

CHAPTER XVI: THE HEAT IS ON

Reeve was fading fast.

He looked ahead. Cloud was a small figure now, running down the road, far ahead. Reeve had tried his best to keep up, but now his lungs burned, his chest heaved for breath. He knew he had to stop.

He came to a halt. He stood there for a few minutes, bent over, hands on his knees, taking huge gulps of air. When he looked up again he could barely make Cloud out.

He resisted the urge to call out. Cloud had said he wasn't going to stop. Reeve wasn't sure if his friend would stick to that statement, but Reeve didn't want to slow him down. Both Tifa and Aeris were in danger, and Reeve felt it was better for everyone if Cloud got there alone than for Reeve to slow him down. It would be better if he left Reeve behind.

He sat down on the side of the road, still breathing heavily but no longer gasping for breath. He had gotten quite a bit of exercise in the last year, since he had joined the group, but he still wasn't in the best of shape, certainly not as well conditioned as Cloud. Even a year of exercise wasn't going to make up for a lifetime of inactivity.

Cloud was gone now. Out of sight. Reeve wondered if he had noticed that he had lost his tag-a-long. Probably not. Reeve hadn't seen him look back. He had been focused on one thing, getting to Ifalna and saving Tifa. Reeve supposed Cloud would probably run though a volcanic eruption to get there without even noticing.

Reeve bowed his head, cursing himself for his weakness. He didn't have that kind of will, wasn't in that kind of physical condition. If anyone could save them it would be Cloud. He'd be the hero again, and Reeve would be left in the dust.

Not that he blamed Cloud for that. More power to him. It was his own fault, not Cloud's. If he was left behind, he had no one to blame but himself.

It was only natural to want to be the hero. But just wanting it wasn't enough. He wasn't Cloud, and he was never going to be. He would never be the big hero who came in and saved the day with his fighting ability, who beat back the enemy single-handedly. That wasn't his forte. No, his strengths were in different areas than that. His strength was organization and thinking things through. And no one had ever been proclaimed a hero for their organizational skills.

He was being foolish, and he knew it. There was only one Cloud, and it was stupid to compare himself to the young warrior. He would always come out on the short end of the stick. Instead of trying to be more like Cloud, instead of emphasizing his weaknesses, he should be playing to his strengths. After all, that's what a team was all about. Each person brought their own particular strengths to the group, making them stronger than any one of them individually.

But how could his strengths help now? Wisteria was on the rampage. The only thing that could stop her was strength. Let's face it, even if he had been able to keep up with Cloud, if they faced Wisteria, how much could he contribute? He had to face the facts that he wouldn't be much help at all. Not that that mattered anyway. At the rate he was going, he'd probably not even get there until after the battle was already finished.

Maybe it would be better if he was just left behind, he thought gloomily. It would give them one less person to worry about.

He got up and started walking again. There was no point in trying to run. He'd never be able to catch up with Cloud. It didn't even make sense to go on.

He shook his head, admonishing himself for being a jerk. There was no sense in getting into a funk about this. That wasn't going to do anyone any good. If his strengths were organization and thinking things through, then that's what he should be doing, not moping around feeling sorry for himself.

But again, how was thinking things through going to help at this point? Calin had already told them what to do to have a chance against Wisteria. It was probably foolish for Cloud to rush ahead. It seemed unlikely that even with his skills he could defeat Wisteria on his own. Aeris and Tifa were there, but Tifa was pregnant, which pretty much eliminated her ability to fight. Aeris and Tifa would have to use magical skills. No, it would be best if they could all fight Wisteria together. Every little bit would count. Who knows, even his own limited skills, when combined with the others, might be just enough to put them over the top, give them the capability to defeat her. He shouldn't sell himself short.

But his skills were useless if he didn't get there in time. Wisteria wasn't going to politely wait around for them all to show up. No matter what their fighting skills, no matter how easily they could defeat Wisteria as a team, it wouldn't matter if they didn't have time to get there.

The basic problem was time. He couldn't run as fast as Cloud. There was no way he could keep up that way. But he had no other transportation. The Slipstream was in Corel. There was no way anyone could get to it in time. The Turks helicopter wouldn't be here for one and a half to two hours. What other options did they have?

Reeve's brow furrowed. He was mayor of Ifalna. They had a few helicopters there. He could order one to come get him. But no, that wouldn't work either. Ifalna was too far away. By the time the copter came to pick him up, it wouldn't be any faster than the Turks.

