

CHAPTER XX: ROSHNIALU'S STORY

"Looks like this whole plan has been cursed from the start," Cid muttered.

Ellengio nodded. His group had just returned to the ship, and the others had gone to the galley to get some food and drink while Ellengio filled Cid in on what had befallen them.

"It would seem that way," he replied. "So far we've had plenty of problems, yet we are no closer to finding out where the field generator may be."

"So what happens now?" Cid asked. "Do we try to find Cloud and the others?"

Ellengio sat there in thought for a few moments, then shook his head slowly.

"We don't even know where they were taken," he replied. "Vincent sent Reeve after them. Unless by some miracle we hear from him, there's nothing we can do. I'm afraid they're on their own."

"Surely there's something we can do for them?" Cid questioned. "We can't just abandon them."

Ellengio looked at him for a moment.

"Believe me, if there was anything we could do, I wouldn't hesitate, even if it meant delaying the mission. But we don't know where they are. Before we can go trekking into that desert, we need some clues, some idea as to what's out there."

Cid looked unsatisfied. He knew what Ellengio was saying was true, but it didn't sit well with him. He felt too much like they were abandoning Cloud and the others to their fate.

"If you've got any ideas, I'm listening," Ellengio said, seeming to understand his misgivings.

Cid shook his head. The truth was sitting around in the ship was starting to get to him. He wasn't used to this waiting thing. He wanted to be in on the action. But he knew it was foolish to risk himself, not when he was the only one who could get them back.

"So what now then?"

"We return to the city," Ellengio replied. "It's the only thing we can do."

"We've already tried that, and it didn't work out too well," Cid reminded him.

"True, but with each contact we learn a little bit more. We didn't know what was out there at first, now we have a better idea. We've been moving in broad daylight, easy to observe, especially from the air. We'll have to be more cautious. The Chadara seem to be more active during the day, just like us. After nightfall they may be less active, and less wary."

Cid looked out the windows of the control room. The sun had already gone down outside, the last light of it still coloring the sky to the west.

"So you're planning on leaving again right away?" he asked.

"Yes," Ellengio said. "There's no reason to delay. Morale is low, we need for something positive to happen, and nothing good is going to happen while we sit around here."

"True," Cid replied. "But nothing bad is likely to either."

Ellengio did not reply, seeming lost in thought. He turned and headed for the galley, Cid right behind him. The others looked up as they entered. Without preamble Ellengio explained his plan.

"What exactly is going to be your objective?" Red asked.

"We need information about the shield generator," Ellengio replied. "The Chadara are intelligent, we know that from old records and from observation. We need to either find a way to communicate with them, or find someplace where they keep records of their own. A race that could build a city surely must have some store of knowledge, which must be kept somewhere."

"Like a library or something?" Yuffie said.

"Yes," Ellengio replied.

"But how would we find it?" Barret questioned. "You can't just go wandering around their city looking for it without expecting to be seen."

"I'm hoping we'll find some way to communicate with them," Ellengio stated. "I'm hoping there are some of them that are familiar with the Cetra language. There's no reason to believe there may not still be some Cetra here. If so, it's not that much of a reach to believe that some of the Chadara may know the language."

"Sounds plausible enough," Barret commented. "So we go back to the city?"

"Yes," Ellengio replied. "Immediately. I think we're better off getting there under cover of darkness."

"We gotta go out there again already?" Yuffie said, not at all happy.

"Not all of us, and not the same group," Ellengio replied. "I know you're all tired from the previous excursion. Perhaps it would be best to send a fresh team. Red and Nipala, would you mind coming with me this time?"

"Not at all," Red replied. "It would be good to get to stretch our legs. I have to admit it has been difficult cooped up in here for so long."

"Good," Ellengio said. "Cait, you don't get tired, so I'm sure you won't mind accompanying us once more. Besides, your communications skills could prove invaluable."

"Sure," Cait agreed.

Ellengio turned to Vincent.

"I know you are probably tired too, but I think it might be vital that you come with us, for previously mentioned reasons, if you feel up to it."

Vincent nodded but said nothing.

Ellengio looked around for a moment.

"That should do it," he said finally. "We don't need a large group. The fewer people we risk, the better."

"I'd like to go too," Lai Li spoke up.

Amanda was tempted to say the same thing, but she held her tongue.

