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Final Fantasy XIII-2 Fragments After: will & choice

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Part 1

After a tongue-bitingly powerful bout of turbulence, the shots came. Snow, who hunched himself into a defensive position and whispered at the bag around his leg. "It's gonna be alright, don't worry," he said.

The yells and screams that filled the inside of the craft quieted for just an instant. Perhaps they had been silenced by sheer horror. However, the fact that everything was in a state of panic had not changed. The situation had become no better.

He had boarded an airship headed for Palumpolum to meet with Rygdea for the first time in a long while. A new year had come around and it was now AF3. He thought it would be a good time to exchange information. Who would have thought he would encounter such an accident on the way there.

It had only been one or two minutes prior that an announcement was broadcasted, "we will be making an emergency landing due to turbulence." Outside the window was a dense fog. Just as he had thought it was ominously noisy within the aircraft, they had lost balance. Everyone aboard had experienced the fall of Cocoon three years prior. There was no doubt this was a vivid reminder of that as even the cabin crew had lost themselves and started screaming.

Fortunately, their fall had not lasted for long. Although, 'fortunate' may not have been an accurate expression to use. The fact that the time between their fall and impact had been short meant the airship had deviated from its original course and was flying at a lower altitude.

He knew the Palumpolum bound route inside out. After all, when the development of New Bodhum began, he had frequently visited Rygdea. The memories of his experiences told him it was impossible for them to be cruising at such low altitudes, regardless of how thick the fog was and how much visibility would have been reduced. It was likely that the instruments had gone haywire even before the pilot had noticed the turbulence.

After the weather-controlling fal'Cie went into hibernation, abnormal weather patterns

and turbulence would often be observed within Cocoon. It wasn't simply just rain or wind, but also among those were reports of magnetic fields forming and gravitational disturbances. It was said that those phenomena would interfere with instruments and communications.devices.

It was just as he considered that perhaps this was the case, again. He heard someone shriek, "it's a monster!" As he quickly turned his eyes to the aircraft's window, he saw that a herd of monsters had surrounded the airship. He had seen them before. They were the same as the ones that had appeared in Eden.

He couldn't get an estimate on how many they were surrounded by because of the dense fog covering the area. But, there were already this many in sight, so there had to be quite a number.

The larger beasts were likely charging, as the airship shook each time a crash could be heard. Screams once again filled the airship. There were also passengers who urged the cabin crew yelling, "start flying, quick!" Even they themselves should have known that they were asking for the impossible. Being surrounded by such numbers, taking off wouldn't even be possible, and even if they were lucky enough to do so, there was no guarantee they would be able to secure a flight path.

"Hey! Get a hold of yourselves!"

Snow tried yelling at the top of his lungs but his voice was all too quickly drowned out. They were met with quite a dangerous variety of monsters. Having continuously encountered so many events associated with "that day", it was likewise impossible to ask for people not to fall into a state of panic.

P74-75

"What now."

At this rate, they would be in trouble. There were too many monsters for them to outrun or avoid. If he had his l'Cie powers, then he might have been able to act as a distraction while the airship escaped, he thought.

"Wait a minute..."

He didn't have his l'Cie powers, but he did have his companion. Once again, Snow spoke to the bag strapped to his leg. Inside hid the cactuar. Unlike on Gran Pulse, he couldn't be walking around with a cactuar inside Cocoon, so he now resided in the bag. At the baggage check, he fooled them by saying he was a toy. He was small for a wild cactuar, so while the inspector looked suspicious he pressed no further.

Although, this cactuar was no ordinary monster. He was a fal'Cie. Though he had lost the ability to turn humans into l'Cie, he possessed enough strength to carve up a landscape. Of course, like other wild cactuars, he could also shoot needles, or use attacks such as headbutts and kicks.

"We'll act as decoys and draw them away. In the meantime, we'll let the airship escape."

While it was a civilian airship, they were equipped with smaller emergency crafts or aribikes.

"You can do that, right?"

As if to offer reply to his words, Snow's eyes were filled with a vision. Snow was flying into the herd of monsters on an airbike, and the cactuar was shooting needles in all directions.

"Yeah. Let's go with that."

Although there were no colors, it was altogether more vivid than the vision they were shown by fal'Cie Anima and easily comprehended.

Until then, he had thought the visions that fal'Cie showed were just for providing clues to one's Focus, but that wasn't all. On their journey, the cactuar had shown Snow visions a countless number of times. It wasn't long before he realized that he was trying to communicate.

On top of that, the visions became more vivid each time. Perhaps it was because Snow himself also desperately tried to read the cactuar's thoughts. It was as if their degree of mutual understanding and the clarity of the image were operating in tandem. As a result, it came about that Snow would use words and the cactuar would use visions so they could convey their thoughts to each other.

Snow stood up and rushed towards a flight attendant. It was likely because she couldn't calm the panicked passengers but could do nothing else that she was standing stock-still in the hallway with all color drained from her face.

"Tell the captain for me. I'll act as a decoy and lure the monsters away. Use that time to escape."

"But sir, that's..."

"It'll be fine. Lend me an emergency airbike. You have them, right?"

"What! That's impossible!"

P76-77

The aircraft shook wildly again. Screaming, the attendant anchored herself to Snow and then sank to the ground.

"Be sure to let the captain know, you hear!"

He ran through the shaking corridor and headed toward the hangar. He had become quite familiar with the layout of this kind of airship. This was because when he rode on the flights Sazh captained, "co-pilot" Dajh would show him around.

"If the old man was the captain then I wouldn't have to ask for her to pass the message on. He'd just go along with things."

I guess I shouldn't say that, muttered Snow as he started up the airbike.

There was a ridiculous number of them. From beyond the solid white fog the monsters appeared one after another. They were all the same types as the ones that attacked Eden on that day.

"So this is where Bodhum was..."

Despite the fact his vision was obscured, he knew this because what had been Eden, the Seat of the Sanctum, had fallen on Bodhum. It was not only Cocoon that lost its ability to float after the fal'Cie went into hibernation. Eden, which was kept afloat by fal'Cie also fell. Right on top of a Bodhum which was deserted after the Purge.

Although there were zero human casualties, the seaside city which was known for its

beautiful scenery was destroyed beyond recognition. It was impacted directly by a mass the size of an entire city, after all.

That wasn't the only problem. Not only did Eden contain legislative and administrative bodies, but it also housed an extremely important facility. The Pulsian armory, Ark.

While the Ark was an armory, it was said to have also served as a training grounds for l'Cie. As a result, it was an extremely dangerous place which not only contained weaponry, but was also crawling with a countless number of monsters. Despite being called an "armory", having housed that many monsters, it had to have been a gigantic facility. In its normal form, there would be no way that it could be placed within Eden. In other words, it must have been housed irregularly.

"They created a dimensional distortion and threw it inside, would be the best way to put it. Don't ask me about the principles behind it. 'Cause I don't have the slightest clue either."

Rygdea said this and shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated manner. This was when he asked about why a region of Old Bodhum was under lockdown.

"Though if they would all stay inside the dimensional distortion there wouldn't be any problems. It seems that a rift was formed from the impact of the fall. On top of that, the fal'Cie in charge of the Ark is in hibernation."

He didn't even have to ask what the outcome of that was. The Ark that was originally housed inside was protruding into 'this side' from the rift. Yet, if the Ark had been properly managed, then they could still have done something about it. The gate of the Ark was sealed tightly by the fal'Cie, making it quite difficult to get into.

However, as that fal'Cie was now in hibernation, it had been unsealed. The monsters inside the Ark could come outside, or in other words 'this side' at any time. As such, the government had decided to barricade a large section of Old Bodhum.

P78-79

He had heard that the exposed Ark had been surrounded by secondary and tertiary fencing, as well as an aerial barrier, but it would appear as if the airship's smashed through it in its emergency landing. He thought that the impact had come too quickly after they began their descent, but it would appear that the first impact had been from crashing through the barrier.