No, it had to be someplace closer. The nearest town was Costa del Sol, but they didn't know anyone there. If they got a helicopter there, they'd have to hire it out. Who knows how long that would take.

The only other nearby town was...

A thought suddenly occurred to him. He stopped and pulled out his PHS. He dialed quickly. He heard it ring, then twice more.

"C'mon," he muttered, tapping his foot impatiently. "Pick it up."

"Hello?"

"Shera," he exclaimed. "We need your help!"

~*~

The crackling of electricity and a shower of sparks preceded a string of curses.

Cid got up, hands on hips, and looked at the sparking console in front of him. He had been working on rewiring it for about twenty minutes, but it was fast becoming obvious to him that he was wasting his time.

It was too badly damaged, that was all there was to it. He hardly had any tools, and he had no idea where to even start to look for replacement parts. Calin had gone with Cait down to the main reactor, so he didn't even have anyone to ask. Which also meant he didn't have anyone to assist him. Not that that mattered at this point. He was pretty handy with machines, but even he couldn't work with nothing. They had left him with an impossible task, and all the assistants in the world wasn't going to change that fact.

Maybe if he had a shop full of equipment and a weeks time, he could fix this. But those options weren't available to him. He could still hear the wail of the alarms. If they didn't do anything quickly, this whole place was going to be blown to smithereens.

He wondered how much time they had left. Nothing in the control room was working. Wisteria had been very thorough. There was nothing here to indicate how much time they might have left.

He shook his head. There was no point in remaining here. There was nothing else he could do. He might as well go down to the reactor and see how the others were doing.

Having made up his mind, he quickly left the room. He walked rapidly down the hall. Calin had told him how to get to the reactor. He just hoped the others were faring better than he had been.

It took him about ten minutes to reach the reactor. He didn't meet anyone along the way. Everyone else had long since cleared out. Not that that would help them much. Unless they had a plane, there was no way they were going to get out of the blast radius before the place went up. If Cait couldn't stop the reactor, no one was going to make it.

There were a number of security doors along the way, but all of them stood open and deserted.

Eventually he made his way into a large room. Calin stood in front of a console in the center of the room. Cid could see Cait working in the next room though thick glass windows.

The alarms here seemed more incessant than ever. In addition to that he could feel the hum of the reactor beneath his feet, and it seemed distinctly hotter here. A green glow, emanating from the room beyond, filled the room.

Cid came up beside Calin and looked over his shoulder.

"Can't you shut the reactor down from here?" he questioned.

Calin started. He had not seen Cid come up behind him.

"No," he replied. "This equipment is just used for monitoring. There's no way to shut it off here."

"Wonderful," Cid muttered. He looked over the gauges in front of them, but even with his mechanical skills, he didn't know what many of them meant. He had no actual experience running a mako reactor. "How is Cait doing?"

"He's done well so far," Calin replied. "But I'm afraid the mako radiation is starting to get to him. He's stumbled a few times in the last couple of minutes. I don't think his circuits can take much more."

"Do you think he can remove enough mako to stop it from blowing up before he malfunctions?"

"I'm not sure," Calin replied, staring at the instruments in front of him. "He'll have to get it down to less than 50% capacity. Right now it's at 87%. He's still got a long way to go. I don't know well he can hold up, but it doesn't look good."

"How much longer do you think we have?" Cid questioned.

"Again, it's hard to say. Twenty minutes to a half hour, tops."

There was an intercom right beside Calin. Cid pressed the speaker.

"Cait, how ya doin'?"

Cait had removed one of the mako rods and was carrying it over to the disposal pool. He looked up briefly.

"A piece of cake," he said cheerfully.

Cid nodded. Cait appeared to be his usual self.

Even as the thought that the huge mog stumbled. He tumbled head over heels, although Cid could see nothing for him to trip over. The mako rod clattered away on the concrete floor.

"Are you all right?" Cid questioned.

Cait didn't reply. For a moment he didn't do anything at all. Then he pulled himself to his feet. He looked over at Cid and waved an okay.

"I'm...fine," he said slowly. He walked over and tried to pick up the rod, but it slipped out of his hands again. He tried a second time and managed to pick it up this time, then continued his journey over to the disposal pool.