"I don't think that would be wise," Ellengio said.

"Look, you're trying to communicate with these people, aren't you? Well, that's exactly what I'm good at! That's the reason I came along, remember? Maybe I can figure out their language."

"I already know the Cetra language," Ellengio replied. "We would be putting you at risk for nothing. I can't allow it."

Lai Li gave him a sour look, but refused to give up.

"But you don't know if any of them can still speak Cetra," Lai Li countered. "It's been two thousand years. For all we know, that language may have died out long ago. Perhaps I can translate the Chadara language."

"It hasn't died out!" Ellengio said with surprising vehemence. He paused for a moment, then said in a much calmer voice; "The Cetra are a very adaptable people. There's no doubt in my mind that they have survived this, even if their numbers are few. Jenova tried to wipe us out on earth and failed. I believe it is the same here. I believe they still inhabit this planet, somewhere. And if that is true, they must still have some dealing with the Chadara. And if that is so, then there must be some Chadara, somewhere, that can speak their language."

"That may be true," Lai Li responded, the doubt obvious in her voice. "But we have found no evidence of them. You have to admit it is possible that the Cetra..."

"No!" Ellengio cut her off abruptly. "I'm not going to argue about this any further. It's too dangerous. You're not coming, and that's final. Now we're wasting time. It's already getting dark outside so we better get going. Remember, night doesn't last very long here, and if we don't start soon it will be too late to get there before sunup. I don't want to have us delay any longer than necessary. So get your things and let's get going."

Then he turned and walked quickly out of the room.

There others just stood there looking at one another. Finally Red spoke up.

"Well, I guess we better get going."

"Yeah," Cait agreed.

The people Ellengio had chosen to go headed for the airlock, while Cid and the others went to the control room. A few minutes later Ellengio and his group were outside, heading down the mountain in the fading darkness.

Lai Li was standing beside Cid in the control room.

"That was interesting," she said.

"That's putting it mildly," Amanda stated. "It was so totally unfair."

"Possibly," Cid said slowly. He had never seen Ellengio act like that before. He had to admit that he himself found Lai Li's argument pretty convincing, and had been surprised that Ellengio had dismissed it out of hand like that.

"He didn't seem at all pleased with the possibility that the Cetra might not have survived here," Rude said.

"Uh huh," Cid replied. "But maybe we're being too hard on him. Everyone wants to be with their own kind. Perhaps he just had his hopes so high that he would find more Cetra here that he can't accept the fact that they may not be."

"That doesn't give him the right to get angry at Lai Li for suggesting it," Amanda said.

"You're right," Cid replied. "It might not have been right, but it was human. Ellengio's a Cetra, but he had emotions too, has frailties just like the rest of us. He's not so different from us."

Amanda felt silent.

"I can forgive him his frailties," Lai Li said. "I can understand him getting angry with me. But my argument was correct, I might be able to translate the Chadara language. By not taking me along he could be compromising the mission."

Cid sat there looking out the window, brooding over Lai Li's words. Again she was right. He could understand Ellengio getting angry, but he couldn't let that get in the way of his judgment. For all the time they had known the man, he had always acted with a cool head, had always been the voice of reason. To believe he would not do the same this time Cid would need a compelling reason.

"You were all there for the speech, you were all there when Ellengio explained just how important this was to us all, and to him. This may have seemed like a rash decision on his part, but he doesn't always tell us everything he has in mind. I don't believe he would do anything to compromise the mission, especially something as petty as that. Everything he's told us so far has turned out to be true. Everything he's done, has been for our benefit. He's the one who's gotten us this far, I'm not going to lose faith now, not unless I have something a lot better to go on. Ellengio knows what he's doing. You may not like it, but the bottom line is, I trust him."

The others fell silent. He looked at Lai Li. She returned his gaze evenly, then nodded.

"All right then," Cid said. He looked out the window again, but the others were long gone. He stretched out his legs and plopped his feet down on the control panel.

"I guess there's nothing we can do now but wait. Some more."

Amanda sighed, making her displeasure painfully obvious. She sat down on the control panel and stared out the window into the darkness. Yuffie came up beside her and said something to her, but Amanda didn't seem to be paying any attention. Finally Yuffie shrugged and walked away.

