone left for you to assist!! Carmoi out!"

"Dammit!" He rammed the radio back into its clip and checked around the building again and spotted Sephiroth cleaving his way through a group of enemy soldiers - if there had been time he'd have felt a twinge of pride for the young general. But instead he checked his gun for ammo and ran out into the field once again.

Sephiroth's blade sliced easily through the guts of an advancing soldier and then slashed the jugular of another, ignoring his plight as the blood bubbled up and the man struggled in vain to stop the flow. He wiped the sweat from his brow just as another man approached swinging a double-headed axe down towards his skull - he dodged just before the axe penetrated the ground and he rammed his sword through the enemies' neck.

One of his men was being attacked and he ran over and grabbed his assailant by the head and twisted hard until his neck snapped and he let the lifeless body slump to the ground.

He took a moment to notice Carmoi who had found a safe enough spot to base himself and was picking off targets at random.

He span quickly on his heel as he sensed another assault from behind and swept his murasame through three men in one fluid motion.

A huge cry erupted to the South and for a moment it distracted everyone - Sephiroth took the opportunity to cut down half a dozen enemy soldiers.

A and D squadron flooded the battle ground, their numbers overwhelming the opposition. Many of the Wutai-Mideel force attempted to run but were immediately cut down by Sephiroth's remaining group.

The battle over Sephiroth dropped to his knees and observed the decimated town, the piles of bodies - many of them his own men, the blood.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Carmoi standing over him. He accepted the hand up that his friend offered and they stood in silence for a moment.

"Still want to fight, Seph?" Carmoi asked quietly.

Sephiroth shook his head "No, and I've never been more glad of ShinRa's decision to make me a general - I'm never doing this again." His head bowed low "I killed, Carmoi... so many men and *I* killed them...."

"Yeah - I know, so did I. If you want to let it all out then go ahead - but not here. You've still got the rest of your unit to think about - if you crack then they've had it. For the record, kid you made the right choice by deciding to fight alongside your men - you kept them going and no matter the losses today, the rest of them, the ones who survived, they'll remember that." He put his arm around Sephiroth reassuringly "You did good today, Seph but it's not over yet - keep your chin up. Heh - you'll probably get a medal!!"

"Well isn't that bloody-fabulous - one more damned thing to wear to make me feel like a twat - as if this stupid uniform isn't enough!?"

"Sarcasm noted, Sir - C'mon we've got a lot of clean up to do!"

Zahra pulled up in her sleek black convertible, climbed out and headed for the front door of the ShinRa building.

100 yards from the car she suddenly checked herself and ran back to collect the small boy she was supposed to be escorting.

"C'mon, brat we don't have all day!" She grabbed the small blonde-haired child by the hand and half led, half dragged him into the entrance hall.

The child clung desperately to his stuffed mog and stayed absolutely silent despite the rough treatment.

Zahra stopped at the reception desk. "Is the president available?" she demanded.

"Uh, let me check" The receptionist fiddled with her computer "Yes go right on up - he's expecting you. Oh hang on!"

"What?"

"It says the president is expecting two people - you and someone called 'Rufus'"

Zahra hauled the boy up onto the desk "This" she said "Is Rufus - can I go now or are you going to continue to annoy me?"

"N... No just go up and see Mr. ShinRa!"

Zahra gave the receptionist a sickly sweet smile and marched the boy to one of the glass elevators.

"Where are we going?"

The Turk looked down at the child who was tugging at the hem of her jacket, his big blue eyes gazed up at her and she couldn't help but smile. "We're going to see your daddy!"

"Oh." Rufus was silent for a moment and hugged his toy. "Who's that then?" he asked finally.

She stared for a moment at the boy "You don't know?"

He shook his head solemnly. A second later his eyes lit up and he grinned "Wait a minute - is it that ugly fat man who visits me at Christmas and on my birthday and gives me presents?"

Zahra chuckled "That's him!"

Rufus smiled "He smells funny too" he crinkled up his nose as if imagining his fathers smell "And he's really noisy and squashes me a lot!"

Zahra shrugged - that was an accurate enough description of the president - ugly, fat, smelly and noisy. Thankfully she'd never had to experience being crushed in a hug by the man!

They stepped out of the elevator and she led him to the Presidents' office where she stopped to knock. A moment later she pushed open the door and brought Rufus to a halt just in front of the large desk.

The president looked up from his computer monitor and beamed at the small child in front of him. Rufus shifted nervously unsure of himself in his fathers' presence. ShinRa climbed from his seat and tottered around the desk to get a better look at his son.

"My word you've definitely grown since I last saw you" ShinRa chatted away happily, scrutinising every detail of the small boy and hugging him at every opportunity. "How old are you now, Rufus?"

"Nine"

"My god, as old as that - I'll have to be buying you a sports car before long!!"

Zahra noticed that every time he got close to Rufus the boy crinkled up his nose to try and ward off the 'smell' - she had to stop herself from laughing aloud.

"Is there anything else, Zahra?" asked the president - noticing her for the first time.

"Actually yes, Sir - it's Reno."

"What now?" The president was getting tired of the petty fights within his group of Turks - why couldn't they all be more like Tseng? Quiet, obedient and ruthless.

"Well first he gets drunk and then he has the nerve to start giving me orders, plus he's completely obnoxious and...!"

"Enough!! Talk to Gerald about it - I'm going to spend some time with little Rufus here" He turned back to the boy

"But, Sir! Oh forget it!!" She turned and stomped out of the office in search of Gerald.

[Author's Note: Poor Gerald!! -_-]

With the battle at Wutai won by the ShinRa forces the allied armies soon fell apart. Sephiroth found himself celebrating his 20th birthday in Mideel whilst on a mission to round up a remaining group of anti-ShinRa terrorists.

The war for the most part was over very quickly, however there were still many people with bad feeling and resentment for ShinRa Inc. The men of SOLDIER were being used to wipe out any opposition to the company.

Several years passed and ShinRa took this time to further push his influence into every corner of the globe, wiping out any minor players in the Arms and Power industry - from now on the ShinRa Electrical Power Company monopolised the world. It had no competition simply because it engulfed it all, either in the boardroom or by force.

In short ShinRa ruled the world and there was no one to stop them.