Though, thanks to the cushioning provided by the barrier, the actual impact of the crash had been softened. He thought it was a miracle that there were almost no injuries from their predicament, but in reality it was due to a bit of luck. Although, this directly exposed them to the worst danger of all, landing in the middle of the herd of monsters that had emerged from the Ark.

In any case, he knew the reason behind the massive eruption of monsters. He had to get the airship away from the spawning point by even just a little.

"This means the Ark is in the direction the monsters are spawning, huh"

The two of them would fly toward the Ark and lure the monsters. This meant they would be flying directly into the monsters emerging from the rift, but there was no other way to secure a route for the airship.

Presently, the only thing that could be done was to let the airship get as far away as

possible, at any cost. So they could report the situation to the government and have them dispatch troops throughout Bodhum as soon as possible.

“Cactuar! Give me a hand!”

He didn’t even have to specify a monster. The instant the cactuar came flying out of the bag, he fired his needles at the greater behemoth. It was the monster charging the airship. The greater behemoth roared and lifted its head. More needles poured down in its direction. The pulsework knights and tyrants that were gathered in the area rushed madly towards the airbike.

Snow rode the airbike at full speed as he dodged them left and right.

“Go for the front now!”

Needles flew in the direction the airbike was headed. All of the circuitrons that were blocking the way simultaneously self-destructed. While making a sharp turn to avoid the blast, he accelerated even faster. He could hear the airship lifting off. He couldn’t see the aircraft because of the dense fog, but there could be no mistaking it.

Just a little more. If they herded the monsters around for just a little longer, they too would be able to withdraw from the area.

The cactuar repelled the pursuing monsters with needles as Snow weaved the airbike through the approaching ones. They were perfectly in sync. Except....

Unexpectedly, the fog ended and the Ark came into view. Now that he was no longer a l’Cie, if he were to go inside the Ark, there would be no way for him to get by unscathed. A gap opened in the crowd.

P80-81

A blow came from their side. By the time he realized they had been rammed straight on, they had already been knocked into the air along with the airbike. Shit, he thought. At this rate, they would crash into the ground or the ocean. In his head, he knew he had to get back in control, but there was nothing he could do. He could barely keep a hold on the airbike.

It was just then. He felt his body floating lightly in the air. It was a feeling similar to when he had activated an anti-gravitational device.

Did airbikes come with those?

The instant after he thought that, he suddenly began falling. It was a long and abrupt fall that seemed as though it was swallowing him into the depths of the earth.

Part 2

It was a while before he realized he wasn’t falling. It was clear that his body was traveling through space, and as if his sense of direction had become skewed, he had difficulty telling up from down and left from right. When he noticed the cactuar by his side was drifting as if he were swimming, he finally understood that he wasn’t falling ‘down’, but rather he was headed in ‘some direction’.

When he calmed down and took a look at his surroundings, he discovered it was a peculiar space. At first he thought it was as if he had been thrown inside a gigantic machine.

This was because he was surrounded by things that reminded him of ancient machinery within Pulsian ruins. However, the objects that surrounded Snow and his companion were moving irregularly. Pulsian machinery operated in a more regular and coherent fashion. Even the older ones wouldn't make grating noises like that.

"A tunnel?"

He imagined a tunnel from the fact that what appeared to be the parts of the machine spiralled around them, continuing far into the distance. But, from between the gaps of the parts, he could see that the space was spreading outwards. Rather than a so-called excavated underground tunnel, it might have been more akin to playground equipment in a park. Snow and his companion were drifting through its center

"Maybe its some sort of... pathway? But if that were the case, where are we coming from and where are we headed?"

As they drifted, he scanned his surroundings once more. At first glance, the vast space visible from between the "parts" appeared similar to the sky. Like a night sky strewn with stars. However, its color wasn't that of a night sky. Though, on the other hand, it wasn't a daytime sky either. It likewise differed from an evening sky. He had never seen a sky the color of a bonfire.

Just as he was about to ask the cactuar what he thought, Snow's eyes widened. The decoration atop the cactuar's head was blinking irregularly. It appeared as if to match the rhythm of the mechanism or wheels around them.

"Hey! You ok!?"

The light grew immensely brighter. The red crystal was vibrating intensely.

"Cactuar!"

It happened the instant he stretched out his hand. His hand had been consumed by something black. No, it wasn't just his hand. Something black he couldn't identify as fog nor smoke surrounded him. He batted at it, but it simply coiled around him, as if having a mind of its own.

P82-83

"What the heck is this!?"

Snow shook his arms and legs in the directionless space. But, the hazy blackness persisted. Unlike fog or smoke, it had a distinct texture. It didn't have any mass, and looked like a liquid, but felt similar to a liquid. It felt rather unpleasantly, as if the very shadows were crawling. It was slowly creeping about his body.

No, rather than creeping, it was probably more accurate to describe it as clinging. Some unknown substance was desperately trying to cling to him. That's what it had felt like.

"Could this be some sort of living organism?"

It didn't appear to be a monster, but it could just be that he wasn't aware of the existence of such a monster. He could feel a powerful presence, but at least it wasn't a fal'Cie. Perhaps the cactuar would know what this was.

He had an epiphany as his thoughts drifted there. What had happened to the cactuar's crystal?

He hurriedly looked around and saw that the irregular blinking had stopped. The cactuar

was back to his usual self. Snow breathed a sigh of relief. No, now wasn't the time to be relieved.

"Stop! Don't attack!"

The cactuar was preparing to attack the 'hazy blackness'. Perhaps he thought it was an enemy, having seen Snow struggling with it.

"It's not an enemy."

I think, added Snow, quietly, as he wasn't sure of that himself, either.

"How should I put this... It kind of feels like when I met you. It's like I don't feel like fighting it."

Well, it was just the slightest bit different. As he looked at the 'hazy blackness,' for some reason it felt like his heart was being gripped with melancholy. He didn't know why. Perhaps it was because he mistakenly thought he was being 'clung' onto.

In fact, this 'hazy blackness' was simply around him, and not causing any harm. If it really had any malicious intent then it would have at least strangled Snow by now. That much would have been easy for the 'hazy blackness.'

"I wonder what this is."

It neither spoke nor made any expressions. Why had he he thought it was filled with 'melancholy,' regardless?

"Hey. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Unsurprisingly, there was no reply. It was as he started muttering about what its deal was. Unexpectedly, everything before him turned white. He didn't know if it was light or simply the color white. Snow was unnerved by his whited-out field of vision. An attack came from his front. He thought he heard a dull crashing noise.

He sat himself up as he scrunched his face in pain. At some point he had ended up face down on the floor. Yes, there was a floor beneath him. It appeared the attack and the dull noise just now was due to him falling onto the floor.

P84-85

His sense of direction has returned. It appeared there was also gravity. But, visibility was poor. The area was dim, and wide. It seemed like it could be the inside of some sort of massive building.

He saw that the cactuar was beside him and felt relieved. If they had gotten separated in this unfamiliar place, then they might never have found each other again.

On the other hand, the 'hazy blackness' had disappeared. Had it been an entity that could only exist in that mysterious place?

"I guess we should start with looking for a way out."

It happened as he spoke to the cactuar while looking around. His vision turned monochrome. It was one of the cactuar's visions.

"Hey, what's this...!?"

It was a vision that he had seen before, but not in its entirety. It was the same as the one he had seen when he asked the cactuar about his Focus.

It seemed that just like how fal'Cie would give humans Foci, they too were given Foci by

higher-ranking fal'Cie. He thought that if that was the case, then the cactuar too must have had a Focus. When he asked about that, the cactuar showed him a vision.