Lai Li reached her arms over her head and yawned. She could sympathize with Amanda. She was getting sick of being left behind. Here they had come to a new planet, a whole new world to explore, and she hadn't even taken one step outside. It was like holding food in front of a starving man, in plain sight but just out of reach. It was torture.

But dwelling on it wasn't going to do any good. She wasn't going to be like Amanda and spend the whole time brooding. She was going to make the best of it. Eventually she knew she'd get her chance.

She walked over to the chessboard and looked at Rude.

"Care for another match?"

Rude shrugged, then nodded and walked over to join her. They had barely started their opening moves however, when Amanda spoke up.

"They're coming back," she stated.

The others looked out the window immediately. They could see someone coming toward the ship in the darkness.

"I only see two of them," Cid said, a hint of concern in his voice. What had happened now?

As they approached their outlines became clearer. Immediately they noticed that one of the figures was not human.

"What the hell," Cid muttered, grabbing his weapon.

"It's Zack," Amanda said. "And the other one must be one of those creatures."

Cid just stared out the window, able to see for himself now. He turned to look at Barret and Yuffie.

"It's similar, but this one's different," Yuffie said. "It looks like a female."

Cid looked back outside. Whatever this thing was, it didn't appear to be a threat. They were walking toward the ship side by side, giving no indication that there was any danger.

"All right," he said. "I'm opening the airlock."

He flipped a switch, then got up, Venus Gospel in hand, and headed for the airlock, the others right behind him.

Zack looked around and saw himself surrounded by the others when he stepped into the ship, their weapons ready.

"Are you all right?" Yuffie questioned.

"I'm fine," he replied. He turned to look behind him. His companion still stood in the airlock, reluctant to enter the room. Zack reached out and took her hand, then drew her out. She stepped into the room, looking around timidly, a look of awe on her face as she looked at the ship around them.

"This is Roshnialu," he said.

"Charmed," Barret said, keeping his weapon leveled on them. "Vincent told us that Reeve told him something had happened to you. You had been bitten, and perhaps poisoned by something."

"I was," Zack replied. "But I'm all right now. Roshnialu cured me."

"And maybe brainwashed you?" Yuffie said suspiciously.

Zack looked at them and smiled.

"She's a friend."

"Gimoaha tu Cetarala?"

Roshnialu's head jerked around, her eyes widened as she stared at Lai Li. She stepped forward and started talking very rapidly.

Lai Li said something, and Roshnialu paused. Then she started again, speaking more slowly. Barret just stared at Lai Li.

"You understand that crap?"

Lai Li nodded, continuing her conversation with Roshnialu, who seemed to be going on and on about something.

"I thought you told us you didn't know the Chadara language," Barret said.

"It's not Chadara, I'm speaking Cetra," Lai Li replied.

"What's she saying?" Yuffie said impatiently.

"She says we have to get out of here," Lai Li replied. "The Mind Slayers know we are here. They're sending the Chadara to capture us."

"The Mind Slayers?" Cid questioned.

Lai Li spoke to Roshnialu again.

"Yes," she said. "That is what the Chadara call Jenova. Some of the Chadara that are captured are taken over by Jenova, their minds erased, or slain, and from then on, they only do Jenova's will. But there's no time to talk about it now. We have to leave."

"Leave? Just take off, just like that?" Barret said doubtfully.

"We can't leave the ship," Cid said.

Lai Li spoke again in the Cetra tongue. Roshnialu replied, her voice becoming urgent.

"She says there's no time to argue about it. They will be here in minutes."

"How do we know we can believe her?" Yuffie questioned.

"She wouldn't lie to you," Zack defended her.

"How would you know that?" Yuffie retorted. "You've know her what, a day?"

"She saved my life," he replied. "If she was an enemy, she wouldn't have done that."

"Unless she wanted you to lead her back to the rest of us," Yuffie said.

Zack just looked at them. He had no argument.

"I trust her," he said.

"That's reassuring," Yuffie muttered.

"Why don't we just hole up in the ship?" Barret suggested. "They wouldn't be able to get us if we don't let them in."

He looked at Lai Li, who relayed the idea to Roshnialu.

"She says it won't work," Lai Li said. "If they know you are in here, they'll destroy the ship if they have to to get at you. And it may take them a while, but they would eventually get in."