Cid and Calin exchanged worried looks. Cait wasn't the most coordinated of creatures to begin with. But Cid thought this time it was more than that. It seemed obvious that in spite of his reassurance to the contrary, Cait was feeling the effects of the mako.

"I don't think he can go on much longer," Calin said.

Cid didn't reply. He wanted to believe Calin was wrong. He wanted to believe that Cait would get the job done. He had to believe, because if he didn't, he knew he'd be going in there next.

"You don't have any protective suits or anything?" he questioned.

Calin shook his head.

"No one anticipated going into the reactor," he replied.

"Seems like there wasn't too much thinking ahead going on here," Cid muttered.

Calin didn't argue the point.

Cait removed two more rods before he stumbled again. This time it took him even longer to get up, and when he did he looked around for a moment, as if he was lost, before he continued.

Cid didn't say anything. There was no need to. He didn't want to think about what would happen if Cait fell and didn't get up again.

But the strange part was, when Cait eventually did malfunction, he didn't fall down at all. He was walking back to the reactor rods when he suddenly stopped.

"I don't feel so..." he began, but never finished. His head fell forward, but he did not fall over.

"Cait! Cait, are you okay?" Cid shouted.

In spite of Cid's pleas, Cait did not respond.

"Shit," Cid blurted out finally. "How many more rods need to be removed?"

"I can't say for sure," Calin replied.

"Dammit, don't you know anything?" Cid snapped angrily.

"Maybe ten or fifteen. I wasn't in charge of the reactor," Calin replied defensively. "I was in charge of the mako infusion research. Grolich was in charge of the reactor."

"Well, what the hell happened to him?" Cid replied. "Did he run out when all this started?"

"No, he was in the control room," Calin replied. "Wisteria killed him. You probably saw his body."

Cid didn't answer. It was a stupid thing to argue about anyway. Pointless. He knew what he had to do. There was no choice. If someone didn't go into that reactor and finish the job, they were all going to die anyway.

"I'm going in," he said.

Calin looked at him for a moment.

"I'll come with you," he said.

Cid glared at him.

"What's the point of us both dying," he questioned.

"There aren't a lot of rods left," Calin replied. "We can do it a lot faster together. Maybe with both of us removing the rods, we'll finish fast enough so that neither one of us will get a lethal dose."

Cid wanted to argue, he wasn't even sure why. He supposed he didn't like the idea of risking more than one life. But he had to admit what Calin was saying made a lot of sense.

"All right, let's get on with it," he agreed.

Calin nodded. He walked forward to the thick insulated door that separated them from the reactor core, a door Cid couldn't help but notice was plastered with warning about not entering when the reactor was live.

What the hell are we getting ourselves into, he thought.

But he didn't have much time to contemplate that before the door swung open.

And it was a good thing he didn't. Because if he had, he didn't know whether he'd have been able to keep his nerve. As he followed Calin into the room he couldn't help but notice his throat going suddenly dry. In spite of his attempts not to, his thoughts went to Shera and Sydney. He wasn't just a lone hot shot pilot anymore. He had a family. A family that needed him. Why was he still doing all this crazy shit?

Nevertheless he forced himself forward. Now he was in the room, the green glow surrounding him. He knew the mako energy was permeating his body, slowly poisoning him. Irrationally, he had thought he would be able to detect that somehow. He looked around, but except for it being almost intolerably hot, he felt nothing at all.

"Hurry," he heard Calin mutter.

Cid followed Calin's lead. He had seen what Cait was doing, so he had a pretty good idea of what needed to be done. He walked over to the bank of rods. He stood there for a moment, looking at one of them, hesitating. They looked hot, and he had no gloves. But he saw Calin pull one out without discomfort. There was a small knob attached to the end, obviously designed to grab hold of. He took hold of it, not sure what to expect, but it didn't feel unusual at all.

He pulled it out and almost dropped it. It was much heavier than he expected! He lifted up his knee to rest it on while he got a better grip, then he lifted it up again and carried it over to the disposal pool.

The rods were not only heavy but cumbersome. They weren't designed for one person to carry. They seemed to progress agonizingly slowly. The air seemed thick, and Cid almost felt like he had to push his way through it. He had to take deep breaths just to get a little oxygen into his lungs. The place was viciously hot. He started to wonder if he was going to keel over from heatstroke long before the mako poisoning got to him. Or perhaps the feeling of being hot was a symptom of the poisoning. It was hard to judge.