However, parts of it were faded out, as if having been torn away. The vision began with the cactuar standing still before something, but that 'something' appeared indistinct, like it was shrouded in fog. The outline of something round with a platform could just barely be identified, but there was no telling what lay beyond that. Did it have a flat surface like a mirror, or was it a sphere? Would it have been something thicker and entirely different if viewed from the side?

Moreover, one could tell that the Cactuar had been sucked into that 'something', but where had he gone? Beyond that, the vision was almost dyed almost entirely white, so it was uncertain if he had even moved at all.

Even while the other visions had become clear, visions concerning his Focus had remained the same. Snow gathered that perhaps the Cactuar had his memories erased.

The vision that Snow had seen just now contained no blank parts. The familiar beginning remained the same, but it became clear what the Cactuar was standing in front of. The round object was not flat, but a sphere. The object was surrounded by something flame-like and rotating. As usual, the vision had no colors, so one couldn't say for sure they were flames.

He could only tell that it was giving off an intense light. The intense light encompassed the Cactuar and absorbed him into the rotating sphere. When the Cactuar was no longer visible, the light shot into the skies like a pillar of flames, and eventually disappeared.

His instinct told him it was some sort of 'entrance'. Maybe it was the 'gate'. The 'gate' connected to the alternate world that the Pulsian fal'Cie were all searching for. It had to be that.

P86-87

Beyond that, the vision continued with clarity. The cactuar was fighting. His opponent wasn't shown but he could tell that it was something gigantic. Perhaps he was fighting with all his strength; the red crystal was glittering brightly, and the Pulsian crest was visible in the sky.

There the vision ended.

"You remembered your vision, huh? Inside that strange space from earlier,"

It must have been when his red crystal was flashing irregularly. It was unclear if it was due to the effects of some sort of force within the space, or if it was sealed in such a way that entering that space would bring back his memories, but the cactuar must have had remembered his Focus at that point.

"Wait. If you've remembered your Focus... does that mean your powers have come back?"

Just as Snow muttered this, another vision began to play. Snow and the cactuar were standing next to each other before the gigantic 'gate'. Just as he thought, no way, the glittering tendrils of light extended towards him. They were tendrils used to bind people.

"Wait! I can't become a l'Cie."

The moment he shouted at the top of his lungs, the vision ceased. The cactuar stared intently at Snow.

"Sorry. If I was turned into a l'Cie I wouldn't be able to make Serah happy anymore, right? I'm travelling in order to bring her happiness. Gotta find Sis and bring her back..."

He would do everything over again from the beginning. So that he would never again make Serah feel sad or insecure.

"Of course I know there's something strange going on with the world. Something's gotta be done about it. I know. I wanna protect everyone."

His companions from NORA, and the people of New Bodhum. Those who migrated to Gran Pulse, and those who remained in Cocoon. He wanted to protect everyone. It had hit him too, that maybe if he had those powers then...

"But, if I do that and cause the one person who is truly important to me to suffer, then there is no point. I'll make Serah happy, as well as protect everyone. I'll search for a way to do that."

There had to be a way. If he kept searching, then surely...

"I know what your Focus is. It's to kill the beast behind that huge gate, isn't it? In that case, I'd fight alongside you even if I wasn't a l'Cie. I'm sure Sis would do the same."

Even as a human, he could fight if they worked together. It was a fact that he and the cactuar had defeated many a foe by working together. They had come out alive by sticking up for each other. If not for that, then they wouldn't have been able to continue travelling the monster-filled frontier lands of Gran Pulse.

"I promised didn't I? We're partners."

The cactuar looked up at Snow as if to say okay.

"First we gotta figure out how to get outta here."

They had suddenly been thrown into the middle of this sprawling space. It wasn't as if they had come in through a proper entrance. But, was there some part that served as an entryway?

P88-89

He looked upwards and strained his eyes. It was too dark for him to see if there was a ceiling. From the echo of his voice, it didn't seem like they were outside. There must have been a ceiling a ways up.

Thinking about it, he realized that other than his own voice, there had been no other sounds at all. There was no presence of anything living, either.

"What the heck is this place..."

Something wrapped around Snow's leg, stopping him mid-sentence. He looked down as his feet, startled. It was a familiar feeling.

"You again!?"

That 'hazy blackness' was tangled around his legs. Suddenly, it started creeping up Snow's body and began winding around his arms. It was as if it was trying to say, "don't leave me."

"Don't tell me you followed us here."

He was sure that this thing, which couldn't even be identified as living or not, could only exist in that strange space, but it appeared that wasn't the case. Even so, who knew it would follow them to a place like this.

"This strange thing has gotten attached to me."

Snow couldn't help but sigh.

"Are you in trouble or something? Is there something you need from us?"

However, the 'hazy blackness' simply continued to squirm, giving no notable reaction.

"You don't happen to know how to get outta here... do you?"

It was possible that it knew. The fact it followed Snow here meant it had to know how to go the opposite way. Maybe even how to get back to the skies above Bodhum, where they were before.

The problem was that there seemed to be no way to communicate with this 'black haziness'. It happened as he crossed his arms, feeling at a loss.

"Who's out there? Why have you come?"

A thunderous voice boomed from above. Those were clearly the words of a person. Snow turned his head in their direction.

It was hard to tell because of the darkness, but there was something big there. It seemed to have the figure of a person, but its outline shimmered like a heat haze, and appeared indistinct. The fact that it could speak human words meant it was no ordinary monster. Moreover, just like before, he felt no 'living presence' around him. Of course, he felt nothing from the gigantic 'humanoid' before him, either. Even if he asked himself if it was a fal'Cie, since it wasn't a living creature, he would have difficulty answering in the affirmative. He could see nothing resembling crystals around him, and it had a presence differing from the fal'Cie he had encountered so far.

"Who're you?"

His booming voice rippled the air around him. His answer was brief. I am the Arbiter of Time, it said.

"The Arbiter... of Time?"

"I am the one who arbitrates over this plane. A domain connected not to time. A place of gathering for the strong, a place for contesting death."

P90-91

The words 'contesting death', sounded grave indeed. However, now that he thought about it, the place seemed somehow to resemble the Ark. Of course, there was no serenity in the monster-infested Ark and there seemed to be no such sprawling space within his memory, either.

"Further, it is a place holding no bonds to the living. Begone in haste."

"We too would like to do nothing more than that, but this thing won't let go of me. If you could do something about it, then we'd be on our way immediately."

He jokingly raised both his arms. Though obviously, he didn't think the Arbiter would do anything for them. He just wanted to indicate that he harbored no animosity. He wanted to avoid being thrust into battle in his weakened state.

Leave now, echoed a voice. Before he could protest, his body started being dragged away. When he realized that he had been separated from that 'hazy blackness', his body was already floating through the air. He had been thrown into the air by force. At the same time, he began his descent. It felt the same as when he fell into that mysterious space through the Ark's

rift.

"You shall come back when the day is come, and fulfil your covenant with them."

What was that supposed to mean? Snow and the Cactuar simply continued falling, without being able to inquire.

Part 3

It had been long since he last felt the sea breeze. It was the smell of the Gran Pulsian seas. The sun's rays were bright. The sound of the waves reverberated comfortably in his ears.

"Huh? What am I doing in a place like this?"

His surroundings appeared familiar. It was the seashore of New Bodhum which he departed from two years ago. It was a place he would recognize no matter what.

"Am I dreaming or something?"

He tried placing his hand atop the head of the cactuar beside him.

"Owowowow!"

The sharp needles pierced right through his leather glove. It was painful enough to make want to him leap into the air. Surely, this had to be reality.

"I guess this means... I was thrown all the way back here, huh?"

Likewise, a familiar face lay ahead of where his eyes had turned to. It was Gadot. Somehow, his face looked glum. It was just as Snow was about to call out to him and ask what had happened. Someone else had said those words before the words before him.