"So you want us to just leave the ship open for them to get into?" Barret exclaimed. "How do we know they won't destroy it anyway?"

Lai Li passed on Barret's concern to Roshnialu.

"They won't destroy it if it's empty," she said. "It would be much too valuable. The Jenova will want to study it. They will not harm it."

Roshnialu spoke again.

"She says we have to go now," Lai Li said.

Cid looked at the others. He could see that Barret and Yuffie were openly doubtful, while Zack at least obviously trusted her. The others all looked unsure, an expression he was sure he wore himself. Slowly he realized they were all looking at him, waiting for him to make a decision. He was the captain of the ship, and neither Ellengio nor Cloud were around to offer advice or to pass the buck to. It was going to have to be his decision.

He looked at Roshnialu again. He wanted to trust her, felt in his gut that he could, but he wanted more than that. This was too important. To leave the ship, their only back from this world, at the mercy of their enemy was the last thing in the world he wanted to do. He would need compelling evidence to do so.

And she had not provided it. On the other hand, if what she was saying was true, then they were going to lose the ship anyway, and be captured themselves to boot.

C'mon Cid, it's time to make one of those monumental decisions, he thought. This is what you're getting paid the big bucks for.

What it really came down to, in the end, was simple. Did he trust this stranger, or not?

"Turin!" Roshnialu exclaimed.

"Now," Lai Li translated.

Cid still hesitated. Hadn't Ellengio said they needed an ally?

"All right, let's go," he said. "Everyone, get your gear together. Quick!"

The others scrambled to obey. Cid had to admit they had a good crew. Even the one's who had expressed doubts did not hesitate once he gave the word. He just hoped his decision would live up to their trust.

Roshnialu seemed to be shaking with impatience.

"Hurry up!" Cid called out, even as he threw his own backpack over his shoulder. They all hurried back to the airlock in minutes, Yuffie last, carrying a large pouch that obviously contained her precious materia.

"Let's go," Cid said.

They left the ship, Roshnialu and Zack in the lead, with Cid and Lai Li right behind, and the others bringing up the rear. It was completely dark out now. Cid looked back at the ship as they hurried away, his mind filled with doubt. If this was a mistake, or some kind of trap, the others would never forgive him. They had been suffering from nothing but bad luck since they had arrived here. Was this a continuation of it, or was it finally starting to change?

"Where are we going?" Cid asked as Roshnialu led them down the slope, away from the trail used earlier to reach the path to the town.

Lai Li asked Roshnialu.

They did not slow down as Roshnialu answered.

"These mountains are riddled with caves," Lai Li said to Cid. "She knows them better than anyone. She taking us to one that we can hide in, one where they won't find us."

Cid did not reply. They were committed now, in Roshnialu's hands. Whether it was a trap or not, there was no going back.

"Kind of ironic, isn't it?" Lai Li said suddenly.

"What?" Cid questioned.

"Ellengio said we needed to find an ally, someone who knew the Cetra language. A half hour after he leaves to go find someone, Roshnialu shows up on our doorstep."

Cid nodded in agreement.

"Yeah," he said. "And I'll bet you're glad now you stayed behind."

Cid kept scanning the skies as they proceeded, kind of hoping he might see some Chadara in the air, confirming Roshnialu's story, but not so close that they get spotted themselves. But he saw no sign of any pursuit in the darkness behind them.

Roshnialu led them down a steep slope. She went down quickly, almost effortlessly, but the others struggled to follow. In the darkness it was difficult to find footing, and the trail was narrow. Only a foot or two wide, with a sheer drop beyond, Cid had to force himself to move even as fast as a slow walk, and some of the others were going even slower. Roshnialu stopped and impatiently waved for them to hurry.

"We're going as fast as we can," Cid said. "We're not mountain goats, you know."

Lai Li passed the message along. Roshnialu did not reply, but when she started down the slope again, she moved more slowly.

But soon the trail became narrower still, and Cid found himself hugging the rock wall beside him as he progressed. He felt a tightening in his stomach as he looked out at the void in front of them, just a step away. Far down on the plain he could see a few twinkling lights from the city below, but otherwise, the plain was dark.

As Cid looked ahead he saw Roshnialu stoop down, then disappear into the darkness. Zack followed a moment later, and now only Lai Li remained in front of him. He continued edging his way forward until he stood beside her.