Neither one of them spoke. Talking seemed to Cid to be not worth the effort. Even after Calin fell to the ground after dropping one of the rods into the disposal pool. Cid just went right on with what he was doing. The fact was, he barely noticed. All his focus was concentrated on removing the rods, on keeping his own body going. He was hardly aware of anything else going on around him.

He had no idea how long they had been in here, but by now it seemed like hours. Calin managed to stumble to his feet, but he didn't continue much longer before he fell again, and this time, he did not get up.

Cid didn't even notice until he almost tripped over him. He stopped for a minute. He knew this was a bad thing, he knew it meant he didn't have much more time himself. But by now he felt somehow indifferent. His vision was beginning to blur, and at the same time a strange lethargy was overcoming him. It seemed to take tremendous effort just to put one foot in front of the other.

Goddamn. This was not good. He looked over at the rods that were still in place. How many more did they have to take out? He tried to count the ones that were still there, but for some reason, though he knew there were more, he couldn't get past three. There was no one outside in the control room, no one to tell him if he had taken enough out to prevent the explosion, but he didn't think of that.

He fell to his knees. The rod in his hands felt like it weighed tons. He couldn't see how he could possibly lift it. But somehow he forced himself to get up. Almost mechanically, he brought the rod over to the disposal pool and dropped it in with a splash.

He stopped again, wiping the sweat from his brow. His shirt was soaked. It felt like he was in a sauna. He room seemed to be spinning. He almost fell, but reached out and braced his hand against the wall to prevent it. He had to keep going. The others couldn't help anymore. If he didn't stop the reactor, no one would.

Gathering all his strength he forced himself upright. He staggered over to the rods once more. It took him a long time, but he managed to pull another one out. He could barely lift it.

He grappled with it, stumbling back toward the pool. He almost dropped it, one end banging against the ground, but somehow managed to hold on. He stumbled again once he reached the pool, letting it slip out of his hands. Part of it banged against the floor again, but it bounced up and fell into the pool. Cid was pitched off balance. This time he did fall, coming down heavily on his left leg, and almost falling into the pool himself. He lay there for a long time, trying to summon the strength to get up. But he had nothing left. In spite of his efforts he felt himself sinking down. It seemed beyond his strength to get up again.

He fought to remain conscious, though he wasn't sure why. He was sure this was the end. Who knows how badly he had been exposed by now. He had seen the man Vincent had found in the woods by Lucrecia's falls. He had been incoherent, insane. Cloud had been the same way when he had been poisoned. Was he going to end up the same way? Cloud had recovered but the other man had not. Was Shera going to end up married to a vegetable, a man whose mind had been destroyed by mako? Could fate be that cruel?

It would be better to die.

Shera.

He stirred, lifting his shoulders. His vision was foggy, but he could still make out the door. There was no way he could lift anymore rods. He had done what he could, and if it wasn't enough then it wasn't.

There really didn't seem much point. It was probably too late. He was probably too far gone, but thinking of Shera made him want to try, made him not want to give up. The least he could do was get himself out of this room. He couldn't give up now. Shera was depending on him, and so was Sydney.

It felt like the hardest thing he had ever done in his life, but somehow he struggled to his knees. Slowly, he inched his way toward the door. By this time he had no concept of time. He didn't know whether minutes or hours past as he slowly crawled towards the opening. It didn't matter. He had no other goal but to reach the door.

He was looking down at the floor, staring at each arm as he moved it forward, as if it would only work if he focused all his concentration on it. When something grabbed hold of his shoulder, he didn't even realize it at first. All he knew was that suddenly his progress greatly improved. A few moments later he found himself outside the door, outside the core. As he sunk down to the ground he looked up to see Red standing beside him.

"Cid," the red beast called.

He could tell Red was saying his name, but his voice didn't seem to want to work. All he could do was lie there looking at his friend. His head was spinning. He felt nauseous. His limbs were numb.

"Cid," Red cried out again, his voice sounding very agitated. "Hang on. The Turks are here with the helicopter. We're going to get you out of here. We're going to get you to a hospital. Just hang on."

Cid's throat was dry. The world was turning a misty shade of grey. He just wanted to rest. But there was one more thing he had to do. He tried to wet his lips, but there was no moisture. He opened his mouth, forcing the words out through cracked lips.