"What's the matter? You look down,"

Lebreau passed right by Snow and ran towards Gadot.

"Oi, hey, Lebreau. Is this how you're going to treat me after not seeing me for so long? C'mon, ask me something like, 'What're you doing here?'"

P92-93

It wasn't only Lebreau who had ignored him. Even Gadot, who was within an earshot, hadn't even bothered to look his way.

"Gadot? Lebreau? What's going on?"

Could it actually have been a dream? No, the pain of being stabbed by the cactuar's needles had been real. Did this mean that the Gadot and Lebreau before him were illusions?

"I was thinking if it was a good idea to let Serah go."

His feet that were trying to walk up next to Gadot and Lebreau stopped on their own. Let Serah go? What did that mean? Where had Serah gone?

"Two years ago, the boss said this to me. 'Take care of Serah,' he said. He went outta his way to come see me,"

"Snow did?"

"Yeah. Serah seems happy, but she's not all herself yet. Else there was no way she woulda backed down with a simple 'wait here for me'."

He was right. He looked at Serah, who had simply convinced herself that she had to stay for the kids, and he knew he couldn't take her along. In Serah's heart, there were a number of

uncertainties, worries and insecurities. She should continue to remain under the protection of their kindhearted companions, he thought.

"He said something like, 'I know you might think it's horrible of me to leave Serah like that, it's really, really to make her happy.' So, please, he said."

"But, how come I've never heard this?"

"D'ya even need to ask? It's a pact between two guys. It's not just something I can blurt out. Well, I've gone and said it now, though."

Really, nodded Snow in disbelief. Who would have thought he would 'blurt' that out right before the very person he had made the pact with.

Especially since this was Lebreau, there could be no going back. Aside from Gadot, there was not one single member of NORA who could keep a secret from Lebreau. And, well, it wasn't as if Snow had made Gadot swear to secrecy. He just told him to keep it in the back of his mind.

Regardless, since he knew of their conversation that night, this Gadot wasn't some sort of illusion. He was the real thing. He was sure this meant that Lebreau was real and the scene before him was real too.

"I see. So that's what it was. I did think you were being just a tad bit defensive."

Lebreau nodded with a look of understanding.

"You're right. I wouldn't have let the Serah from two years ago go either. 'Cause she still seemed pretty unstable. Back then, Serah herself probably wouldn't have gone either. No matter how much she was told that Lightning was alive."

He doubted his ears. What had Lebreau said just now?

"Hey! Is Sis really alive!?"

For the past while, whether it was about where Serah had gone or whatever, they were all words he couldn't ignore. Then, something happened just as he tried running up to them, thinking he had to know more.

P94-95

Suddenly, the ground beneath his feet sank. He thought he had accidentally stepped into some mud, but it felt unexpectedly deep. When he hastily tried to pull his feet out, the ground had already reached the level of his chest.

Indeed, it was sand, but it was nothing out of the ordinary. What he had been standing on, that is. There was no way it should have been sinking like this. Yet, what was it that gave it this mud-like consistency?

"I had thought at first this whole coming from the future thing was just a bunch of nonsense. But, now Serah's..."

What happened to Serah? From the future? What on earth was Lebreau talking about?

Snow was swallowed up by the familiar beach sands of New Bodhum, left with a number of question marks.

Once again, they had exited out into that mysterious space. That place filled with what seemed to be parts of a machine, spiralling into the distance. However, this time his vision

turned white before he drifted very far. Just like that, they had arrived at their 'destination'.

Fortunately, he had arrived without crashing awkwardly this time. Thanks to what he learned from last time, he was able to brace himself for the instant he felt he was being thrown out.

"Oh boy. I wonder what we're doing in a place like this."

In an instant, he knew that this incline surrounded by debris was Bresha Ruins. This was both a hiding place for the survivors of the firefight at Hanging Edge and also the place where many lost their lives in the airship crashes which followed. He had visited the Bresha Ruins a number of times to do things like erect gravestones at locations where they had to bury the bodies and accompany the bereaved families who wished to lay flowers.

Only, these Bresha Ruins seemed to have more advanced facilities than he had remembered. Although, you couldn't originally see very far out from this incline, so it was only a fraction of what he could see now.

"So they can't see us here either, huh?"

Chocobos dashed by, narrowly missing Snow. Even though these *were* chocobos, they would have tried to avoid Snow if they had saw him, and the cactuar was there too, so they ought to have had reacted in some way.

"...But anyway, it must be pretty helpful now that the Gran Elevator has been built."

Suddenly, his ears perked up. Even though he couldn't see them, he knew that there were soldiers standing guard nearby.

"I can't believe when we had to order airship tickets all the time."

"I know, right? The lines were pretty darn long at first, too."

"But, didn't we stop having to do that after the expansion?"

"Which reminds me, I heard they're expanding the fourth base next year."

"That's sure to eliminate all the waiting time."

"Well, they'll probably stop for maintenance again, right? They're pretty inconvenient now that we can just use the elevator."

P96-97

What were they talking about? How had he been travelling to Cocoon just a few hours ago? Why, the airships connecting Gran Pulse and Cocoon, of course. He had indeed been "ordering airship tickets all the time."

He knew of the plans to build the Gran Elevator. When he last visited Rygdea, they had already began constructing it. However, it would have been due to be completed next year, in 4 AF. *That* had been completed and was now something that people could "just use."

"What's going on? Hey, what do you think?"

Though he asks, the cactuar shows him no visions. Was that supposed to mean he had no idea?

"Oh yeah, those guys disappeared into thin air, huh?"

"Yeah. They're just like those 'defenders of justice' types that appear in movies and stuff, right? You know, how they show up, defeat the monsters, and then disappear."

He could hear one of the soldiers speaking with a sigh.

"It's really too bad. I wanted to get closer to Serah."

What was that, just now? He was sure he had heard it. The name, Serah.

"Hey! What did you say about Serah!?"

He ran towards the source of the voice. However, he wasn't able ask them what they were talking about. His feet had begun to sink again. As he thought, oh yeah, they can't hear my voice, huh, he was sucked into debris littered surface of the ground.

"Huh, now we're on a roof?"

This too was somewhere he was familiar with. He had visited the village of Oerba a number of times. They had gathered things like half-wild domesticated animals and crops, and conducted a survey on the remnants left behind by past inhabitants. Since the area had been declared a restricted Special Protected Zone after the initial survey, it was probably about two years ago that he last visited.

However, he thought the buildings had eroded significantly despite the fact only two years had passed. In the topography too, though subtle, there appeared to have been changes. Instead of two years, if someone had told him some decades had passed, he would have easily believed them. They were those sorts of changes.

Regardless, what could that soldier from earlier have been talking about?

There was that 'like a defender of justice' thing, too. Serah's name was said right after that. Judging by the context, it would have meant that Serah was the one who defeated the monsters and then fittingly departed like a defender of justice.

"Who would have thought. No matter what, something like that just"

Isn't possible, was something he wouldn't say. If Serah was up for it and put her all into training, then it would have been possible for her to become comparable to Lightning in battle. However, whether or not Serah could have put such skills to practical use was another matter. Then, to top it all off, there was the fact of going as far as Bresha Ruins to defeat monsters.

"Nope. Can't imagine that at all. I guess it was something else."

The "Serah" person that soldier was talking about was probably someone else.

P98-99

"At any rate, Serah should've been at the village. But, wait?"

He recalls Gadot and Lebreau's conversation. Gadot said something like "was it a good idea to let Serah go," and then Lebreau had said "I wouldn't have let the Serah from two years ago go either." Then, she said "no matter how much I was told that Lightning was alive." If you connected those, then it would mean "Serah went on a journey to find Lightning," wouldn't it? If she had left on a journey, then it wouldn't be strange if she had passed through Bresha Ruins.