The trail came to an end in a bulging outcropping of rock. Lai Li stood at the edge, looking down. Cid came up beside her, feeling a great reluctance to stand so close to the precipice. Looking down he saw Roshnialu and Zack climbing down the cliff face below.

"Oh great," he muttered.

He looked at Lai Li.

"Isn't there any other way?"

Lai Li did not reply, just stood there, staring down at those below.

"Lai Li?" Cid questioned.

She looked at him suddenly.

"Huh? Oh, yeah."

She called down to Roshnialu. When she was answered she shook her head.

"She says it's the only way," Lai Li stated. "It's not far. The cave mouth is just below us."

Cid looked down one more time, then decided he wasn't going to do that again.

"All right," he said. "I guess we better get it over with."

Lai Li sat at the edge, unmoving.

"I don't think I can do it," she said hesitantly.

Cid just looked at her, trying mightily to keep his eyes from wandering beyond her.

"Sure you can," he said reassuringly. He could understand her reluctance. He wasn't anxious to attempt this himself, but they didn't have much choice at this point.

Lai Li nodded slowly. She took a deep breath, then turned and swung her legs down to find purchase on a narrow ledge below, but then she stopped. She glanced downward fearfully.

"Don't look down!" Cid admonished.

Immediately her head jerked up. She stared at her hands, and the death-grip they had on the rocks she was using as handholds. For a moment she remained there, frozen in place. Finally she shook her head.

"I...I can't do it," she said again.

The others had caught up with them and now stood close behind.

Below them they heard Zack call out.

"Hurry up!"

Cid stooped down beside Lai Li.

"You've got to do it," he said encouragingly. "There's no turning back now. Just keep your eyes on the rocks in front of you. Don't think about it."

He could tell she was trying very hard to be brave, but her knuckles were white, and for all her determination, they refused to let go their hold.

Suddenly Rude came up beside Cid.

"Hang on," he said softly to Lai Li.

He turned around and slowly lowered himself down beside her.

"Concentrate on me," he said. "Can you do that? Just look at me, nothing else."

He stared into her eyes. Her face was pale, but her eyes locked onto him. For a moment she just stared at him.

"Can you?" he asked.

She nodded slowly.

"Yes."

"Okay then," he replied. He slowly lowered himself down a step, then looked up to see her staring at him still.

"Okay, now just put your foot where I put mine. Ease yourself down. Go ahead, I'm right here. I won't let you fall."

Lai Li nodded. Again she hesitated, but then she lowered herself down, the entire time staring at Rude. A moment later she was a step lower.

"That's it," he said. "See, it's not so bad. I'm going to continue down. Just do everything I do, okay?"

She nodded, still looking right at him.

"Okay," she said, "but if you fall, I'm not going to do that too."

Rude smiled. In spite of her fears it was good to see she could make light of the situation.

"Fair enough," he said.

Cid stood watching them from above as Rude slowly coaxed Lai Li down the side of the cliff. She seemed to be gaining some confidence now, and was moving slowly but steadily down, following Rude. Cid looked at the others.

"Let's keep it moving," he said.

None of the others looked too pleased to climb down the sheer cliff. Almost all of them hesitated at the edge, and he thought that Yuffie, Amanda and Altim might falter, but they all gritted their teeth and followed the others, and soon Cid found himself alone on the trail above them.

He paused for a moment, looking down at those below him. In spite of the encouragement he had given the others as they had started down, he had to admit he was just as reluctant as they were to actually start down himself.

"C'mon, you're supposed to be the leader here," he muttered to himself. It wouldn't look good to have one of them have to climb back up here to nursemaid him down. He turned around, gritted his teeth and lowered himself down, being careful to look steadily at the rock face in front of him.

A few minutes later, though it seemed much longer than that, he found himself, with a huge sigh of relief, dropping down onto a narrow ledge that ran along the mountainside in a westerly direction. The others were already hurrying on along it. He followed quickly. Though the ledge was narrow, barely wide enough to walk comfortably, it felt wide and quite safe compared to the descent they had just made.

He saw a deeper darkness appear ahead of them on the trail, and the others vanished into it. As he approached he realized it was a cave entrance. He quickly slipped inside behind them.