"Tell...Shera...that I...I love her."

And then he let his head fall back. The grayness closed in around him, and he struggled no more.

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The trees had been thinning out in front of Cloud for some time. Finally they fell away behind him, leaving an open plain in front. The forest and the mountains were behind him. Ahead, and slightly to the right, he caught a glimpse of blue where the plain ran down to the ocean. He looked north. He was still too far away from Costa del Sol to see it, but he knew he didn't have too much farther to go.

He had finally realized that he had left Reeve behind. By the time he had, however, Reeve was nowhere to be seen. Cloud had been tempted to go back and look for him, but had decided against it. It would be better for him to get to Costa del Sol as fast as he could. If he could find chocobo, he could go back and get Reeve then. It would be a lot quicker that way.

Or he could leave Reeve to fend for himself. He was terribly worried about Tifa. She and Aeris would be no match for Wisteria. He knew he'd never forgive himself if something happened to her while he wasn't there. And would he ever be able to forgive Reeve if something happened to Tifa because he went back to get Reeve?

He pushed that thought grimly out of his mind. A million things could happen. There was no sense thinking about a worse case scenario. Reeve couldn't be too far behind, and they might need his help against Wisteria. Besides, Cloud knew that Reeve was just as worried about Aeris as he was about Tifa.

He had been traveling at a fast pace, but he hadn't really been pushing himself. With this long a distance, he couldn't go all out the entire way. Now that his goal was almost in sight he found himself going even faster, pushing his pace to the limit.

He shouldn't have left them alone. He had had a bad feeling about it from the very beginning. But at the time he had just thought that Gilan Bradford would be the problem. Aeris had seemed pretty certain she could handle any trouble he caused. But now they were in trouble again, and he couldn't help them. How many times had this happened now? Aeris faced Sephiroth and was killed. The bar had been blown up, nearly killing Tifa. In both cases he hadn't been able to lift a finger to help either one of them. When was he going to learn?

He should have stayed with them, or insisted that *someone* stay with them. Gilan was a clear danger. That alone should have made him more cautious.

He was being irrational, and he knew it. He couldn't stay by Tifa's side twenty-four hours a day. No one was responsible for another person's life. It just couldn't be done. Given what had happened, he had had no choice. He had had to search for the reactor. And if he had left someone behind, how much better would they fare against Wisteria?

But even those thoughts didn't stop him from feeling like he had failed again.

Thinking that just made his feet fly faster. It wasn't over yet. There was still a chance he could get there in time.

The sound of the plane had grown quite loud by the time he noticed it.

He looked up as a dark shadow shot just a few hundred feet overhead. His eyes widened as he recognized the unmistakable shape of the Tiny Bronco.

The plane banked sharply. As it turned toward him again, he could see Shera at the controls, with Reeve in the seat behind her.

"Goddamn," he muttered.

The plane came back toward him, dropping down onto the plain, landing a hundred meters away and taxiing in his direction. He ran toward it.

Shera waved as he reached it. The plane came to a stop, the propellers still spinning.

"Hurry up!" Reeve called.

Cloud didn't need any prodding. He leaped up and climbed aboard. Almost as soon as his feet left the ground Shera gunned the engine. A moment later they were in the air again, turning north toward Ifalna.

"Shera, what are you doing here?" Cloud called out.

"Reeve called me," she replied. "He said it was an emergency."

Cloud turned to look at Reeve. He nodded in appreciation.

"Good thinking Reeve," he said.

Reeve shrugged. He couldn't help but add a little dig.

"You're just lucky I didn't leave you behind," he said with a smile.

Cloud smiled ruefully in return.

"I was going to come back for you once I got a chocobo," he said.

"It's all right," Reeve replied. "I understand. I probably would have done the same thing in your place."

Cloud didn't reply. The Tiny Bronco was faster than either a chocobo or a helicopter. Reeve had come up with the best solution. He kicked himself for not thinking of it himself.

"How long until we reach Ifalna?" he asked.

Shera glanced down at the gauges in front of her.

"About fifteen twenty minutes," she replied. "What's going on?"

Cloud gave her a quick rundown on what had happened with Wisteria. When he got to the part about the reactor going critical she interrupted.

"The reactor might explode?"

Cloud suddenly realized he had probably said too much. The reactor could explode, and Cid was there. But he couldn't take back the words now.