Come to think of it, those soldiers had said "those people," too. He assumed that the monster killing was done by Serah, but this would mean there was someone else accompanying her on her travels. Who, though? Hope, perhaps? If Hope were with her then there was a chance they would have done some monster exterminating. Then, this would mean the one who told that her Lightning was alive, was Hope.

"When was the last time I met Hope?"

Was it before he departed New Bodhum and visited Rygdea, or after? The Hope he had

met with after such a long period of time had grown significantly in height. They hadn't met for over a year, so it was no surprise that he had grown. However, it was clear that when they next met, he had grown taller again.

"No, wait, let's put that point aside."

When he had last met with Hope, he was still convinced that Lightning was dead. When he had told him about how only Serah's memory was different, and about how he didn't realize things until they were pointed out to him, he was utterly shocked.

It could be possible that Hope too, had begun gathering data based on having been told about the possibility that Lightning was alive. Then, he could have come across some information. He would visit New Bodhum to convey what he had learned, but Snow would not be there. Serah, who then received this information instead, would have decided to go on a journey with Hope to search for Lightning...

"Would that make sense, then? But wait, something still seems strange."

Even if Serah had asked to accompany him, would Hope have gone along with it? Would Hope, who knew full well the dangers of going on an expedition, have allowed the "family of a former companion" to accompany him? That was just not possible. So long as he hadn't been told, "take Serah with you," by Lightning herself that is.

It was as his thoughts had reached this point. He heard the shrill call of a chocobo. Snow was left utterly flabbergasted as he casually turned his eyes in that direction.

"Serah!?"

There could be no doubt that the one mounted on the chocobo, sprinting across the beach was Serah, herself. Even from afar, there was no mistaking Serah for someone else.

"Heeeeeeey! Serah!"

The instant he began dashing forward, waving his arms widely in the air, he became filled with worry, "am I gonna be sucked into somewhere again?"

"Serah...!"

Unfortunately, he was right on the money. What had been the roof that he was standing on took on a mud-like consistency. There was no resisting.

P100-101

"Just when I had finally found Serah..."

He sighed. That was real. Serah was really in Oerba. Perhaps it was because he had been shown the lies of the fal'Cie that he could grasp what was real and false when it came to Serah. It wasn't about logic. He knew based on things like intuition and instinct.

Perhaps due to disappointment, it was a while before he realized it was dark around him.

"Where... is this?"

It was raining. Nighttime. Colorful lights were illuminating the darkness. As he looked upwards, there was a neck-strainingly tall building. There wasn't just one of them. A number of buildings towered overhead.

Whilst taking care not to make any missteps, he surveyed his surroundings. It seemed he would be sent elsewhere if he moved away from where he was standing. Having gone through it three times already, it was about time for him to learn his lesson.

There were many pedestrians, but it had to be have been reasonably late in the day. The rows of shops had dimmed their lights, leaving only the ones in the display windows. Amongst them, there was a particularly eye-catching boutique targeting young women. There was an outfit of incredibly eccentric design being displayed.

Though eccentric, it seemed like it would fit Serah well. When it came to Lightning, regardless of how nicely clothes would fit, she would probably flatly refuse saying, "I'm not into that fancy look."

As he thought of such things, Snow, who shifted his gaze nonchalantly, felt his legs go weak. It was because, next to the outfit, he saw the words "400 AF Autumn-Winter Collection."

"Woah, woah. What kind of nonsense is this?"

As Snow was about to laugh it off, he came upon a possibility. Those soldiers that claimed people could "just use" the Gran Elevator, which was scheduled to be completed in 4 AF. Wouldn't that conversation he heard there have taken place further in the future than 4 AF? Basically, wouldn't he have been in the future, where the Gran Elevator had already been completed?

Even when it came to Oerba, it would have been more logical to say that it was tens or hundreds of years in the future. The deterioration of the buildings and the changing of the landscape were not things that could have occurred in just a few years. Although, it did make him uncomfortable to think that Serah had been in such a future.

"If that was in the future, then I guess it wouldn't be weird if this was in the future as well."

He takes another look around. The clothing worn by passers-by was not nearly as bizarre as the outfit in that display window. However, it was clearly different from the clothing of the people in downtown Palumpolum. Even more so than in design, he could tell that they were altogether of an entirely different material. The luster of the material when illuminated by the street and window lights, was unlike any other he had seen before.

He gave a try at waving his hand before the eyes of a woman who had passed by him. However, regardless of the fact that there was a hand stuck right before her face, she simply walked away without any reaction whatsoever. It was just as he thought; he wasn't being seen by the people who were there.

"Could it be that the dimension has been shifted?"

P102-103

He recalled the Ark, which was originally housed in Eden. Rygdea had said that it was housed there using a dimensional shift. How you couldn't see it or touch it even if it was right before your eyes, was precisely the same as his present situation.

"Now, there's the matter of what that all means."

How could stop himself from being sent somewhere else simply by moving a little ways away?

It was just as he was thinking of such things. The faces of people walking right before him suddenly contorted in pain.

"Hey! What's the matter!?"

They clawed at their own necks, appearing to be suffering so greatly that despite knowing none could hear him, he couldn't help but call out to them.

In the next instant, the people before his eyes transformed. Into a form he had seen a countless number of times within the Pulse Vestige of Bodhum, and at the Seat of the Sanctum, Eden.

"They're Cie'th..."

Why were these normal-looking people turning into Cie'th? Could it be that all of the area's residents are l'Cie? No, the mark of the l'Cie progressed at a different pace for everyone. There would have needed to be some intervention from a fal'Cie for everyone to have turned into Cie'th at the same time. But, weren't all of Eden's fal'Cie in hibernation and hadn't all of the Pulsian fal'Cie lost interest in humans?

It was the first time he had seen a horde of this many Cie'th. They began to shamble about in all directions. There were some who came in Snow's direction as well. He couldn't help but retreat.

There was nothing a mere human like him could do for them. Even a fal'Cie could not turn a Cie'th back into a human, Even for fal'Cie Cactuar who had regained his memories and powers.

His footing sank. That was the first time he felt thankful for such a thing. The rain-drenched pavement gradually rose. Then, it happened just as he was about to concede to sinking, Beyond the herd of Cie'th, he saw Serah.

Serah was fighting with the Cie'th. With a bow in hand, she shot off a powerful-looking spell, whilst nimbly dodging the approaching Cie'th.

However, that was all. In the next instant, he could no longer see Serah, or the person fighting next to her.

"I don't believe it... but that was Serah. What could possibly have happened?"

If that place was really 400 AF, did that mean Serah had lived on for four hundred years? No, it couldn't be. It wasn't that, she had probably travelled through time somehow, like himself. However, there was still the question of why Serah could move around freely, while he was rooted to the same place.

"But man, it sure is rough. Being shown such a sight."

Especially since this was right after he realized what he was seeing wasn't a dream or an illusion. He thought he would like to see something peaceful next. Something where he could stand around and listen to the conversations of some soldiers on guard duty, would be nice. If there was nothing he could do anyway, he thought.

P104-105

"This time we're in Pulse... huh?"

He could see a group of tall buildings in the distance. Perhaps the city he had seen earlier was over there. However, based on the amount of deterioration in the buildings, he could tell even from far away that a number of years had passed. They didn't age naturally. It appeared as if they were destroyed by man, as the result of there being some sort of war.

“What could have happened?”

In the instant he muttered this, he heard a splitting noise. Or, perhaps it was a cracking noise. It sounded as if a crack had formed in ice lying atop a vast lake. The sound came from the skies. Cocoon was in that direction.

“It’s shaking?”

It looked as if Cocoon was shaking ever so slightly. Shaking in fear, almost. Again, he heard the sound. It was the same as the one he had just heard. It sounded a second, and a third time. Again, Cocoon shook. This time, more widely and irregularly.