Inside it was pitch dark, and he hadn't taken more than a few tentative steps when he ran into Amanda.

"Can't see a thing," came the deep voice of Barret.

"Lai Li?" Cid called out.

"Just a second," came the immediate response.

There was a scratching sound, and suddenly a blue light flared. Cid saw that they were in a narrow rough walled tunnel. Roshnialu stood in front of them, something similar to a torch in her hand. The head of it glowed with a bluish light which did not flicker.

"Shondu," she said, turning and hurrying down the tunnel.

"This way," Lai Li said, pretty much unnecessarily.

They walked through the tunnels for a long time. The caves twisted and turned, with dozens of branches and turn offs. Soon Cid was hopelessly lost. He wondered how Roshnialu could find her way, for each tunnel seemed pretty much the same, with no distinguishing features. But she walked unhesitatingly forward, confidently making turns as if she knew exactly where she was going. Cid hoped for all their sake that was true.

Eventually the tunnel opened up into a large cavern. The sound of running water caught their attention. Near the back of the cavern they saw a small stream gurgling out of the wall. It ran into a rough hewn basin, then overflowed and bubbled down across the cavern floor to disappear into another crevice. Roshnialu walked over to the basin and turned toward them. She spoke quickly.

"She says we can rest here," Lai Li interpreted. "The Chadara do not know of this place. It is deep in the mountain, farther than they go. We are safe here."

Most of them sat down, making themselves as comfortable as they could on the hard rock. Roshnialu removed something from a pouch. It looked like some kind of herb. She crushed it in their hands and let it fall into the basin. She turned to look at them.

"Genthar."

"She says drink," Lai Li said.

Barret eyed the basin dubiously.

"I think I'll pass," he said.

"No, I think I know what it is," Zack said. He stepped up to the basin and drank deeply. The water had the same sweet taste. He could feel it's renewing power even before he had finished. He stood up and wiped his arm across his face.

"She gave it to me earlier," he said. "When I was recovering. It has some kind of healing power. Try it."

Barret still looked doubtful.

Lai Li stepped up to the basin. She looked at Zack, then took a drink herself. The others looked at her. She returned their gaze and nodded.

"It's quite good," she decided.

Convinced, the others drank too. While they were doing so, Zack turned to Lai Li.

"Roshnialu had an argument with a Chadara before we came to the ship," he said. "Ask her what it was about."

Lai Li looked at Roshnialu and they had a quick conversation.

"She says Kelmpeck wanted her to turn you over to the Mind Slayers."

Zack nodded slowly as Roshnialu went on.

"The Chadara are deathly afraid of the Mind Slayers," Lai Li said. "They know what Jenova can do, they know, after two thousand years of domination, that they cannot fight them, cannot stand against them. Some have rebelled before, but none have ever been successful, and those who have turned against Jenova had paid with their minds, or their lives. He was afraid. She doesn't blame him."

"She says the others were captured. She must be talking about Cloud and those with him. Jenova was informed. They have been taken to Daris. That's a large city to the north of here, where Jenova has their headquarters in this portion of the world. Kelmpeck, like most of the Chadara, would not dare to do anything openly against the Mind Slayers, but he and others keep an eye on them, try to find out things. He has many contacts. One of the Chadara he knows in Daris told him that at least one of your friends was taken to the induction chamber."

"The induction chamber?" Barret questioned.

"They Mind Slayers use some kind of device to reach into people minds. With it they can read their thoughts, and also take control of them. Once this is done, the persons mind is destroyed, and they are under the total control of Jenova."

"Destroyed?" Yuffie said nervously. "It can't be reversed?"

"It has never been known to happen," Lai Li translated.

They all paused for a moment to ponder this.

"Do they know who was in the chamber?" Rude questioned slowly.

Lai Li asked Roshnialu.

"No," Lai Li said at Roshnialu's response. "But almost immediately afterward the Chadara were ordered to escort one of the Mind Slayers back to the city, their mission to go up into the mountains and find your ship, and the rest of you. Kelmpeck had come to warn her, to tell her to turn over Zack before it was too late, before the Mind Slayers found out she had helped him."

Roshnialu fell silent.

"So she's risking her life to help us," Cid said. "Tell her we said thanks."

Lai Li and Roshnialu spoke some more.