"I'm sure they'll be all right..." he said, not knowing what else to say.

"Cid's been in scrapes like this before and managed to get himself out," Reeve piped in.

Shera was silent for a long time. She was facing forward, so he couldn't see how pale her face had suddenly become. When she spoke again, her voice gave away no hint of the hollow feeling in her stomach.

"Well, when you said it was an emergency, you weren't kidding. I'm glad to help. Were Vincent and Elena okay?"

"I don't know," Cloud replied. "Elena didn't look too bad, but Vincent was in serious condition. I hope so."

They fell silent. Shera drove the plane onward, pushing it to its limits, well aware that she was going in the opposite direction from the reactor. If it was going to explode, a fast airplane might be the only escape possible.

But she bit her lip and flew on. She had to depend on Cid's abilities to get himself out of a tight spot. Again. How many times would this go on? How many times would he push his luck? How many times before it ran out?

She felt a momentary bitterness toward Cloud. Toward everyone in Avalanche. Cid wasn't as young as he used to be. He had responsibilities. He had a wife and a child. He should have settled down by now, should be raising his family. But instead he was off gallivanting with Cloud and the others. If he had never met them, how much different would his life be?

A momentary bitterness, but it passed quickly. She knew she wasn't being fair. All those years that Cid had been scornful of her. It had only changed after he had met Cloud and his friends. She had a feeling they had had a lot to do with his asking her to marry him, a lot to do with making him face up to how he really felt. If he had never become a member of Avalanche, would he have told her how he felt about her after she left him, or would he have just let her go?

And besides, Cid wasn't gallivanting. He wasn't hanging out at the bowling alley with his buddies drinking beer. What Avalanche was doing was important. When they had stopped Sephiroth, they had literally saved the world. They all knew the dangers of mako, they all knew what kind of damage another reactor could cause. How could she complain, when he was doing so much good?

But in spite of those reasons, in spite of the logic of what he was doing, she wanted to complain. She wanted him to be with his family. She knew it wasn't fair to feel that way, but she couldn't help it. Sometimes she just felt cheated by the whole thing.

And now, now he was stuck at some reactor that was about to explode. God, how did he always end up getting himself into such messes? She loved him so much. She didn't know what she would do if something happened to him.

She suddenly realized her eyes were moist.

She wiped them dry. There was no time for this. There was nothing she could do to help Cid. She just had to pray that he would be all right. She looked up and realized that they had covered quite a distance while she had been lost in thought. They were already over the northern continent. She could see Shell Village, the excavation site sticking out of the trees to the left. And ahead she could make out the dark forest that surrounded Ifalna.

"We're almost there," she announced.

Cloud leaned forward at this, craning his neck to look ahead. But they were still too far away to make out any details.

There was no airport at Ifalna. At least, not yet. Reeve had one planned, but construction had only just begun. The road leading in had been widened to allow the heavy construction equipment needed to build up the city. Shera looked for a straight portion of the road as close to the city itself as she could find, then set the plane down there.

Before it had even come to a full stop Cloud leaped out. He hit the ground running. He looked back. Reeve was right behind him. Shera was still shutting off the engines.

"You all go ahead," she called out. "I'll catch up!"

Cloud nodded.

"Thanks Shera, you're a lifesaver!"

He ran down the road, as fast as he could. Shera had landed close to the city, and they could both see the rooftops of some of the taller buildings sticking out through the trees ahead. This was fortunate for Reeve. For that short a distance, he could keep up with Cloud.

They ran straight through the upper city. Something was going on. Some people were running in the streets, shouting as they went, but neither Cloud or Reeve could make out what they were saying. And neither one of them was inclined to stop and ask. Cloud felt that every minute counted. For the agitation expressed by the people, he had a feeling Wisteria was already here.

They reached the entrance to the underground city and plunged in, running down the wide tunnel until they came to the long crystalline staircase. From there they could see the entire city below them.

They both paused for a moment, staring down at the city beneath them. The Cetra glow of the buildings was unchanged, but it was augmented. Dark clouds of smoke billowed up into the air from the center of the city. But it was the source of the smoke that now commanded their attention. Brighter than the Cetra glow, it cast flickering shadows on the walls of the cavern and sent burning embers high into the air. Both Cloud and Reeve could feel the warmth of it, even from here.

Ifalna was in flames.