“No way...”

He thought the color of the supporting pillar had changed. It wasn’t that. It was a fissure. That was the sound of fissures forming in the crystal. Cocoon shook wildly. At this rate, the support pillar would break. Cocoon would fall to the ground. He stilled his feet which threatened to break into a dash and clenched his fists. He couldn’t move from here. If he took even a single step, he would get sent somewhere else. He had to do something to stop Cocoon from falling.

“Cactuar! Do something!”

With the strength that could carve up the landscape of the Archylte Steppe, he thought.

“Please!”

He knew all too well that such a request would be impossible. There was no way he could prevent the disintegration of the pillar just by having been able to carve up the landscape. Even so, as he could not presently move a single step away, he had no choice but to rely on the power of the Cactuar.

The crystal cracked in various places and each time, fragments glittered and rained down to the ground. Cocoon shook wildly as if to twist itself off the support pillar.

The Pulsian crest appeared in the sky. The Cactuar fully stretched out its little arms and legs. His body began to inflate. However, nothing would happen. There was nothing like the changes that occurred back in the Archylte Steppe.

“Vanille! Fang!”

Though he yells at the top of his lungs, his words are drowned out by the thunderous roar. Although the red glow of the Pulsian crest intensifies, the disintegration of the pillar does not cease. Finally, the gigantic cocoon begins to fall. There are only a few seconds before it impacts the ground. They were a long few seconds that seemed to last an eternity.

With the ground-shaking thud, his vision was obscured by a miscellany of dust and dirt. He thought something had screamed, but he could no longer hear it. The ground shook violently. Anything and everything was sent flying.

Regardless, Snow stood fast throughout it all, without moving a single muscle. The fact that they alone suffered no injury in this great calamity. This was proof that there was nothing they could do.

P106-107

Aside from clenching his fists and shouting, there was nothing.

He heard an incoherent scream. He finally realized that the thunderous roar had stopped. The Pulsian crest too, had disappeared, and there was nothing but white around him.

He couldn't do anything.

He involuntarily sank to his knees. He couldn't save them. Not Vanille, Fang, the people residing inside Cocoon, the people living on Gran Pulse, or the world.

Was there really nothing he could have done? Wasn't there at least one thing he could have done? Maybe he had just one-sidedly decided that there was nothing he could do at the destinations he was sent to. Could he perhaps have missed something, from habitually becoming a spectator of the events that unfolded before him?

He punched the ground with all his strength. Again and again. Pain shot through his fists. How could he think that there was nothing he could do. Wasn't it that he might have been able to do something, but just didn't do anything?

What's worse is that until he was faced with the collapse of Cocoon, he had been as careless as to think he "would like to see something peaceful next." He made no attempt to think about why he was there, or why he was being shown these images that could be from nowhere other than the future.

In what age could this have been in? How far in the future was it?

It had to at least have been further in the future than 400 AF. He was sure that Cocoon was in the night sky that he saw just a little while ago. The crystal pillar too, remained intact.

He thought of this and became filled with terror. If the pillar existed four hundred years in the future, then this meant they were unable to save Vanille and Fang. They had died without being able to save their companions. Then, the crystal would come to disintegrate far in the future. Along with the two of them, still inside.

"Damn it..."

They had all wished to save Vanille and Fang. They hadn't said so out loud, but all of them had to have sworn to save them. They had likely all continued hoping for that until their deaths. Yet, they could not make it happen...

He punched the ground in vain. He wouldn't have been able to keep himself in check if he didn't do at least that. From the violent emotion swelling forth, that could neither be described as anger, or regret.

How long had he been at this. Again, he heard a thunderous roar. Reflexively, snow lifted his face. It was a sound that differed from before. It was magic. Someone was fighting with magic.

He strained his eyes and stared at the direction where the sound came from. However, the dense crystal dust was in the way, and he could not see the people who must have been fighting.

He had thought a great number of lives had been lost from the fall just moments ago, but perhaps, the people had evacuated elsewhere and were safe. There were people who could fight using magic, after all.

People fighting with magic typically meant danger, but now it sounded like a gospel, and even brought him hope. Those sounds meant there were a number of survivors.

He stood up, strained his eyes, and focused on listening. He saw Bahamut soaring through the sky. Perhaps he was able to see him this time because unlike on the surface, the dust was less dense in the skies.

Unlike Fang's Eidolon, it was a jet-black Bahamut. It was the color of a sinister darkness. "So, does this mean that the ones fighting are l'Cie?"

However, Bahamut was moving quickly, so he couldn't tell who was riding on its back. Just then, meteors came raining down to the ground. The one controlling Bahamut had to be quite a powerful magical user.

Occasionally, he would see intense thunder and flame attacks being fired at Bahamut. Since they were fighting on par with one who controlling such a powerful Eidolon, they too had to have been powerful magic users.

After a long, long battle, silence came. Was it over?

"Who won?"

As if to answer Snow's mutterings, from behind came the sound of something being thrown. It was close. Just then, the jet-black Bahamut took flight. He could hear a roar of laughter. As usual, he could not see them, but he knew from the sound of their voice that they were a man.

Serah, echoed a scream-like cry. That sound. Wasn't that the sound of someone collapsing? He didn't want to see, he thought. He had a gut feeling that he would see something awful if he turned around now. Even so, he couldn't keep his eyes turned away. Simply because.

"Serah!"

His intuition was right. Serah lay collapsed, having already expired.

"You're... kidding, right?"

His voice sounded distant. Time had stopped. That's how it felt. He heard an incoherent yell. When he realized it was his own voice, he could no longer see Serah's body.

He came back to his senses after hitting the ground awkwardly. Afterwards, he continued being sent here and there. He recalled a Yaschas Massif shrouded in darkness, a Sunleth Waterscape where little miniflans were spawning in great numbers, and an Oerba where the sandy beach grew ever larger, but his memories were altogether blurry.

As he staggered around, he was sucked into the ground, sent flying to another location, and then he staggered some more... continuing to repeat the cycle. He wished to go somewhere that would tell him this was just a dream, but it was the same no matter where he went. Instead, he only became more confident that this was reality.

That is the future of our world. A future that will someday come to pass, whether or not I am alive there.

It wasn't as if there was sound evidence. However, he understood this through the illogical aspects. ...Serah's death included.

If that had been someone else's corpse, then he might have been fooled. "It's an illusion," he might tell himself, and then cling onto a false sense of security. If only that hadn't been Serah.

Because it had been someone more precious than any other to him, there was no way he could lie to himself. He knew, now.

As he sluggishly righted himself, a desolate landscape unfolded before him. There was a

land of death. There was a lifeless sea. There was debris strewn throughout that one would even hesitate to label as ruins.

“Could it be that this is...”

P110-111

It was a landscape he had seen before. Because he had seen it since before there was a single house, or even a campground, he could still recognize it in its dilapidated state in just a single glance. It was the shore of New Bodhum. He couldn't stop himself from muttering, why this?

“Our village is going to become like this?”

In the skies he looked up towards, there was no Cocoon. This was probably the future after Cocoon had fallen. An object of that much mass had fallen down. The ground's surface had to have been decimated. New Bodhum wouldn't have been any exception.

“The crystal pillar crumbled to dust, Cocoon fell... Serah died. Then on top of that, even our village has become like this... Hey, this has to be some sort of bad dream, right?”

The Cactuar simply stood next to Snow, without showing him any sort of vision at all. Silence. That was the Cactuar's answer.

“I know. I know, alright. It's not some sort of dream. But how? How did I know that this is real?”

It was probably because these were things that were precious to him. Even if he couldn't touch them with his own hands. Even Cocoon. Even Pulse. Even the people living there. Even his companions. Finally, even Serah. They were all things that he needed so much. They were things he would go as far as to offer himself to protect.