"She says there's no need," Lai Li said. "But she is curious as to where we came from and what we are doing here. She's never seen anyone quite like us."

"You can say that again," Cid said, walking slowly up and looking at Roshnialu thoughtfully.

"Should I tell her what we're doing here?" Lai Li asked.

"Yes," Cid replied. It was too late not to trust her now.

"Wait," Zack said. "But first, I have a question. Who is she?"

"She told you. Her name is Roshnialu," Lai Li replied.

"No, I mean, who is she really. She looks like a Chadara, but she's different. She doesn't act like the others, like the ones' we fought. Is this what all Chadara women look like?"

Lai Li relayed the question. Roshnialu spoke for some time, and they saw Lai Li's eyes widen in surprise.

"No," Lai Li said. "she does not look like Chadara women, she does not look like anyone else at all. Her father was a Chadara, but her mother was Cetra."

"She's half Cetra?" Yuffie said in surprise.

The others just stood there looking at Roshnialu in a new light.

"I knew it," Zack said slowly. "I could feel it."

Roshnialu spoke again.

"Her mother was a Cetra, her name was Mistihlia. She died in childbirth. She was raised by her father, Gregolias. At the time there were few Cetra left, and those that existed were still fighting a guerrilla war against the Mind Slayers. A few of the Chadara had always fought alongside them, her father among them. When she was six the rebels were discovered. They were attacked by a group of loyal Chadara and Mind Slayers and wiped out. Roshnialu was the only one to escape. Her father and the others all fought to the death."

"I'm sorry," Cid said.

Lai Li passed it on.

"It's alright," Lai Li continued. "It was a long time ago. Since then Roshnialu had been hiding from the Mind Slayers, who, because of her Cetra blood, would be hunted down immediately if they knew she still lived. A few sympathetic Chadara took her in and raised her, keeping her hidden from Jenova."

"So does that mean that there are other Cetra here?" Cid asked suddenly.

The all waited while Lai Li spoke again to Roshnialu.

"She says she's the last one. At least, as far as she knows. She hasn't seen another Cetra since her father and the others were killed."

Cid rubbed his chin thoughtfully. It was a big planet, and even if she hadn't seen any, that didn't mean that some didn't exist somewhere. The fact that they were still here just a generation ago gave him hope that there still might be some alive.

"She wants to know who we are now," Lai Li said.

Cid nodded.

"Go ahead and tell her. Tell her everything."

It took a while. Roshnialu listened intently as Lai Li told her story. Occasionally the half Cetra would interrupt, but for the most part, she remained quiet. When Lai Li had finished, Roshnialu spoke again.

"She says she had hoped it was something like this. That we were here to fight the Mind Slayers. She has been waiting all her life for a chance to avenge her father, and release the Chadara from Jenova's yoke. She'll do anything in her power to help us."

"Good," Cid said. "Looks like we've found an ally. This is just what Ellengio wanted. Bout time we had a little bit of good luck. Ask her if she knows anything about the field generator."

Lai Li relayed the question.

"She says she doesn't," Lai Li said after Roshnialu replied. "But she does know something that may be of help to us. There was a secret Cetra base, known only to the rebels, that they had used on occasion. The Mind Slayers never found out about it. She doesn't remember very much about it. She hasn't been there in a long time, but she thinks she could find it again. There might be some clue there."

"That sounds great," Cid said. "How long will it take us to get there?"

Lai Li asked Roshnialu, who replied quickly.

"About four days on foot," Lai Li said.

"Four days," Cid replied, not pleased with the response. "I wish there were some way of going faster."

"It would help if we all had wings," Altim stated.

"Yeah," Cid muttered.

Lai Li was talking to Roshnialu once again.

"She says we may be able to get there faster," Lai Li said. "These tunnels come out near the base of the mountain, not far from the city. She may be able to get us some transportation."

"That would be great," Cid replied.

"We can rest here for a few hours," Lai Li said as Roshnialu continued. "That way we can get to the city right before dawn, when the Chadara are most likely to be sleeping. We should not have much difficulty stealing a few chendu."

"Chendu?" Yuffie said.

"Beasts of burden," Lai Li explained.

"Sounds like a plan to me," Barret concluded.

Cid looked around at the others.

"All right then. I suggest we get some shuteye. Looks like this mission is finally on it's way."