All of those things had turned to dust and lay here.

He wanted to yell again. The anger and humiliation welled up once again. The instant when he became stricken with a sense that he was powerless to do anything had come back to him with vivid clarity.

Snow stood up slowly. He placed his feet down on the land of death and looked up at the darkened skies. No. He wasn't meant to be yelling in anger to his heart's content. He wasn't meant to be pounding away with his fists, either. If this was the future they were destined for, then he would change it. He would go against it. He would fight. There was no way he was letting it all end like this.

“Cactuar. Turn me into a l'Cie.”

The Cactuar looked up at Snow as if to say, ‘are you sure?’

“I said there was no point in obtaining power if it would cause the one person who is truly important to me to suffer, didn't I. That's why I didn't want to become a l'Cie, I said.”

The Cactuar understood how he felt. The power of a fal'Cie, could have easily been used to force a person to become a l'Cie, but the Cactuar did no such thing.

“But, if I wasn't able to protect the one person who is truly precious to me, and only I'm left alive, then there's nothing that can be said.”

Even if he became a l'Cie, there would be no one to feel sad for him. Then, what was the point in trying to stay human? Even if he was destined to become a Cie'th, he would have no

regrets if there was even one thing for him to protect.

"I might not be able offer protection even if I do become a l'Cie. However, if I had power, then maybe I could do something. I'll bet everything on that."

As if to reply 'okay,' the Cactuar spread out its limbs. The color disappeared from his vision. It was a vision of his Focus. For real, this time.

P112-113

Snow was there. So was Serah. The two of them were up against the jet-black Bahamut. Snow was throwing punches at it. Serah was shooting off magic. Snow stood on guard and took a hit from their enemy, while Serah watched Snow's back.

I see, he thought. Up until now, he had always only thought of protecting Serah. The Cactuar was telling him not just to think about that, but to try fighting together.

Tendrils of light stretched towards him. Instead of being bound by them, Snow himself reached out his hands and took hold of them.

"Thanks. I'm glad that we're companions."

Part 4

When he came to his senses, he was back to where he had been before. At Old Bodhum, right before the Ark which protruded from the dimensional rift.

"Huh? I don't think... I was dreaming."

There was a mark of the l'Cie on his arm. Was becoming a l'Cie the condition for getting back there? Or, was it simply a matter of completing the cycle after being sent here and there, and then returning?

He tried taking one step, and then another step. He didn't feel any sinking beneath his feet. He took another step. It was fine. It seemed that this time he had come back.

Perhaps time had passed on its own accord, for the fog had cleared up. The large horde of monsters too, were gone. Had he returned to the inside of the Ark? No, if some time had passed, then the military might have exterminated them.

"Hey, wait! Cactuar! Isn't this what was in your vision?"

Before his eyes was the "gate-like" object that was in the vision. It was a gigantic sphere surrounded by haze.

"Your Focus was to fight the thing inside there or something, wasn't it?"

It was as he approached the shimmering object, saying this. A howl reverberated in the space around them. A gigantic creature had appeared. It was a humanoid, so perhaps it could have been called a giant. Except, whilst being a giant, it was clearly different from the "Arbiter of Time." Its blazing eyes were a red reminiscent of red-hot lava.

"Heeey. We mean no harm. Why don't we avoid this needless fight?"

A gigantic arm came swinging down at them at the same time as he said this. Perhaps what exterminated that horde of monsters was not the military, but this giant, he thought.

"End of discussion, huh?"

Running away or waiting things out, these were no longer options for Snow. From then

on, Snow had every intention to face all who opposed head on.

The Cactuar who was bound by the Focus of defeating the enemy within this “gate” had given Snow a Focus differing from his own. A Focus that would have him defeat the jet-black Bahamut alongside Serah.

As a response to that gesture, he decided he would defeat whatever enemy stood in their way, whether or not it had anything to do with his Focus. This included the monster behind the “gate”, of course.

P114-115

Then, the Cactuar showed him a vision that lasted for just an instant. It showed that Snow and the Cactuar defeating the giant and entering the “gate”. This meant the giant was the gatekeeper of that “gate”. It seemed that the Cactuar knew this.

“So, that’s our first hurdle, huh? Then we’ve gotta kill it no matter what.”

After, saying a quick ‘let’s go’ to the Cactuar, Snow began to approach the giant.

Just as he had expected, the l’Cie powers were on a whole other level. Even an enemy that would have been a struggle for a normal person, could now be crushed with ease, as a l’Cie.

“So, how do we get in there?”

According to what was in the vision, they would be sucked into the “gate” simply by approaching it. Although they had already gotten quite close to the “gate”, it gave no reaction whatsoever.

“Don’t tell me it’s a fake or something. This here is the real thing, right?”

Slipping away from beside a puzzled Snow, the Cactuar approached the “gate”. By the time he had remembered that it had been glowing like this in the vision, his feet had already left the ground.

He knew this feeling. Right after he was sent flying by a monster while trying to escape the dimensional rift, his body floated as if something like an anti-gravitational device had been activated. He seemed to recall that it happened around here, last time. Perhaps they had been sucked into the “gate”, and just hadn’t seen it because they were shrouded in fog.

Then, as predicted, they had ended up in that strange space. As well, when he drifted onwards to the “end” of the mechanical parts, which extended into a spiral, his vision turned white. How gravity returned abruptly, too was the same.

“Here again, huh?”

It was a Sunleth Waterscape in the early evening. Differing from before, perhaps due to the time, there was no sign of the little miniflans.

“So, I’m not going to sink again if I start walking, right?”

He tentatively stuck out his foot and tested the ground’s surface with his toes. It felt like normal grass and dirt. He took a step, and then another step. Nothing happened. He stomped the ground with his feet. It was fine. Snow breathed out a large sigh of relief.

“But, what am I supposed to do here? Have any ideas?”

But, the Cactuar showed him no vision whatsoever. He had thought he was sent to

Sunleth Waterscape with a certain objective, but at any rate, it didn't appear to involve the Cactuar.

"Well, if we're going to do anything, it'll be tomorrow. We have to find a place to sleep, today."

The sun had already set. It didn't get dark in Cocoon as fast as it did on Gran Pulse, but even so, they would likely be shrouded in darkness within the hour. Fortunately, unlike around the Archylte Steppes, there were any number of places in Sunleth Waterscape where one could set up camp.

P116-117

After setting a simple trap to dissuade monsters, he felt exhausted. Thinking back, he had been continuously sent here and there with no time for rest. He had fought some powerful foes, too. No wonder he was tired.

He lost consciousness as soon as he laid himself down. It was as if Snow was already half passed out when he drifted to sleep.

He heard a familiar voice. A voice he had continued searching for.

"So you can finally hear my "voice", huh? I was going to stop you from becoming a l'Cie." I was too late, he heard the voice say in dismay, and then he sprang to his feet.

"Sis!?"

She was there before him, it was Lightning. Only, she was clad in an impressive set of armor, reminiscent of that of a knight or a battle maiden from some fairy tale. Perhaps that was why he immediately realized this wasn't real.

"Sis, this is a dream, right?"

"Yeah. It's a dream. I tried calling out to you again and again, but since you never realized, I forced my way in. We're still ignorant of what others say as usual, I see."

She sounded slightly annoyed.

"Don't tell me... you're mad, aren't you."

"Of course I am."

He had promised he would make Serah happy, but he went and became a l'Cie, anyway. Lightning had good reason to be angry.

"Sorry. I..."

"But, I know how you feel."

With those words, Snow realized that Lightning was angry not with him, but with herself for not being able to stop him.

"Since you did end up seeing that."

"You knew!?"

Cocoon falling and Serah dying. Had Lightning seen those things, too?

"You can see everything from Valhalla."

"The thing you walked into in Old Bodhum was a gate. Gates are created as a result of temporal rifts. If you enter a gate and pass through the Historia Crux, you can go to other periods in time."

"Historia...? You mean those strange places? The ones that look like mechanical tunnels?"

Yeah, said Lightning with a nod.

"Only those who have been granted passage may enter the gates. It was just a coincidence that you were thrown into one by a monster, the first time. At that point, the temporal rift hadn't finished turning into a gate yet. Since the dimensional distortion housing the Ark happened to be nearby, the two reacted and the incomplete gate ended up being activated.

P118-119

"So that's what happened. I thought they were similar in principle."

"Only, that was something of an accident. That's why you couldn't stay in the places you were sent off to."

It seemed that being forced somewhere else if he had so much as moved a step was due to him entering an incomplete gate. That short, yet long journey. If he hadn't gone through it, then there was no way he would have become a l'Cie.

Continuing to live in ignorance as a human, or becoming a l'Cie to change the grim future. He wasn't sure which he would have been happier with. But, being transported to different ages had allowed him to choose. It was decided not from getting caught up in it, or from drifting there, but by his own will. That's why he believed it was by no means a waste.

"It may have been an accident, but it wasn't a pointless detour."

As if reading Snow's mind, Lightning continued.

"Having been influenced by the dimensional distortion, as you passed through the temporal rifts, your "footprints" were left at your destinations. In time, those would crystallize, and turn into a particular substance. That substance would be picked up by Serah, who is travelling the ages, and give hope to the people of the future."

He was taken aback upon hearing that Serah was travelling through time. He had seen Serah at the places he travelled to. He had also heard that Serah had "defeated the monsters." So, that's what was going on, was it?

Snow, called Lightning, quietly.

"I want you to protect the crystal pillar. That's why I called you here, to the Sunleth Waterscape of 300 AF.

In Sunleth Waterscape, there were places where the crystal pillar was exposed. According to Lightning, the origin the pillar's collapse could be traced to there. A flan that had grown to enormous proportions for some reason or another, had been gradually dissolving the pillar, she said.

"So, this means what I saw was real, huh?"

The image of a fissure running down the support pillar and then shattering before his eyes. He had realized that it was real, but now that he was made fully aware of the fact, the reality of it weighed down on him even more.

"I see. But,"

He thought he saw a powerful glow in Lightning's eyes.

"If you can protect it, then that will no longer be a reality. Please, protect the crystal pillar

so that future does not come to pass, as well.”

The dream ended with the words, for Vanille and Fang who are sleeping within...

“Sis!”

He awoke to the sound of his own yelling voice. It was morning. Snow gave a large stretch and sat up.

“It was a dream, but I really met her didn’t I.”

P120-121

If he could, he would have wanted to go back to New Bodhum and tell Serah, right then and there. Sis is a live; I met her, he would say.

“But, I’m sorry. Please just wait a little longer.”

He couldn’t see since it was dark yesterday, but beyond the overgrown trees, he could see a gigantic flan. It was the culprit behind the dissolving of the crystal pillar.

“If I beat that thing, the pillar will be safe and Cocoon won’t end up falling. If Cocoon doesn’t fall, then I bet Serah won’t die either.”

So that future does not come to pass, reverberated Lightning’s voice in his ears.

“I know. Sis, I swear I’ll protect Serah. I’ll protect Cocoon, Pulse and everyone else, too.”

The hero is back in the house. Nodding at the Cactuar beside him, Snow bolted towards the gigantic flan.

Part 5

“Was I able to keep them safe...?”

Snow clapped his own cheeks with both his hands to keep himself from getting discouraged.

“Everything’s fine. We defeated that huge flan. Serah was stronger than I had ever expected, and that Noel guy was strong, too.”

He had continued fighting with the gigantic flan, and eventually, the Cactuar had been knocked somewhere by a single blow from the creature, leaving Snow alone and in a tight spot. Just as he was getting beaten like an old rag doll, Serah had showed up. He was stunned. He almost thought he was having a hallucination from being on the brink of death.

“Man, that Noel guy’s words were right. They really hit the spot.”

If you don’t care about yourself then the people you’re trying to protect will be the ones who get hurt, he said. Noel probably had someone who was precious to him, too. As well as someone he couldn’t protect. His voice on that day, was that of a person who had felt the regret and heartache of not having been able to protect someone.

If Serah hadn’t been there that day, then I might have said that I was the same as you. I couldn’t protect the people I cared for. I had seen that future. I was fighting so that it would not become a reality, I would say.

If I gave up then Serah would die. I wouldn’t be able to save her. So there was no way I could just quit. You’re like that too, right? You fight to protect your loved ones from dying without

any regard for your own safety, don't you? Don't you...

But, there was no way I could say those things before Serah, herself. Instead, I said, haven't you been protecting Serah, too? That was all I could manage. Noel probably didn't understand what I was trying to say.

If he met Noel again someday, if they were both able to protect their loved ones, if they could arrive at such a future, then he would tell him. Everything. He would lay his cards on the table.

"But, before that..."

P122-123

Snow turned his eyes to his feet. That 'hazy blackness' had wound itself around his legs.

"Yeah, I got it. I promised. I'll stick around until you're satisfied."

The 'hazy blackness' crept up Snow's body, as if to say, really? While it did look rather eerie, it felt as if he was being clung onto by a child, no, a little girl. Somehow, this melancholic feeling to it made him imagine a silent and lonely little girl.

Like before, there was still no means to communicate, but judging by how the Cactuar wasn't putting up any defenses, it probably wasn't anything that bad.

"But anyway, who knew we'd end up back here after getting separated from Serah?"

Perhaps, it was because the temporal axes had realigned after they defeated the gigantic flan. Snow had been torn away from where Serah and company were. When he came to his senses, he found himself in that puzzling space where the "Arbiter of Time" was.

However, unlike before, he had discovered the purpose of this place.

"Who would have thought that this was a coliseum?"

It was dark when he last visited, but now a spotlight shone in the center and the circular stands too, were lit brightly enough for spectators to watch. "When the day is come" had likely meant when the arena started its operation as a coliseum.

"Hey. So, you wanted me to defeat all of the opponents here?"

There was no answer. Yet, he had a feeling it wasn't that. What the 'hazy blackness' desired was something different. After having thought that far, something occurred to him.

"Could it be, that you know too? About what Sis and I both saw,"

Was that why it didn't want to leave his side. I don't want to see the end of the world, so make it stop, save me. Was that what it was trying to say?

"Well if that's the case, then everything will be fine... Though, I guess you don't understand what I'm saying."

He thought that he would tell it, if they were able to convey their thoughts, someday. About how he protected the crystal pillar, about his companions who were fighting to change the future.

The problem was, he had no idea when such a day would come.

"Oh well. All I can do now is fight, anyway."

In this moment, at this place, all he could do was use all his strength. Even if he didn't yet know the reasoning behind it. At the end of these struggles, there would lie the answers.

"Oh. My bad. Sorry, to keeping you waiting."

It would have been more accurate to say “them”. A bunch of light-blue colored creatures had gathered around Snow’s feet. According to the Arbiter of Time, they were “guests from another planet”. The yellow receptor-like decorations on their heads and their smooth bodies made them rather different from any of the monsters from Cocoon or Pulse. For some reason, these strange creatures that were supposed to be Snow’s opponents, had also grown attached to him. Of course, this was after quite the battle had taken place, though.

P124

His new opponent let out a warcry, having grown impatient. He was equipped with a number of weapons all at once, and looked to be quite the formidable foe. It seemed he would be a good match.

Snow approached slowly, and raised his fists.

TL Note: Chapter 4 finished as promised. Still don’t know what happened to the cactuar between this book and 13-2/3. D:

Translating for back & reverse chapter has started:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-_MYzhANUvfLBiTqahy20jtpb-jld7jyrJu8BcyLV5o